

The Percy Jackson Grammar School

A Lighthouse at the Heart of Britain

My time at Woodlands near Doncaster: 1962-1963

A Journey into Narcissism.

Jacques Gubler, August 2026



Linocut by Joe Forrester



The school badge

Editorial assistance provided by Ken Cooke, PJGS pupil 1950-1957.

“TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN”

Under this heading - in capital letters - Mr Cecil Elliott, the Headmaster, signed a character reference letter on the 26th of July 1963, where he stated:

“Mr. Jacques Gubler has been French Assistant at the Percy Jackson Grammar School during the school year 1962-63. During this time, he became a popular member of the school community, by reason of his adaptable and friendly nature. He showed boundless enthusiasm for every type of activity, extending his interest far beyond the walls of the classroom. Such participation has ranged from playing in the annual staff cricket match to giving a public reading of his own translation of a Swiss poet and playing his own brand of music to school groups. He even organised a visit to a coal-mine for members of staff.”



Headmaster Cecil Elliott

Never before had I read such a pleasant description of my life. My permanent narcissism and its flipside, critical nostalgia, caused me to return to Mr Elliott's letter. I shall go further. I shall try to imagine and describe what I learned at PJGS. These recollections are needed to tone the *muscle* of my memory, a metaphor popularised by the French novelist, Bertrand Ploirot-Delpech. Thus, I shall lift my kilt and delve into some autobiography.

Place Names

Toponymy, the study and etymology of place names, has to do with history and poetry. Toponymy is important when it comes to revisiting the past. At the University of Lausanne our professor of Latin philology had published extensively on toponymy. To him, toponymy was the key to the history of medieval Europe. Call it my grounding or my mis-grounding, the outcome is that I am ever alert to the meaning of place names. The Latin root *castrum* in *Doncaster*, the military camp on the river Don, reminded me of the *castra* described by Julius Caesar in his commentaries on the wars he conducted in Gaul.

I was born in a Roman colony founded by Julius Caesar: the *Colonia Julia Equestris*, in the present city of Nyon, *Novio Dunum*, on Lake Geneva: *dunum* being a Celtic word for *fortress*. Starting at Nyon, the Roman road through the Jura Mountains was called *route de l'Etraz*. The disputed etymology of *strada* seems to refer to horizontality (see *stratum*). Indeed, the ground has to be levelled if you want to cross the mountains. In Britain, *Adwick-le-Street* was a Roman station on the *strada* between south and north – the Great North Road.

I was interested in toponymy, as was my Welsh friend, the painter Ivor Davies. Ivor was teaching French/English comparative phonetics at the University of Lausanne, where we met in 1959. Ivor even recognised his name in *Yverdon*, a city on Lake Neuchâtel that he embraced as *Ivor's Dunum (fortress)*. Thanks to Ivor, I became conscious of the interaction of Celtic and Latin languages in the toponymy of Europe. The Latin root *pont* for bridge, exists in Wales (Pontypridd) and in Yorkshire (Pontefract).

At the university of Lausanne Ivor led exercises in phonetics, using the textbook *Moby Dick*. Ivor taught us that the vowels printed in the text by Melville were not pronounced like

their French equivalents. As an obedient pupil, when trying to meet intelligent women speaking English, I abandoned the charming intonations of Ives Montand!

All the letters I received while staying at PJGS were sent to my address on Princess Street in Woodlands. At the beginning of the 1960s and without knowing it, I was living in the *West Riding of Yorkshire*. After a tortuous political reform, in 1974 the three *Ridings*, North, East and West Ridings of Yorkshire were converted into four new counties North, South, West Yorkshire and Humberside. The West Riding was roughly divided into two and the East was given a name which nobody in Yorkshire approved of!

Reading Ken Cooke's chronology of Adwick-le-Steet in his book on the history of PJGS ('Percy Jackson's. A History of the Percy Jackson Grammar School.' Troubador, 2010), Adwick occupied a significant place in the history of Anglo-Saxon Britain. Indeed, in early 2008 during excavations for a new building, significant archaeological finds were made within fifty metres of the headmaster's office! An Anglo-Saxon cemetery with the remains of 35 bodies together with remnants of Roman pavement.

Parachuted

The British Council parachuted me into PJGS in the Summer of 1962. *Wikipedia* tells you that the "British Council is a British organisation specialising in international cultural and educational opportunities, promoting a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom and the English language." After Clement Atlee and now under Harold Macmillan, the British Council was operating in full swing.

My professor of English at the University of Lausanne noticed I was a poor student and had difficulties in reading Joseph Conrad, Herman Melville, Robert Frost or King Lear. He was in touch with the British Council. He organised every year at the *Théâtre Municipal* in Lausanne the performance of a Shakespeare play, given by enthusiastic students brought over by a famous university. Was it Cambridge, was it Oxford? I don't remember. Such was my ignorance of English geography and its social landscape.

Ignorant as I was, I did help my professor in promoting the event, distributing the posters and entertaining the theatre troupe for two days. My professor slept with *Roget's Thesaurus* under his pillow. He insisted that my English must improve. If I were to spend a year in England, he could introduce me to the British Council, and I could get a scholarship. Indeed, it was an attractive prospect and I reorganised my private life accordingly. The British Council sent me a registration form and a questionnaire. I remember the question about my geographical preferences in Britain - a puzzling question. After lengthy rumination and checking my English spelling I answered: "*Anywhere on the seaside.*" I was subsequently parachuted into the West Riding of Yorkshire and discovered the Percy Jackson Grammar School at Woodlands near Doncaster.

Crossing the Channel

The British Council's offer was generous. I was awarded a single flight ticket from Basel to Gatwick. It was the first time I travelled by plane. I was lucky to sit on the starboard side of a Fokker Friendship aeroplane, with a window which offered a full and intriguing aerial vista over France, the Channel and England. Such views remain firmly in my memory. The flight was scheduled a week before the start of the new school year at PJGS. Time was short.

From Gatwick, a bus took me to another bus station in London, close to a park. I had to wait before boarding a bus that was scheduled to stop at Doncaster. The departure took place under bright sunshine. I soon fell asleep. I was awakened when someone with a friendly voice touched my shoulders, saying "*This is Doncaster.*" I tried to collect my suitcase. I could see nothing. I was half asleep. Someone helped me to step out. I landed on the ground. The whirring engine rumbled away and I was left alone. I tried to see something. I could see nothing.

I knew it was not a dream. I could hear locomotives whistling in the distance. There was nothing to see but I could hear trains. I decided to walk towards the whistles; moaning whistles. My steps were slow. I did not know what time it was. I had begun a lengthy walk. Suddenly I had the feeling something solid could be touched with my right hand. Indeed, I could feel a vertical wall. My hand told me it was a glass wall. I tried to look inside. What I saw was the phantom of a wedding dress. This apparition - a shop window - was proof I had reached the town centre. Exhausted, I stayed there and waited, hoping the morning would come.

Such memories cannot be invented. I had discovered the fog in Doncaster! Nothing like the milky *brouillard* I had breathed in Switzerland between Avenches and Villard-le-Grand. The **fog** in Doncaster was more serious. Its dampness stiffened and modulated the sound. Does black cottonwool exist somewhere between mouth and nose?

Arrival at Woodlands

On a dismal Doncaster morning, I was shown the bus stop to Woodlands. I had never boarded a double decker before. I did not yet know how to take advantage of its subtle configuration. With my suitcase, we stayed downstairs. I hardly remembered the landscape but only the impression that Woodlands was rather far from Doncaster. I landed there on the western pavement of the Great North Road. I looked around and was amused. So, this is where they sent me!

I had hoped to reach the sea. *Seaside* was one of my favourite words in English. Now, what should I do? I noticed a policeman dressed in black standing on the opposite pavement. I crossed the road with my suitcase and greeted him. He was the first person I spoke to in Woodlands. He was friendly and perceptive. He did not belong to the species of continental policemen I had met before. He understood I was waiting on this pavement because I was looking for PJGS. He took me to Brenda Frost's family home where I met Brenda's mother. Why there? Probably because the policeman knew that Brenda Frost's name featured on the honours board at PJGS. Brenda's mother welcomed me. She *put the kettle on*. Was it ten or eleven in the morning? She asked: *milk first?* An unheard question. I remained silent.

My first night was spent at Mrs Frost's – we would work things out tomorrow. I was to find accommodation on Princess Street at the home of Mrs Lydia Cook. I was fascinated by the name Princess Street: a good omen. Mrs Frost showed me the way to Mrs Cook's.

Mrs Lydia Cook, my Landlady on Princess Street

A widow, Mrs Lydia Cook was living in a 'semi-detached' house built on the northern side of the street. She was a kind, motherly person. Her waist measurement and her smile were noticeably wide. We exchanged a few words. I was charmed. We agreed that I would lodge in a room on the first floor and meals would be provided downstairs. The lodging expenses amounted to half of the monthly grant the British Council awarded me. The other half was effectively 'pocket money.' My situation was luxurious!

The semi-detached adjoining Mrs Cook's was occupied by the Bonser family. I soon met Mr Bonser, a miner working at the Brodsworth Main Colliery. He told me that in winter the miners who worked the night shift would never see daylight. Brodsworth Main Colliery is close to latitude 54° north.



Brodsworth Main colliery

The First Day at PJGS



**The School Badge. Three Roses of the West Riding.
Red & White stripes of the Washington family of Adwick Hall.
Motto 'Keep Troth' - Remain faithful.**

Before the opening of the new school year in August 1962, I was settled in the social geography of Woodlands. I knew what I had to do on the first day: present myself to Jim Woodward, teacher of French and my academic tutor, responsible for supervising and supporting me. Jim Woodward was an elegant man with charcoal black hair, full beard and moustache. Amongst pupils his nickname was 'Fidel' - after Castro. He greeted me in French. His French was fluent and elegant. He knew the difference between the language spoken in Lausanne (Switzerland), where I came from, and that spoken in Paris. His conversation was an exercise in skill. He explained what my tasks would be. The British Council had appointed me as a "French Assistant."



Percy Jackson Grammar School in 2005

My duty was to teach French to a couple of brilliant students. They had been awarded scholarships and would enter Queen's College, Cambridge in 1963. They had to be drilled in French like performing dogs. What a puzzling and pleasant surprise. As for supplementary duties, Jim Woodward told me that some of his colleagues teaching history and geography might want to invite me to talk about Switzerland. This happened only once: Miss Eleanor Mayers asked me to present the geography and history of Switzerland: a difficult task.

Collect your daily '*Guardian*'



Woodlands: The corner of Princess Street and the Great North Road.

On workdays I kept a regular schedule. After breakfast walk up Princess Street, turn right onto Great North Road: after the picture house enter the newsagent & tobacconists, buy *Woodbines* and the *Guardian*. My *Guardian* was a daily exercise in learning written English. The paper covered a vast geography. It was not easy to understand the titles. In the autumn of 1962, we lived in suspense during the disrupting times of a political crisis. The words *ultimatum* and *ultimate* were often printed. A Russian armada was approaching Cuba, down in the Caribbean. The rumour circulated that we were close to the end of the world. The *Guardian* was keeping its head above the flood. Was the war cold or would it soon be hot? The arm wrestling between Khrushchev and Kennedy evolved finally into a draw. In Woodlands, we were all relieved.

Is it Poetry?

In the mornings, meeting my colleagues in the men's staff room was a friendly event. When the bell rang, they stopped smoking and left me alone in a comfortable armchair. I then opened the *Guardian*, starting from the last page. A poem was printed on the last page. But was it a poem? To me poetry was related to the sky, the moon, the stars, the woods, the village, the cows, the ships, the wines, the railways, the planes. But something else was printed on that last page of the *Guardian*. It had to do with common-place events. At that time, I did not know that Philip Larkin existed. With Joe Forester (art teacher), my comrade in political discussion, we started to read Yevgeny Yevtushenko's *Selected Poems*, translated from Russian in an elegant pocket book edition published by *Penguin Books*.

Poetry at PJGS was not just floating in the morning of the men's staff room. Poetry was part of the teaching. It was matter of dispute between the institutional tradition (Shakespeare played by the students) and the ambition fostered by some teachers to reach the land of the avantgarde. For instance, Harry Chambers (English & Drama teacher) wanted to get rid of the

academic corset. His attention was directed towards Liverpool, a metropolis where the avantgarde was thriving.

A Daily Confusion

At that time, I used to confuse the past participle of the verbs to read and to write. This might have been the reason why the British Council had parachuted me into the West Riding of Yorkshire! Can you imagine the surprise of my colleagues when I said one morning: ‘Oh yes, I remember, when I wrote the Deuteronomy, I was not sure if monotheism was preferable to polytheism’ I knew how to pronounce clever words, *Monotheism*, *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Deuteronomy*, because my professor in Lausanne injected them into his lessons. He taught the exactitude of the *International Phonetic System*. Moreover, in a fossilized Oxbridge diction, he used to read the bible on Sunday mornings in the Scots Kirk, a chapel built by Viollet-le Duc at Lausanne. I was unable to distinguish between the past participles, *I read* and *I wrote*. But I could say *Deuteronomy* in accordance with the *International Phonetic System*. An unusual and comical situation.

Will the Cold War get Warm?

In October 1962 Russian rockets were photographed on board Russian ships heading towards Cuba. The ‘secret’ aerial and naval war between the USA and the Soviet Union had started earlier. The situation escalated in October and appeared on the front pages of the newspapers. The events were presented as arm wrestling between John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. The word *ultimatum* entered the headlines. Was it our final tragic moment, the last day of our lives?



School Magazine 1962

The Sky over Woodlands

In the sky over Woodlands near Doncaster and Finningley the beautiful bomber Avro Vulcan with its delta wings was carrying atomic bombs. Its roar over us was monstrous and familiar. So intense was the roar that it penetrated your whole body through its various orifices. You opened your mouth and you were reduced to silence while the atmosphere trembled. People were used to it and seemed not to care. Sometimes they just shrugged their shoulders.

I was fascinated by this phenomenon. It reminded me of my adolescence. In June 1955, my father had taken me, my mother and two sisters to an air show at the Geneva Cointrin airfield. Among the many aircraft, old and new, civil and military I noticed the beauty of the Hawker Hunter. My father then offered me for my 15th birthday the French translation of Neville Duke’s autobiography, *Victory in the Sky*. Neville Duke was the test pilot for Hawker Siddeley. I was seduced by the sculptural beauty and intelligence of the aircraft built in Britain. The story of the *sound barrier* was almost as romantic as the test pilot’s wedding with a woman called Gwendoline.



Avro Vulcan V-bomber

To me, the Yorkshire place name Finningley sounds like gunshot! I first heard it when I asked Mrs Lydia Cook, my motherly landlady, what was happening one early morning when the windows were trembling in her house. It was a penetrating rumble in crescendo. She shrugged her shoulders and just said: *Finningley*! Such a sublime sound I had never heard before. Was it on earth or in the sky? It was early morning and nothing could be seen. I wish I had seen the planes. Just to feed my curiosity about aviation. Just to see the zoomorphic configuration of the Avro Vulcan V-bomber. I knew it existed. Its minimalist triangular configuration reminded me of prehistoric monsters. Unfortunately, I never spotted one over Woodlands.

Joe Forrester

Joe Forrester was the art teacher whose Harris Tweed jacket made an elegant statement. He used to smoke a curious aluminium pipe. The advantage of the Harris Tweed in relation to the pipe was demonstrated in the following way. Should by accident some burning tobacco fall from the bowl of the pipe onto the arm of the jacket, then you just brushed the wool briskly with your hand. He also told me that Harris Tweed serves the twin functions of interior and exterior. The interior lining wears out before the weave of the woollen exterior. I remember these details well because I heard the same claim thirty years later from the mouth of another friend.



Joe Forrester

Joe Forrester and I exchanged names of artists. Sculptress Barbara Hepworth was a sacred figure to us. Closing our eyes we shared the beauty of Paul Klee or Botticelli's names. We were comrades. Joe was ready to help me in my poor English. In October 1962, during the Cuban crisis, we both remembered Nikita Khrushchev's courage in the denunciation of Stalin's crimes just a year before. Khrushchev had started the 'de-Stalinisation' of the USSR. Why was he now shipping missiles to Cuba?

At the same time Joe and I mimicked prime minister Harold Macmillan's historical announcement. We tried not move our lips when we repeated: '*You've never had it so good.*' In the Spring of 1963, Richard Lord Beeching's report, brewed by the same Tory government, was a great shock. Beeching's *The Reshaping of British Railways*, argued for closing railway lines to achieve modernisation and more profitable business. In Yorkshire it was more a kick up people's backsides. Something like *Thatcher before Thatcher*.

Watching Television

Mrs Cook tried to forget her sadness as a widow and to ease her loneliness by watching BBC and ITV programmes. I had never watched TV before. Now, in 1962, I was guided on a daily swing between public and commercial programmes. In the 1960s did the competition between BBC and ITV enhance the quality of television programmes in Britain?

More than sixty years later, writing about my time at PJGS, I am surprised to discover that exact TV moments remain in my memory. Why is this so? The answer might be related to the combination of two factors: the quality of the programmes in 1962-1963 and the quality of my memory. As an historian, I try to exercise and refresh 'the muscle' of my memory, a metaphor borrowed from the French writer Bertrand Poirot-Delpech. Watching television offered me a tool to examine Great Britain. I like to distinguish the unique moments from the daily and weekly moments. Unique moments are unexpected. Whereas you expect the daily and weekly moments to be more routine.

A unique moment on BBC was the fight between Cassius Clay and Henry Cooper transmitted live on the 18th of June 1963. Before the event Cassius Clay had been invited to speak at the BBC studio in London. He explained that his name and sayings were as significant as Shakespeare's. Was not Cassius a major actor in *Julius Caesar*? This declaration was considered as a joke by the presenter, but Cassius was serious. The boxer became angry. He stood up and left the table. He wanted to leave, but he could not find his way out of the studio. He boxed against the white walls of the television studio. The situation was so tragicomic that it remains firmly in my memory. I watched the fight with my landlady, whose late husband was interested in the noble art. The fight was broadcast live in black and white. I remember a hectic ballet. Cooper was wonderful. Cassius licked the dust. The fight was interrupted because of an excess of blood - in black and white. Cassius was declared the winner. My landlady was angry. It was a unique moment.

At weekends on BBC we watched the weekly *Juke Box Jury*, a musical programme full of suspense. New juke box material was tested. In the studio a teenage jury of girls and boys had to answer the question: "Is it a hit or a miss?" The music was not my cup of tea, but I learned the word *smashing*. I did not know how to use the word *smashing* in my daily life, but I never forgot it.



That Was The Week That Was. Cast 1962.

On BBC on Saturday evenings, we watched *That Was the Week That Was*. It was my favourite programme. I remember Millicent Martin singing the introductory tune *That was the week that was*. She pushed the words into a jazzy phrasing. I also remember David Frost's Oxfordian diction and gestures and his satirical commentaries on royalty. The tempo was fast. I did my best to guess what the issues were all about. I remember my landlady was uneasy. She respected the Queen and the flag.

Lydia Cook's favourite program was *Coronation Street* on ITV. Culturally, *Coronation Street* was not far removed from Princess Street where we lived. I picked up phrases to use in my daily life at Woodlands: How do? Tata luv! Champion!

The Forester's Arms

My passport in colloquialisms gave me privileged access the Forester's Arms, a public house in Adwick-le-Street attended on Sunday nights by the men and women reliant on the coal produced at Brodsworth Pit. Yes, they were dancing on Sunday nights. Probably the best way to celebrate Sunday. In daylight I had noticed the picturesque architecture of the Forester's Arms, close to a small gothic church. Adwick-le-Street was a parallel world.



The Forester's Arms

When I first entered the place, I was given a friendly welcome. I did not know what to say. So, I said something: like 'Jacques, from Percy Jacksons.' They adopted me. Percy Jacksons was my passport. They taught me words and manners: *Pint*, *bitter*, how to be offered and buy a *round*. Bitter was unknown to my palate - more familiar with wine. Bitter at room temperature was a discovery. At the Forester's Arms there was a constant movement between sitting and dancing. Sitting was the time when you drank in small quantities. Dancing was the moment of meeting as a couple. Who would dance with whom? I was lucky to be invited. I tried to follow the lady who invited me. The steps were called a barn dance, I think.

Doncaster Public Library

Over lunch at school, I had discussions with German teacher Eileen Crowe. With her contralto voice and ample bosom, she sat directly in front of me. She referred with emphasis to *The Town*, meaning Doncaster. I soon verified indeed that Doncaster was *The Town* because it sheltered a rich public library, a public service developed by the postwar socialist government. At lunchtimes Eileen was respected by her colleagues for her capacity to speak when they were chewing and listening. In addition to its fine library, Doncaster also offered a large swimming pool, open all though the hard winter of 1962-1963.

Doncaster Public Library was an impressive institution. There was a rich section of books in French. I was attracted by the typographical classicism of the *Éditions Gallimard* and borrowed two books by Simone de Beauvoir. In her *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (*Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*), she explains that her friends, among them Jean-Paul Sartre called her affectionately *Le Castor* as the result of a bilingual pun. Beauvoir is not far from beaver. A beaver is constantly building. Simone was constantly reflecting and writing. She became her own fetish animal. '*One is not born a beaver, one becomes one*,' expresses it as a kind paradox. In her *Mémoires*, Simone describes her passion for teaching. In France, teachers must constantly move location. From Paris, Simone goes to Marseille and then to Rouen. I myself came to accept the idea that teaching was a constant move from one city to another.

The first volume of *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*) could be borrowed from Doncaster Library. The French subtitle was *Les faits et les Mythes* (*Facts and Myths*). Presentations and commentaries were a model that I would try to follow. Firstly, by giving full

attention to the text and then in distinguishing between mythical explanations and factual reports. When I was reading Beauvoir in French in 1962-1963 her book had been reported in France for blasphemy and obscenity. I appreciated the intelligence of Beauvoir's narrative. She opened my eyes.

Discovering Britain

My discovering Britain in 1962-1963 arose from the invitations of three friends who invited me to join and accompany them. Sandra who lived in London, Ivor who lived in Cardiff, and George, a teacher at PJGS who wanted to share his Morris Mini and visit cities at weekends. I present these friends one after the other.

Sandra and Phonetics

I had met Sandra at Lausanne in 1960. She was studying Modern French in the Faculty of Arts whilst I was studying English. We used to pass each other on the first floor, near the small and busy café where people arrived in the morning before the lessons. Sandra and I shared some professors and she would comment on their teaching. For instance, René Rapin's exquisite pronunciation. René Rapin was the professor who was to send me to England in 1962. In 1960 at Lausanne, he explained to us the word *intercourse* as a crossroad in literary information. Nothing to do with personal intimacy. Sandra and I exchanged smiles.

When at Woodlands in 1962, I refreshed my friendly 'intercourse' with Sandra. She was then living in Finchley, London, at her parents' home and she invited me to visit. From Doncaster you could easily hitchhike south on the M1. In October 1962, on a beautiful day under a shimmering sky, I hitched a lift in a saloon car driven by a courteous driver. I did not know how to thank him. He drove south. I was eager to discover England.

On the right side of the road, I soon noticed - Was it a park? Was it an enclosure? - A battery of missiles, the elegant fluted bodies of which were directed northwards. Today in 2026, Google's intelligence service tells me that the location (it might still be a secret) might correspond to the site of the RAF Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. Google adds that *during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, the missiles were frequently kept in a vertical position on their launch pads, making them visible to passersby*. Indeed, I was and still am a *passerby*. I love that word. Could my life be more than a passerby's excursion ending in absolute cold and darkness?



Bloodhound missile, as developed by Bristol Aeroplane Company and operative during the Cold War.

In my broken English I exchanged words with my driver. He told me he was Jewish. I asked him what his opinion was about Jean-Paul Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive*. I tried to

explain that for Sartre a Jew is a Jew because his neighbours regard him as a Jew: a question of existentialism. The question embarrassed my chauffeur. He did not answer and I could feel that I had hurt his feelings. He probably thought I was confused and ignorant.

Sandra welcomed me at her family home in Finchley. Her father was a generous man. I tried not to be shy, but I found it difficult to lift my eyes from the table and look at Sandra's mother or at the house. Fortunately, Sandra said we were going to leave soon so she would show me London. A red bus took us south. We were sitting on the upper deck. I did not know where or what to look at as Sandra explained so many things to me. I was dizzy. The next day, her father invited the whole family to an Italian restaurant. He ordered spaghetini. I did not know that spaghetini existed. This unique exquisite dish with mushrooms, tomato and herbs still remains in my memory. Before returning to Woodlands, we agreed with Sandra that she would come up as soon as possible.

The weather conditions delayed our hopes to meet again. We had to wait for fairer days and they came in May. She arrived at Doncaster and we took a train to York. Sandra wanted to discover York and I had never been there. In Lausanne, we had hired a small boat to roam happily on Lake Geneva. In York, we hired a little boat and roamed happily on the river Ouse. Sandra wanted to see the stained-glass windows in the Minster whilst I wanted to visit the Railway Museum. We visited both places. We were young.



A small rowing boat

Talking with Sandra was a delight in irony and unexpected comments. She insisted I should read *Sons and Lovers*, a book that Harry Chambers had also recommended in relation to my interest in the everyday life around the pit. Would it be the keyhole to understanding where I was? My landlady had family relations in Nottinghamshire and she used the word 'mucky' that featured in the book, though the social violence and promiscuity depicted in *Sons and Lovers* had no parallel with our daily life on Princess Street.

Next-door, in the adjoining semi-detached, a woman lived with her six-year-old daughter, Angela. When tea was ready, mother would shout from the door: “/ʌndʒələ, /ku:m i:r”. This pronunciation in the Northern accent would resonate with that in *Coronation Street* and also with the North Midlands accent of *Sons and Lovers*.

Ivor Davies

You may remember that the Welsh painter Ivor Davies had taught comparative phonetics of English & French at the University of Lausanne, where we met in 1959. The textbook we used was Melville's 'Moby Dick'. In 1962, Ivor had returned to Wales. He lived in Penarth with his family. Besides painting he was active in cultivating a network of artists to follow him in a new avantgarde movement focussing on Welsh culture - literary and figurative.



Ivor Davies, self-portrait, circa 1955.
Homage to James Joyce: *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

There was a service station on the M1 motorway near Doncaster where lorry drivers stopped to refresh themselves on their elephantine routes. I went there one evening in June and was lucky to find a driver on his route to Cardiff. Would he take me as a passenger? He accepted, although certainly not for my personal charm! The main reason was that he did not want to fall asleep at the wheel, so through the night I tried to tell him everything I could think of. And we did not fall asleep! We reached Cardiff between 5 and 6 a.m. and under a bright sky he dropped me near the harbour. I took the train to Penarth where Ivor and his father welcomed me. It was a friendly and amusing meeting. Ivor's father told me he had worked as a sommelier in Paris and was an expert in wines. He fried eggs and laverbread for breakfast, a wonderful introduction to Welsh culture.

Ivor's father owned a Rover - a precious car. He invited Ivor and me to accompany him on a tour along the western coast to reach Saint David's Head. I was so dazzled that I do not remember the church. I only remember the beauty of the light over the cliff's precipice. It transported me to Sicily. Ivor too had visited Sicily and remembered the eastern coast above Catania and near Mount Etna. We shared this common memory. Is Wales the Sicily of Britain?

George Finlay

At Woodlands, George Finlay was a precious friend. He drove a Morris Mini which was his visiting card. He taught religious instruction, in parallel to and with great respect for Miss Molly Marsden. Sharing questions of the English lexicon with George Finlay, we soon became friends. He invited me on weekend trips. He wanted to visit the new cathedral in Coventry. Witnessing the architectural reconstruction from the catastrophe was so staggering to us both that we could not speak. That silence resounds in my memory to the present day.



Driver cabin of Morris Mini c 1959.

At PJGS his surname was registered as Finlay, a name with old Gaelic origins. I soon called him Yuri (Russian for George). He was a generous man and he did not smoke. Aboard his Mini, he tolerated the filthy stench of my cheap cigarettes. He simply opened the window.

A second excursion took us to Whitehaven on the Cumbrian coast. Being unhappy with his teaching post at PJGS, George was trying to find a more suitable situation elsewhere. He had received an offer to teach in Whitehaven and wanted to inspect the place. There was no time for daffodils. On long journeys I found the Mini was very tough on your back. At Whitehaven, we discovered that the place was white when you looked at the sky and black when you looked at the harbour. Coalmining existed in Whitehaven as in Woodlands, but with galleries under the sea which was not the case in Woodlands. We were both interested in mining. Was it for coal, was it for salt?

Yuri was Jewish. How he arrived safely in Britain, we never discussed. Was it too early to disturb painful memories at the peak of the Cold War? My intuition was that he held landscapes of Ukraine in his memory. Once settled in Yorkshire, he used to visit a Polish social club. Did he want to be recognised as Polish? In Britain, the Poles benefited from their reputation of valiant resistance to Hitler and to Stalin. At the time of our friendship at PJGS, George Finlay did not teach Russian. That episode arrived as a later *jewel in the crown* in the history of the school.

Clem Vallance and Andrew Brunt: A Sparkling Duo

In 1962 Clement Vallance and Andrew Brunt were awarded County Scholarships and were due to enter Queen's College, Cambridge in the autumn of 1963. My main duty at PJGS was to teach them French. Brunt and Vallance were ambitious and readily accepted the idea of intensive drill. Their training in French was to be my main function at PJGS.



Jim Woodward had accepted my proposal to try to jump into Blaise Cendrars' poetry, but Vallance and Brunt wanted to dive further into more recent avantgarde. They wanted to read Raymond Queneau's novel, *Zazie dans le Métro*, published in 1959. How Brunt and Vallance came to this provocative challenge, I do not know, but fortunately, I was able to respond to their demand. I had read Queneau's novel and in Lausanne I had seen Louis Malle's film, *Zazie dans le Métro*, which Vallance and Brunt had not yet seen. With Brunt and Vallance, sweating over every word, we explored the intricacies of Cendrars' poem and Queneau's novel.

During our tortuous adventure, we were fortunate to meet Harry Chambers. *Jisc Archives Hub* tells us that Harry "was born in Heanor, Derbyshire, the son of a schoolteacher

mother and a colliery accountant father. He spent his early years in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, where Jessie Chambers - the model for Miriam in D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* - was his father's second cousin. The family moved to Doncaster, where Harry attended the Percy Jackson grammar school. After national service, he took a degree at Liverpool University and after teacher training returned to his former school as an assistant teacher. Harry founded Peterloo Poets and was its director for the 37 years of its existence, during which time 240 volumes were published, all handsomely designed in an instantly recognisable house style. He listened out for neglected voices and, through canny negotiation, maintained the precarious independence of his press."

Harry Chambers had previously invited me to accompany him on a weekend in Liverpool. He had friends on the Mersey. It was the beginning of summer of 1963, before Beatlemania. The LP record we listened to at Harry's friends was *Mess of Blues* and it was the first time I heard Elvis Presley singing the blues. That evening we boarded a ferry. The blow of the breeze, the yellow and pink light at sunset transported us into some kind of forested world. Back on shore we tasted draught Guinness. It was black. It was dense - a taste poles apart from the Yorkshire bitter I came to appreciate during licensing hours in Woodlands.

With his love of the avant-garde, Harry supported our mission to translate Cendrars. He was trying to open a Poetry Club in Doncaster. He organised a soirée to present the translation of *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (*Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France*). The text was read by Clement Valance in precise and distinctive diction, with nuances and contrasts to reflect a baroque musical composition. The full performance of Cendrars' poem in translation lasted ten minutes and the audience was thrilled. The final silence was followed by some muttering and mumbling. Fortunately, nobody clapped hands. In the audience, twenty or so people were looking at each other, the conclusion being that was it was better to discuss it in the pub.

Soon after that, Vallance and Brunt with their talents in diction and elocution were at the core of *Hamlet*, in the annual PJGS school play. I remember it as a rather clumsy performance. Brunt as Polonius, Vallance as Hamlet. Brunt's hair and skeletal outline were whitened with flour. Valance's gingernut helmet of hair could remain as it was through every day. Both performed well above their accomplices, bearing in mind the style and peculiarities of Shakespeare. But I had to remind myself that I was attending their performance because of my own clumsiness in English - hardly acceptable in a "Grammar School"!

It also brought to mind that, when I was sixteen, Molière's *Malade imaginaire*, was one of the annual theatrical adventures in our school at Nyon, on Lake Geneva. From that exercise the whole text has remained embedded in my memory, and I was able to recite it to myself in bed: *par coeur* in French; *by heart* in English. When a school promotes amateur theatre as part of the syllabus the issue is not really about the talent or clumsiness of the performance. It rests more with the memories of a singular experience which might accompany you through the rest of your life.

Memories in Black & White

As a history of art student at the University of Lausanne, I was aware of the differing arguments on the theories of colour. Ivor Davies and I were quite close to our professor, Jean Leymarie, and he was working with the publisher Albert Skira, who lived on Lake Geneva. Skira gave Leymarie some high-quality colour slides, an uncommon visual thrill around 1960. On the basis of that new technology, Leymarie revisited the history of 19th century painting in France. This moment might support the epistemological assumption that the instrument creates the result of the information. The essential question was: "Is white a colour?" or its opposite

theorem: “Is black a colour?” Another question, probably more subtle, was “Do you recognise all the hues and colours in a lithograph?”



Goethe's Theory of Colour 1809 AD.

In his *Farbenlehre* (Treatise of Colour) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe uses his box of watercolour paints to form a circle portraying his theory of colour. A white circle surrounded by a sumptuous polychromatic crown traces the centre of the warmest perception. Black is not presented as a phenomenon. It exists as the antithesis of white. Isaac Newton who had demonstrated the prismatic beauty of the rainbow does not enter the picture.

Forty years later in France, the chemist M.E. Chevreul, inventor of the beautiful adjective ‘chromatic’, copied and corrected Goethe’s circle. He referred to Newton’s work which, in relation to the rainbow, did not encompass black and white as colours. Chevreul introduced a hierarchical system of primary and secondary colours which fascinated painters who wanted to know how they functioned in practice. The trilogy of the primary colours consisted of red, blue and yellow. The trilogy of the secondary colours represented their combination: red + yellow gives orange; blue + yellow gives green; blue + red gives violet. Chevreul’s system captivated in particular the French painter Robert Delaunay who tested the *contraste simultané* (simultaneous contrast), that is the juxtaposition of primary and secondary colours for the sake of maximum chromatic effect.

I arrived at Woodlands with this kind of sophisticated background. Questions came to my mind when I noticed that glittering pieces of coal were often left untouched on the pavement. I was puzzled. Why did people on Princess Street not collect these wonderful nuggets? My landlady told me that these pieces were tokens of the “Queen’s Pit” (since Brodsworth Main supplied coal to Buckingham Palace) and they did not need to be collected, since there was plenty of them already at each house. Miners received a ton of coal each month as part of their wages. The fire-places built into the party wall between Mrs Cook and Mr Bonser were useful indeed in the winter of 1962-1963.

A cold winter had invaded Yorkshire. Google tells us today (and it could change tomorrow) that “sub-zero temperatures and continuous snow cover began abruptly just after Christmas in late December 1962 and finally broke on March 6, 1963, marking 67 consecutive days of snow and ice.” I had lived a tough winter on Lake Geneva in February, when ice hemmed the banks of the lake and those memories came back to my memory. I was not surprised by the freezing temperature but more by their impact on the daily life of the people in the neighbourhood. The first effects were on water supply and drainage. The pipes were frozen. The sanitary system failed. How could you put up with it? A rumour circulated: A perfect lavatory was available in a pub near Harrogate. Who would hire a limousine to go there? The first occasional yellow traces in the snow soon disappeared under the black dust. Powdery

dust was omnipresent and the ground was mucky everywhere. But the air you breathed was tonic, at least in my lungs. People huddled close in bed. Spring was expected.

Let us go back to the initial question of the importance of colour in life, art, sciences. What I saw at Woodlands was both paradoxical and trivial. On one hand the purest coal was the purest black. On the other, the white purity of the snow was erased by black dust. Perhaps I ought not to repeat the discussion where the French chemist M.E. Chevreul opposed the German poet, J.W. von Goethe and the paradox that Isaac Newton, who had demonstrated the prismatic beauty of the rainbow, did not enter the picture.

Cinemas in Decline

Before arriving in Woodlands, I was a keen cinema-goer in Lausanne. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Freddy Buache, leader of the local film club, we could follow contemporary film productions from around Europe. Freddy invited French film producers to present their works, for example George Franju. When, for political reasons certain films were banned in Switzerland, the film club crossed Lake Geneva to hold their sessions at Evian on the French side of the lake.

By my time not many films were being shown at Woodlands Picture House as it was mostly used as a bingo hall, but two events blossomed in the summer of 1963, my last season in Yorkshire.



‘Animal Farm’

The first opportunity took place in Grimsby. Joy Batchlor and John Halas came to the town to present and comment on their 1954 animated film, *Animal Farm*. I do not recall the name of the cinema but I do remember that Batchlor and Halas explained the arts and crafts of their film. They did not tell us the film was commissioned by the CIA. We were fortunate to see their work on full screen. The significance of Orwell’s paradox, that *some animals are more equal*, was assumed to be known to the audience. Little was said about brotherhood, comradeship, uprising and freedom in relation to the historical situation of the Cold War - probably to avoid discussion on the sponsoring of the film by the CIA. It centred upon the techniques of making cartoons. As a couple in love, Joy Batchlor and Halas were the living proof of Stalin’s crimes. Hence the dramatic intensity of the evening.



Woodlands Picture House

The second cinematic event took place at Woodlands *Picture House*, on the corner of Princess Street and Great North Road. I had been there once before with my landlady who played bingo. She had explained that a man, the caller, retrieved random numbers and announced them to the players in a particular way. For example, the number 16 was shouted as *Sweet Sixteen* and 88 was *Two Fat Ladies*. I remember the bingo stage was aligned towards the east: in the direction of my favourite pub, the Forester's Arms in Adwick-le-Street.

I came across the announcement for the screening of a film entitled *This Sporting Life*. Was it in June? I don't remember. What I do remember is that the screen was placed in the opposite direction, facing the Great North Road. The film was a symphony in black and white. Blood looked black. The glow of coal in the chimney was white. People in the film were talking like the people around me.

I could understand many of their words. For instance, the answer *Champion!* to the enquiry *How're you doing?* I remember the muffled sound of the blows given and received. The film corresponded to what I had seen and had not seen during my time at PJGS. Women wore their hair in those elegant waves. I remember one moment of skimming stones (one of my favourite pastimes on Lake Geneva) in the vicinity of a ruined gothic abbey. The rules and vocabulary of rugby league were quite beyond me and I do not remember the intricacies of the drama. I only remember the violence and the mud. *This Sporting Life* was a kind of inventory of events and a reflection of my sojourn in the West Riding of Yorkshire.



'This Sporting Life'

Farewell via Grimsby

Early in 1963 one of my two sisters informed our father she had decided to marry a Dutch boy she had met in North Carolina, where she was living in Asheville. My father, a veterinary doctor, took this notice seriously and started to organise the wedding at Nyon, the bride's home town on Lake Geneva. Father was pleased that his daughter was to marry the son of a prosperous Dutch family, respected in the city of Enschede in Over Ijssel. Out of the blue I was invited to join the ceremonies and the stag party on the eve of the event. The bridegroom's three brothers told me: "You've never been in Holland. Come and visit us!" I was enthralled by this invitation and scheduled a visit for the coming summer.

In 1963 passenger ferries from Grimsby left in the evening to arrive in Rotterdam the next morning. Passengers, I noticed, descended on the duty-free shop for bottles that would boost their conversations and enliven the seascape - and I happily joined them. My arrival in Rotterdam was an unexpected and memorable journey in Technicolor.

Barbara Hepworth

My time in Woodlands was to become a long-playing record in my narcissist memory. Let me mention three instances. The first is related to Barbara Hepworth. At the University of Lausanne in 1960-1961, Jean Leymarie had presented a one-year course on 20th Century

sculpture. He talked about Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and their common origins in Yorkshire. When I visited the Art Gallery in Leeds, one of my favourite museums in Britain, I was captured and thrilled by Hepworth's intensity. To me, Moore became a lesser brother in the background. This feeling was confirmed by my visit in 1963 to the Kröller Müller Museum in the woods near Otterlo, NL, where Hepworth displayed the strength and intelligence of her works.

Francis Donald Klingender

Klingender's book, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, played an important role in my apprenticeship of art history. I discovered his book in 1972, thanks to Enrico Castelnuovo, my professor at the University of Lausanne. For Castelnuovo, the book was so outstanding that he selected the 1975 revised edition for translation and he also composed the preface.

Whilst living in Woodlands I was carefully reading a book one might consider the exact antithesis of Klingender's. Accompanied by *Cassell's French-English English-French Dictionary* (22nd edition, 1951), I was deciphering, page by page, Kenneth Clark's *The Nude, A Study in Ideal Form*. This book describes a vivid tension between the libido of the viewer and the substance of the representation in stone or on paper. In his elegant RP English, Kenneth Clark does not use the Freudian notions of *Libido* or *Trieb*. He plays with the adjective *erotic*. He tries to distinguish the poetical individuality of each artist. He defines the rhetorical opposition between Leonardo and Michelangelo and he separates the north and the south of Europe. Cranach's erotic Venuses are gothic and old-fashioned. Dürer is closer to the *Ideal Form* because he travelled to Italy and adopted the rules of the Italian perspective.

On his side Klingender postulates that individuals, whether artists, slaves, wage-earners, are immersed in a flux of collective happenings which accounts for their presence in society and history. The pictorial, sculptural, photographic iconography of the *Industrial Revolution*, an almost inexhaustible quantity of images, is related to the poetic categories of the *sublime* and the *picturesque*. Some pictures are well-known, for instance Turner's painting 'Rain, Steam and Speed - The Great Western Railway.' The locomotive emerges in full steam on the hazy perspective of a floating bridge. This event might be sublime. In front of the engine a hare is running to save its life. This you might call a picturesque event. The hare is hardly visible on postcards so you need to go to the National Gallery and look closely at the canvas.

The actors of the *Industrial Revolution* are not only the famous engineers and politicians celebrated in numerous biographies, but the anonymous workers, women, children, who lost their limbs and lives in the factories. In my teaching at Lausanne, I introduced the images of Crystal Palace and the Forth Bridge alongside Friedrich Engels, *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England (The Condition of the Working Class in England)*. I maintain that my motivation arose from my enthusiastic reading of Klingender. Enrico Castelnuovo, my supervisor at the University of Lausanne, promoted and introduced the Italian translation by Einaudi in Turin of *Art and the Industrial Revolution*. His opinion was that Klingender was despised and ignored in England because of his belief in communism. Klingender's appointment to the University of Hull after the Second World War was considered a banishment by the intelligentsia. But perhaps one should not so readily dismiss the fact that Hull might have been the appropriate place to observe the *Industrial Revolution* and its effects upon history.

In Retrospect

My sojourn at PJGS was like an echo chamber. Its resonance accompanied me when I discovered books and situations unknown to me in 1962-1963. At that time, for instance, I had never opened a book by Daniel Defoe or Laurence Sterne. You may know that the works of both are travelogues and follow a narrative thread combining adventure and geography. Defoe

introduces the port of Hull in *The Great Plague* and in *Robinson Crusoe*. Sterne has many domestic and family connections with Yorkshire.

Defoe does not dwell on Yorkshire. He invites us into a fictional geographic realm, like Jules Verne would do later. Defoe's Calvinist theology of predestination fosters the dominance of a linear chronology in his narration. The musicality and modernity of his language probably derive from the fact that, as Flaubert did later, he tested the acoustics of his texts by reading his prose aloud.

Many scribes have embellished and commented on Laurence Sterne. Even if Sterne is not Homer, Sapho or Darwin, it is public knowledge that Sterne was an author. Should I mention him without reading him? Or should I read his books? I tried to do so and went to the library of the *Lesegesellschaft* in Basle, a progressivist and elitist society created at the end of the eighteenth century. To read Sterne is not an easy venture. I was impatient to discover his *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, since I had some interest in the description of monotonous landscapes and the "nothing to declare". Umberto Eco has praised the notion of *digression* in relation to Sterne. I was thus directed towards *Tristram Shandy*. I discovered that, without knowing it, I had used *digression* as a figure of narration in some of my publications on architecture.

I wonder if my memories of Woodlands and the Percy Jackson Grammar School are no more than a collection of digressions.

PJGS: A Lighthouse at the Heart of Britain



Flamborough Head Lighthouse, Yorkshire