

Earliest memories:

London 1942-1946

I was born on 2nd June 1942 at 28 Allens Road, a terraced road in Ponders End, Enfield Middlesex, where my parents lived with my grandparents. I think my Dad was away in the Royal Air Force at the time. I just missed by a couple of hours having the same birthday as my granddad who was born on June 1st.

My earliest memory is of being in an air raid shelter, a corrugated iron hut with a curved roof, underground, at the bottom of the garden, and seeing my Dad put his head in to ask if everything was all right. My Dad said it never happened because he was abroad most of that time and Mum and I had been evacuated to Norfolk, but the picture is very clear in my mind. The last air-raids were in March 1945 so I would only have been about 2³/₄.

When the war was over we moved to Greenmore Road just a couple of miles away and my next vivid memory was of learning to swim – or not! I must have been about four years old and we went to the local outdoor baths which were freezing, with one of my uncles – I can't remember who. We got in the water and Dad said that the first thing you needed to do was to get your head under the water, so he grabbed my head and dunked me under. I came up crying and screaming for Mum, got straight out and never learned to swim for another 17 years.

I went to Nursery School at Brimsdown Road school, a short walk from where we lived and the only memory I have of that was playtime and the huge scramble to get one of the wooden hobby horses to gallop around the playground.

Another memory of that time is of going to the pictures on the bus with my Mum. There were two cowboy films showing at different cinemas, one was Gene Autry and the other Roy Rogers. I don't know what possessed her but after we were on the 'bus heading for the Gene Autry film she asked me which I preferred Gene Autry or Roy Rogers. There was quite a scene when I said Roy Rogers, but Gene Autry it had to be – I think he was her favourite.

My sister Sheila was born in September 1945, while Dad was still finishing off his stint of duty in Sardinia, but when he returned he went back to his old job at Enfield Cables, where Mum had at one time been secretary to the managing director.

Thatcham 1946-1961

In early 1946 Dad was transferred to a new subsidiary of Enfield Cables, called Sterling Cables, at Aldermaston in Berkshire and we moved into one of the newly built firm's houses in Station Road, Thatcham, about a mile away from the main railway line from Paddington to Penzance. We actually made a special trip to stand on the bridge over the line and watch the 'Cornish Riviera express' whistle through on its way west. The firm were building a row of semi-detached whitewashed houses for new staff and we were in in the fourth one along and watched four more go up over the next year or so. There were young families in all the houses, so we had plenty of people to play with. Behind the row of houses were open fields in which we ran and hid and played football and cricket.

Our next door neighbours were the Clarks who remained close friends and were especially helpful much later when my Mum had arthritis. David and Irene, their children were almost exactly our ages. By a peculiar quirk of British reserve Mum and Mrs Clark called each other 'Mrs Clark' and 'Mrs Chapman' until Mum died in 1978, while Dad was always 'Arthur' and Mr Clark was 'Jim' from the outset. Jim had not learned to drive and so Dad took him to work everyday. At first Dad had a motor-bike and side-car, but upgraded to a black and yellow Austin 7 after Sheila was born.

Primary School

I started right away at Thatcham County Primary school, a short walk up Stoney Lane, which was actually gravel for the first year or so; this led up to the A4 the main London to Bath Road, and about half a mile along on the right hand side was the school. I went into the lowest class of about 25 girls and boys with Mrs Maskell. I have plenty of random memories over the next five years. I have to admit I was rather noisy and full of myself which gave me the regular title of 'chatterbox', 'know-all' and 'show-off'. Surprisingly I wasn't bullied, in fact although I was quite small and not very tough. I had a sort of strength of personality which let me get away with ordering other people about. I remember being surprised when a boy I usually dominated punched me on the arm during a disagreement, so that brought me up short. I only remember one playground fight – we flayed wildly at each other, mainly missing, until a teacher came up and stopped us. There was another occasion when I was going to 'thump' another boy after school and we arranged to meet at the top of Stoney Lane, but he brought an older friend and when he started pushing me around, I ran for it and got home easily.

There were two bizarre moments which show that lapses of memory came along very early. We had a cooked lunch at school which required us to queue outside along the wall until a teacher came to call us in. One day I got there first and was waiting for a few minutes until a teacher came along and pointed out that it was half past three and everyone had gone home for the day. Another time exactly the reverse happened; when lessons ended I shot out of the gate and went home to my Mum's great surprise, forgetting that I had not had lunch.

I was a bit of a creep too. Two of the male staff used to play tennis on the playground at break without a net or lines, and I would call out the imaginary score - '15 love, deuce,' et c. They were so impressed with my knowledge of the game! I even composed a song for the Festival of Britain in 1951 and my teacher made me sing it to the senior class, who were not at all impressed but the teachers loved it:

*Come to the Festival of Britain in 1951
Come to the Festival of Britain and we will have some fun
People to see and things to do,
Outside the Dome a mile-long queue
Come to the Festival of Britain in 1951.*

How cheesy was that!

I was also the Headmaster's favourite and he used to take me out of lessons to play football with the older boys on a Wednesday afternoon. I could run quite fast, so I did quite well at soccer and athletics. We had races on a fairly rough field near the school, and as usual I had a lot to say; in one close race against older boys, I shouted 'Dead

heat! I looked along the line!' I am not sure whether anyone cared except me. I did come 3rd in a district 80 yards race against local schools – I have a certificate somewhere. I also have a 2nd prize certificate from Cadbury's for essay-writing certificate, but I suspect that I was only competing against other pupils in the school. The school eventually acquired a field next to the asphalt playground and we had to spend breaks picking up stones to avoid risk of injury when we played on it.

Eventually there were about a dozen boys and girls in the firm's houses and we often played together after school. 'Can David come out to play football?' (David owned the ball). In the field next to the houses we had a telegraph-pole for one goalpost and a jersey for the other. Dad had been a very good footballer in his day and still played for Sterling Cables at the weekends; I would often go and watch. I remember him packing together wads of newspaper to use as shin-pads. He played centre- or inside-forward, and was very nippy; he scored lots of goals. By contrast he was hopeless at cricket but would always have a go. We would play on the very uneven surface with a wooden crate for stumps and, usually, a tennis ball. When I was about 10, he bought me a cork ball and a new bat, although the bat was one of the old-fashioned sort with no springs. He had to try it out against one of the other Dads who bowled one as hard as he could. Dad swung hard, connected and the bat broke in half! He took it to work the next day, and because the break was on an angle he managed to tape it together with cable insulating tape, a very rough black sticky tape. It lasted for a while and even gave the bat a spring of sorts, but sometimes the two halves separated rather dangerously as the bottom half flew off over mid-wicket.

Thatcham lies under Greenham Common where the Americans moved onto the old aerodrome with their B47s in about 1950. The bombers made a terrible noise coming and going or just warming up. We would often walk or cycle to the top of the hill – a good three miles - blackberrying, or picking bluebells. We tried soap-box carts down the very steep hill; there was very little and traffic and it was great fun but tiring pulling the carts back up to the top. I had a second-hand bike by the time I was about 10, but wasn't allowed to ride up on the Bath Road yet. I remember one spectacular accident when I was giving Sheila a cross-bar ride and tried to go no-handed. We both had grazes and I got a good telling off.

Another walk was across the fields behind the houses to 'the dump' which was a collection of rubble from the nearby army depot down by the railway line. Beyond the dump was a marshy area which grew long tall rushes, which we collected to make splendid arrows; we pushed pointed knitting needles in the thick end which made them very dangerous, and we were lucky not to have any accidents. We fired at birds, the arrows went miles but we never hit anything.

Talking about birds, egg-collecting was a favourite pastime until the police took it seriously and started making house calls. I can still tell the eggs of chaffinches, blackbirds, thrushes, pigeons, tits and so on and I had quite a collection. We never took more than one egg but it was exciting climbing up to a nest to see what was in it. We also attracted some police attention for scrumping apples in the big house over the road. I remember running over the field kicking a football, pretending that we had been nowhere near the orchard.

There was another walk which I remember going on with the whole family, including Nan and Grandad, one holiday weekend. We went up to the Bath Road, over it and up the hill towards Buckleberry. Dad completely underestimated the distance and after a

picnic lunch Nan certainly was in no condition to walk back, so Dad went all the way home on his own to get the car. Another exciting excursion was by car to Devon, with Nan, Grandad, Sheila and I all in the back seat. When we got to Porlock Hill some of us had to get out to allow the car to get to the top.

Thatcham village was about a mile back up Station Road and I trudged up many a time to get the shopping. 'Mum says a nice piece of topside, please'. We could make a small beef joint last several days. Sometimes I would fiddle the change by adding on a penny here and there and getting enough left over for a Mars Bar!

I was about 10 when I discovered fishing. I had a new two-piece cane rod and an Oxo-box of hooks, weights and floats and of course a jam-jar for my catches. I'd walk the mile or so down to the railway line and over to the river Kennet and the Kennet and Avon canal which flowed parallel to the railway. I preferred the canal which was slow flowing and had several locks. In fact I dropped my brand new rod into the lock when a wasp flew in my face, but I grabbed another boy's rod in a panic and hooked mine out.

We never worried much about falling in, and I couldn't swim yet. I saw lots of big fish but was never subtle enough to catch them, so it was mainly minnows, roach and the odd small perch. I did have one major success with a spinner which I was dangling under the road bridge and a small pike about a foot long rushed out and hooked itself. My main fishing venue, however was about 4 miles away at Aldermaston, close to my Dad's factory. Tony Griffiths, who was a year or two older than me, and I, cycled along the ridge past the airbase and through Brimpton towards Reading, thus avoiding the A4 Bath Road, usually on a Saturday morning, to another part of the Kennet and Avon, complete with lock. There was a nice open bank and we never found anyone else fishing there. We caught dozens of good sized roach. In the early days I got so excited when the float went down that I struck too hard and the poor fish slammed onto the ground behind me.

Mum's illness

It was about now, when I was 10, that Mum went down with osteoarthritis which left her immobile and sent her in and out of hospital for the next 20-odd years during which time she had various treatments but was in a wheelchair from the age of 30. All Dad's spare time was devoted to looking after her and although Sheila and I did our bit I have only recently realised how much she suffered from her pain and immobility and how much more I could have done. Mum could be very irritating because she wanted everything done 'just so' and would issue instructions while we took all the short-cuts possible. In everything from clearing the fire-grate to buttering bread she would offer advice. It was clearly so frustrating for her not to be able to do things her way and there were many tears and arguments – even with my Dad who occasionally lost his temper.

While Mum was in hospital, Sheila and I spent short spells living with my Nan back in Allens Road, during school holidays and even going to school there. I remember Nan's addiction to jigsaw puzzles – she would start them on the front-room floor and take several weeks to finish them and I would help. Next door lived the Stranges, Peter was about my age and knew that I could run fast, so he found a lad from a few streets away to challenge me. We ran along the pavement, round a lamppost and back. It was more or less a dead heat on that occasion, but I did enter a race in the local park

and won The Observers Book of British Birds for coming first. Grandad's house did not have a proper bathroom so it was a tin bath in front of the fire – the lavatory was outside in the scullery. While we were away Mrs Clark next door was always volunteering to help and often cooked Dad's supper.

I have good memories of Nan and Grandad. Grandad didn't have a car so when they visited us in Thatcham, Dad drove to Reading station to collect them and I would walk to the top of Stoney Lane to wait for them. More often we would drive in the Austin 7 to visit them, but the 60 miles were an all-day journey and we always stayed over night. We went up to London for Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 on my birthday and Grandad had bought a 9-inch cabinet TV for the occasion.. At the time I only had a few more weeks at primary school before moving on to St Bartholomew's Grammar School in Newbury but more about that in a moment.

I was certainly Grandad's favourite, first grandson after 4 daughters, Joyce, Vera, Violet and Rita, in order of seniority; my Mum was the eldest, Joyce. He always had a half-crown for me when I left. We always went to Allens Road for Christmas and stayed about a week along with all the other relatives – all four daughters were married by now but lived close enough not to have to stay over every night, although on Christmas Eve everyone crowded in; beds were shared, mattresses on the floors, stockings were hung and so on. I remember often sharing a double bed with my Dad and my uncle.

Christmas lunch was traditional – chicken (wishbone but no turkey in those days), roast potatoes, brussels et c. Uncle Laurie had served in the navy as a chef so he was in charge. He managed to cook a great meal for about 16 people and do the washing up as he went along. The Christmas pudding was also traditional with silver threepenny pieces hidden inside, so we had to chew carefully. The adults had the odd beer, but Dad was tee-total and no-one had wine. Grandad did try a drop of sherry once and staggered a little much to Nan's scorn – she had been a member of the Sons of Temperance for years. After tea we all gathered in the front room, rarely used at any other time, for presents and a sing-song around the piano. Mum insisted that presents were opened one at a time so everyone could see who gave what to whom. Dad was pianist and with no formal training could pick up any tune suggested. The adults gave it a full go – I remember 'Roses of Picardy' being a particular favourite of auntie Vera's mother-in-law

On Boxing Day we toured around Dad's relatives, just dropping in without notice and always welcome. Sometimes if Spurs were playing at home Dad would take me to White Hart Lane where we had a favourite corner and I was lifted up onto a wall for a perfect view. Getting in and out was a bit scary in a dense crowd of very tall men.

Grammar School 1953-1961

Almost unnoticed the 11+ exams arrived. I don't remember any particular preparation, meetings with teachers, homework and so on, simply Mum and Dad saying 'good luck'. I think Mum asked me a few questions afterwards and I remember telling her that I did not know what a 'hub' was. In due course, and very low key, the school told me I had passed outright, along with one other, a girl, and two other boys had

qualified for an interview. There were no great celebrations at home as far as I can recall, although I am sure Mum and Dad were pleased – perhaps we all took it for granted. I was master 'clever-clogs' after all. Grandad was chuffed and I had to go up to London to parade my new school uniform – peaked cap, grey blazer, grey shirt, tie, short trousers and long socks. There are photographs somewhere in the archives. He bought me a small suit-case for school kit and wrote my name in neat black letters on the outside. Grandad did all the writing of letters in an immaculate script; I don't think I saw any example of Nan's handwriting until after Grandad died

St Bartholomew's Grammar School was in Newbury, about 4 miles down the Bath Road. It was an all-boys school with about 360 boys of whom about 50 were boarders. From Thatcham I caught the bus coming down over the hill from Tadley which stopped in Station Road about 100 yards down the road from our house. The view from our house was such that I could see it coming up from the station, so I had about 5 minutes to get to the bus-stop. Mum was in and out of hospital at the time and I was actually lodging with the Vickery family just down the road on my first day at my new school. There was an older boy in Station Road, Terry Allen, who was already at St Bart's who escorted me on my first day and looked out for me. I was not particularly happy at the Vickerys, who had two rather dim children of about my age, and who were quick to remind me that they were doing me a favour.

There was a small group of us on the 'bus heading to St Bart's and the Newbury Girls' Grammar school which were only about half a mile apart. Once we got to the Wharf 'bus station in Newbury we had the option of a mile or so walk up to school, or another 'bus which was not always regular enough to get us to school on time. On the way home over the years the Wharf cafe became a major rendezvous for an ice-cold coke while we waited for our various buses. Reg Jewell and Philip Stradling both started when I did and caught the same bus and so did a couple of girls, Ann, Philip's sister and a delicious little girl, Maggie Murkett, with whom I soon became besotted. It never turned into anything but she did kiss me on the top story of the 'bus, possibly just for a tease. She lived up at Brimpton and I cycled up there a couple of times at the weekend just to catch sight of her.

There were three equal ability first year classes of about 24, IA, IB, and IC and I was in IC. Our form master was 'Nobby' Bloodworth, poor man. 'How much is blood worth, Sir?' He had a limp, a lisp and a short fuse – not surprisingly. In those days a sharp cuff round the head was an accepted means of delivering punishment, and many a time as Nobby bore down upon an insolent offender the rest of the class chanted 'Duck, duck!' Nearly all the masters were known by first name or nick-names: *Jumbo, Cow, Seedy, Lurgi, Alfie, Sid, Jake, Crusty, Jock, Pud, Dougie, Snoz, Jac* My initials were GAH, - Geoffrey Arthur Hart, but I was rather embarrassed by the 'Hart' bit – it was my mother's maiden name and the only way my Grandad's name would survive, but of course it was not a proper Christian name. So I filled in forms as 'Geoffrey Arthur' and was mortified when the second master came into class on the second day to query the anomaly. I remember tamely saying 'Oh we don't use that name much.' I cannot remember the second master's reply, but he was a tough Welshman, Mr Herbert, and was not standing for any such nonsense, so 'Hart' it was.

IC was great, we were lucky enough to have a number of good athletes, and once we had learned how to play rugby we beat both the other forms. St Bart's was a rugby school through and through, Mr Herbert would not allow soccer and even confiscated tennis balls if he saw them being kicked on the playing fields. All the masters had to teach rugby, although some were better than others. Mr Ismay, a French master did not really hold with the game, but had to take IC in the early weeks. He particularly disliked scrums, so would have a bouncy-wouncy instead, bouncing the ball between the two sets of forwards. We played down on the Fifth Road pitches, one of which ran parallel to the railway cutting. It was a good long kick onto the lines but we were not allowed to go down and get the ball. The balls were almost round and very heavy, especially when wet.

There were four 'Houses', named after World War I heroes and I was in Davis. The first inter-House competition I can remember was Sports Day in the summer. We had trials and two were picked for each event. I won the u/12 100 yards and the u/13 220 much to the delight of the seniors in our House (all of whom seemed to me to be really old men) and I was established as a good lad. In the 220 I ran in shorts, shirt and a pullover, but I had forgotten to take my braces off when I took my school trousers off, so half way round there was a flapping noise and my braces detached themselves and fell out. I was a bit embarrassed walking back to find them. I also came 3rd in the High Jump

I learned to play chess, which became a break-time obsession and I also made some cash from trading and selling postage-stamps of which I had a good collection donated by various relatives. Pocket-money from Dad was two shillings and sixpence a week which I supplemented from a Sunday paper-round which brought in about 5 shillings. It was a bizarre set-up, I had a fixed round delivering ordered papers, but no real idea of how much money I should collect, because some paid monthly others weekly. I simply handed in the money and took what I thought was my due.

When summer exams came round I found that I had won 3rd prize for Year I and was duly presented with a book of my choice on Speech Day. I was still able to cause resentment with my 'cockiness' and one boy wrote in a school essay that Speech Day had been spoiled by '*Chapman's grinning face.*'

In Year 2 we were grouped by ability, so I was a proud member of 2A, where I had a bit of an academic slump and only came about 20th at the end of the year and got a good talking-to by my teachers. I did not really hit form again until Year 4 when I came top!

Year 2 brought more athletics success in the summer. I won the u/13 100 and Long Jump and played cricket for the u/14s, having most success with my wily offspin, but mainly in junior house-matches. I see that I did captain my house to victory in the junior rugby house-matches in 1956 by which time I was in 3A but not yet good enough for the school u/15 rugby team. In the summer I was awarded my House Colours (special tie) exceptionally early and there was some muttering but I had a very good season with the ball in u/15 cricket, although we only had five school matches and three House matches. The next season I was still u/15 and started scoring some runs – a 62 not out for instance. Sports Day was again a triumph and I won u/15 220 and 440, although I could only manage 4th in the Long Jump. By now my Grandad had bought me running spikes, which I loved – they were dark black and light as a feather and I looked after them with great care and devotion. I used to talk to

my legs and feet as though they were my lucky charms. In the summer of 1957 I was selected to represent Berkshire in the 440 in the All-England Schools Athletics Championships in Southampton. It involved about a week away from home with some real super-star kids – one was Ann Packer who eventually won Olympic gold. I did not impress, however; when the gun went for the start of my 440 heat I thought I'd got mixed up with the 100 yards; everyone went off so fast that I was left for dead – I think I came 7th out of 8. This was only a few weeks after I had broken the school u/15 440 yards record!

I was not an automatic selection for the school u/15 XV to start with. I was a year young but one or two others of my age did make the team. I was fast enough on the wing but my tackling was feeble and I did not really like it, but I was eventually awarded my u/15 'stockings'. I graduated to 2nd XV for a season, but I was already in the 1st XI by summer 1958, taking lots of wickets (8 for 29 against Reading School) and batting number 9. This is when the headmaster, Mr Ballantyne famously declared, '*Chapman's an opener*', put him in first. So up the order I went and was run out for 1 in my first innings, but after that I did begin to make some scores. I was written up in the School Magazine as '*a clever bowler and opening batsman of promise*.'

Eventually I made the 1st XV and at City of Oxford School '*wormed my way through and outpaced the field over 70 yards for a glorious try*' although my '*tackling was not yet decisive*'. The following year I was made captain in the Lower Sixth, and note from the match against the Newbury Club A XV '*Chapman dominated the first half with his fantastic acceleration and scored four tries*'. All these quotes come from the termly school magazines, which my Mum kept. My valedictories from Mr Chester the games master in 1960 and 1961 were very flattering indeed:

Athletics: '*GAH Chapman showed his quality by almost jumping out of the pit to record 20ft 8ins, a most respectable distance for the senior long jump record. He also won the 100 and 400 yards, in the latter shaving a little off the 1948 record, so that he now lays claim to quarter-mile records in all age groups. It is too easy to take for granted good performances from Chapman and we must be careful not to underrate his very fine efforts in recent years.*'

Rugby: '*As captain he combines a cheerful disposition with a genuine sense of responsibility. As a player he is a match winner, elusive, with a truly remarkable acceleration and a good left boot. It is a pity that he has not been fed the ball more frequently, for he is one of the best wings Berkshire has seen for many years.*'

'Captain for a second season, and a very good one too. We were sorry to lose him before the fixtures were completed. He is one of the most exciting players the School has fielded and a fine leader, worth his place in many better teams yet.'

Those were the days! Actually I did play at a slightly higher level, for Berkshire Schools, but I was un-invited from the All-England trials because I had left school before the trials! I had several games for the Berkshire Senior County side until I left university.

I cannot leave school without tracing some very special friendships going right back to Year I and my earliest classmates. Reg Jewell stands out, literally, he was big, loud and jolly; he always had money and would dispatch lesser mortals to the tuck shop at break to bring back jam doughnuts – a doughnut was the reward. He was a strong rugby forward and made it into the county u15 side before anyone else. Another good sportsman was VACF Lamb – Victor, Archibald, Charles, Frank – fearless flank

forward and demon fast bowler. He lived on a farm at Englefield, near Theale, and had to be up early enough for a two mile cycle-ride to the 'bus- stop and a 30 minute 'bus ride to Newbury. Because of his farming background he was knick-named 'Foxy', and his Dad even brought a hunting horn to rugby matches to urge us on. Mum and Dad would always come to home matches, rugby and cricket, despite the difficulty of loading and unloading Mum's wheel chair. The school catchment area was very wide and boys 'bussed and biked in from up to an hour away and from all directions. I had another senior moment once, when I cycled to school, and forgot that I had, and went home on the 'bus. Numbers grew from 350s to over 500 during my time there.

Ahead of us by one year was 'Thommy' Thomas, he had entered a year young but dropped back in Year III to join us. He was a fine all-round sportsman and tough as nails – you provoked him at your peril. Fortunately I was always on his right side and to some degree he was my protector. He, along with Reg, made it to school and county rugby sides before me and eventually had three full seasons in the 1st XV as full-back or fly-half. He was a good cricketer too, but always wanted to hit the ball out of the ground, which he frequently did and was one of the very few to score 100 in an u/15 match. Thommy and I became close friends and spent a lot of time together, especially at breaks and after school, when, along with Vic and Reg, we formed a small clique, because we were nearly all staying after school to the same practices (Reg did not play cricket), and walked down to the bus-station. There were others too of course but by the time we were in the Sixth Form we would stroll at lunchtime in the summer like lords, in a group across Fifth Road, around the games' fields, and along the fence of the girls' school, where we often passed the time of day. Thommy and I had a go at after school dancing-classes with Miss Brooks – 'fingers together, not a bunch of bananas!', we had crew-cuts together, much to the annoyance of the Senior Master, and we tried badminton and basketball with some success. On the rugby pitch he was my 'supplier' – he had a great eye for the gap and excellent timing, which allowed him to 'put me way' especially in 7-a-side matches.

Reg was first to pass his driving-test, but Thommy was not far behind. I failed mine first time and did not re-take until after I'd left school. Reg had access to an older friend's Jaguar and would occasionally borrow it to bring to school. Since he came right past my house it was only natural that he would pick me up. Thommy's Dad was ultra careful with his car and rumour had it that he only took it out of the garage on Sundays to wash it.

We all had to join the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) in the 3rd form and for no particular reason I rose through the ranks to Company Sergeant Major of the Army section by the Sixth Form. I was no soldier but apart from the hair-shirts, gaiters and soggy Field Days on Snelsmore Common, I did enjoy learning about 303 and 22 rifles – I just scraped my first-class shot badge, but Vic was a marksman from the outset. Thommy joined the RAF section and they seemed to have a cushy life – linen shirts and ordinary shoes and Field Days looking at aircraft. We went to school in our various military uniforms every Tuesday. My favourite story, which I am sure happened although I did not see it in person, occurred during one of the regular CCF exams, Part I and Part II. Part of the test was for the candidate to march a small squad of about twelve cadets around the field under the eye of a regular Army NCO examiner. Michael Foster (it must have happened, because I remember the name?) called 'about turn' in rather a weak voice and only half the squad heard – and turned –

the others marched on, so Michael bellowed 'about turn' much louder; both groups about turned and the result was mayhem as they marched into each other! I got my 8 O-levels, including Additional Maths; I had no idea what was going on and just applied the formula as dictated by Mr Saunders – there were no grades in those days, just pass or fail. The others got a few between them, but Reg left after Lower Sixth. Thommy got 2 A-levels and went off to be a junior apprentice at an estate agents and never looked back – well hardly ever. He climbed the ladder to his own business via Newbury, Abingdon and Oxford and enjoyed the fruits of hard work and initiative, becoming

quite a pillar in the community – which would not have been an obvious prediction. By now I was firmly rooted in the Classics, since the time that Mr Ballantyne informed the top six boys in Latin that we had all qualified to do Greek. There was no debate and my parents spent the next four years trying to understand why. Every now and then I had to do my party-piece for Nan and Grandad and count to 10 in Latin and Greek. I could have said anything they would have been none the wiser! I eventually wound up with A levels in Latin, Greek and Ancient History, taught mainly by the brilliant Robert Sewter, who told my parents not to worry – I would go to his old college, Trinity, Oxford. He was very generous to me and I have several books which he gave me, not to mention letters of encouragement and congratulation. He had a 'hot-line' to Trinity and I was the fourth to go in 10 years. I am sure his reputation helped, although we all had to take three days worth of entrance exams and interviews at Oxford. 'Don't forget to tell them you are captain of rugby and cricket' . 'Alfie' as he was knick-named (I don't know why) was also 1st XI cricket coach and kept saying I would get a double blue, but that was a very long shot, especially the cricket. I was a little surprised not to be made Senior Prefect – I was deputy – but Mr Ballantyne explained that I had plenty to do with rugby and cricket and there were other excellent candidates. He left to go to Cranbrook in Kent and then died suddenly afterwards. Thommy and Vic were also part of the 15-man squad of prefects and we had our own garret up a winding set of stairs at the top of the school. We spent spare time and breaks up there; lesser mortals had to knock and were answered by a loud 'come up!'.

The new Head, Mr Cooper, was not such a fan of the Classics and Robert Sewter soon retired. I thought I had told everyone that I would leave at Christmas after my extra Oxbridge term, so when I was offered a place at Trinity I went along to say goodbye and found Mr Cooper a little peeved that I was going. Earlier in the year Grandad had died and Mr Cooper wasn't too keen to let me go to the funeral so we were not on the same wave length. One blot on my copy-book that year was my failure to read the lesson at assembly – I was not a public person in those days and could barely manage an impromptu vote of thanks after the Old Boys' match – I had an imaginary case of stomach upset and cried off! What a wimp!

Girls, mainly from the High School, did the rounds and the odd after-school assignation disrupted our routines, but there was no in-fighting and we usually managed to combine male and female camaraderie. Saturday night pictures was a common feature after the day's rugby or cricket. I had several crushes at various ages, and one, Jean Bradley lingers in the memory; we were going well until she decided 'to

give up boys' at the age of about 16. I did link up with her later, even when I was at Oxford, but we never quite got it together.

So I slipped away quietly at Christmas, but I did play for the school 7-a-side team at the Rosslyn Park Sevens in February. I was not very fit by then but we won a couple of matches and I had one full length of the field romp; I enjoyed the familiar shouts from Mr Chester on the touchline of '*Give it to Chapman*'.

I met Karen Rowe, my future wife, at about 16 and we went 'steady' until we both left school. She was at the High School and turned out to be a very good Scandinavian linguist, her mother being Norwegian, and though we had a good relationship for some years, we were never really 'good friends'. She had no sporting ability and little interest as a spectator but did come to some cricket matches when I played for Thatcham on Sundays. My sense of humour was a little too sharp and Karen

was very possessive, quick to take offence and her doting father was a terrible snob with academic pretensions and nothing to back them up. We almost split up when I went to Oxford and she to UCL, and we should have done. I think it was insecurity on both our parts which kept things going.