

Chapter 77

St Cyrus – Winter, Spring, Summer 1969

One thing that I have not mentioned so far, and it had interesting effects on our ‘body-clocks’, was the introduction of **GMT + 1 Hour on all UK clocks all year round from March, 1968 until October, 1972**. Thus, clocks were advanced as usual by one hour to GMT +1 at the end of March, 1968, but, until the end of October, 1972, no further clock movements were to be made! It was hoped that road accidents UK-wide in early mornings and early evenings would be reduced, but, by 1972, because of the significant difference in latitude between, say, London and Aberdeen, no acceptable generalisation could be made on improvements or otherwise.

St Cyrus School, Kincardineshire, being in the North-East of Scotland, had always had potential problems with school hours in the months of December and January, as its many pupils from outlying farms and cottages could be exposed to walking, or bussing, to, and from, school in darkness. Sunrise in December was normally c. 8.25 am and sunset c. 3.30 pm. Sunrise in January was normally c. 9 am and sunset c. 3.35 pm. However, outlying pupils were often allowed to finish school earlier than 4 pm because of this.

Decisions were left to individual Headteachers in their varying situations in the County of Kincardine to determine how best they could take advantage of **all year GMT+1**. I decided that, from after the fortnight’s ‘Potato Holiday’ in October each year, until the Easter Holidays started in April, school would start at **10 am instead of 9 am**; and finish, as before, for senior pupils, at 4 pm, and Infants at 3 pm, even although this meant shortening lunch-breaks and morning intervals. Thus, with **all year GMT+1**, in December and January, sunrise was c. 9.30 am and sunset c. 4.30 pm.

All this apart, our village life went on in routine fashion, with my only two ‘escapes’ being, Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons devoted to rugby football with my team-mates in Montrose Rugby Football Club At that point in time, a mere sixteen of us twelve farmers, one lawyer and three teachers so, not surprisingly, we failed to muster a full side of fifteen on several occasions! The club lacked direction in playing terms, and quite quickly, before Christmas, 1968, because of the contributions I was making towards the team’s improved results from my on-field ideas, ability and organisation, I was invited to become its amateur ‘player-coach-manager’. This offer I was glad to accept as I was just not accustomed to haphazard approaches to tactical planning and mental preparation for competition nor let it be said, to my team turning out in, to put it mildly, a mixed assortment of shirts, shorts and stockings for matches!

It soon became apparent that, to a man, the lads really wanted to be organised, and as a fact of sporting life, it was also clear that such direction was much better coming from a relative ‘outsider’ than from someone inside their own erstwhile Saturday ‘afternoon-jaunt’ group. The casual approach

that I had found in September and October, had become all the more frustrating to me because of the considerable individual talents, skills and strength, amongst them that were going untapped. But I had to work hard on Thursday evenings with them at training sessions not overmuch on physical exercise, but more on serious 'talk-ins' about the game ... teamwork forwards and backs' leadership responsibilities ... codes for set-pieces, planned moves in attack, co-ordinated defensive measures in various circumstances, and so on and so forth! All this they found not so new after all they had just forgotten about how their games' masters at school had so organised them! Soon the 'pints and stovies' conversations in the Central Hotel after the two hour Thursday evening sessions in the Academy gymnasium became extensions of what I had been teaching them through talk more than them comparing notes on the prices they were getting for farm produce! Soon, with strong approval from jovial captain Johnny Milne, I was laying down the law about always arriving in the dressing-room, home or away, at least an hour before kick-off time. After a few matches where constructive use of this hour had been seen by the team to be most worthwhile, I overheard one lad saying, "Why did we never think of doing this before now?"

Simultaneously, I got approval for the ordering of a full set of numbered self-coloured emerald-green shirts, the laundry of which I promised would be done regularly by my school-cleaner Mrs Harrison at a reasonable rate per shirt contributed by players from within their match fees. This high quality wool-apparel arrived just after Christmas, 1968 and not long afterwards, any travellers approaching St Cyrus from the south on a Monday morning would see 15 emerald strips blowing in the breeze on the Harrisons' back green washing-line!

Making adjustments to some of our players' on-field set positions was also a priority in my book. I tended to have insightful knowledge of where certain players might better serve the team, and where some others' weaknesses might not be so exposed. However, these changes had to be rationalised individually with the players concerned especially to those who were inclined to say, "But I've always played ..." scrum-half or some other position. As I intended to become their 'director-general' at fly-half, I not only needed someone with all-round basic skills for the crucial role of scrum-half, but also someone with a fair measure of decision-making acumen Thus, wing forward Ian Salmon in due course became an accomplished scrum-half, and the ever-willing David Cargill became a doughty wing forward. And, boy! did this shuffle pay off handsomely ... as did Sandy Jessop's move to centre-three-quarter from fly-half to accommodate me there.

By February, 1969, we were becoming a formidable unit, based mostly on a dependable ball-winning pack at tight scrums and lines-out, solid, organised defence, great backing-up in the open spaces, and my kicking my usual expected number of points from penalties and conversions. Then, in late March, our already useful pack of, among others, Dave Donald, Bob Meikle, Johnny Milne, John Forbes (6ft 4inches), John Officer, John Wilkie, Ian Ridge, and David Cargill, was strengthened

by, a later to become Scottish International, a former Aberdeen University student, George Mackie at No. 8 ... and, to the delight of David Officer, our flier on the wing, an ex-Scottish Internationalist friend of mine, David Whyte, the new Principal Teacher of Classics at Brechin Academy, also joined us to play inside the other David at centre three-quarter. That we lost narrowly in an April snow-storm to Harris Academy FP at Broomfield, Montrose in the semi-final of the Midlands Cup was not too disappointing as we had surprised many pundits by, as a lowly club, getting anywhere near that stage of the annual competition. Quite a first season for me in the Junior ranks, but very satisfying from the great friendships made and missions accomplished. Next season ... well that's another story

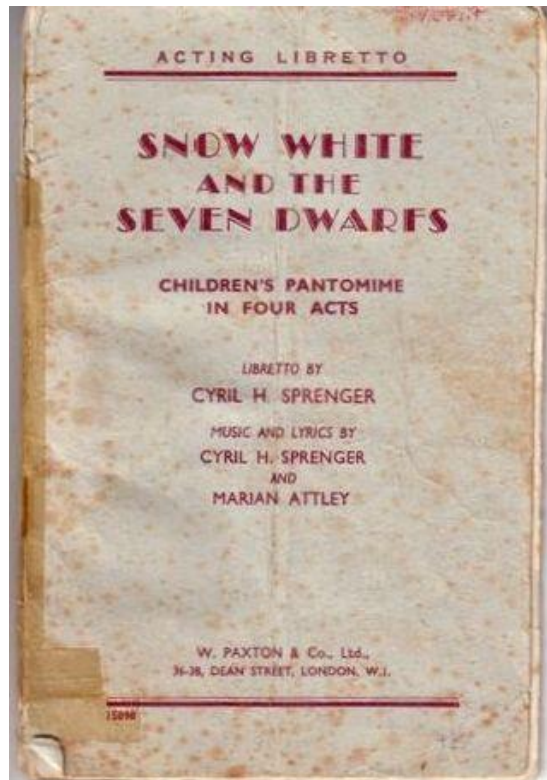
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..... But we never did get a chair-lift in the time we lived in the village just about 100 yards from the cliff-top and now, at the time of writing in 2008, to my knowledge, no modern machinery has been allowed to invade the 'sanctuary' and thus ease the sandy-slithering down, or the strenuous climb back up. However, as spring was slowly taking its leave, the four of us, Olive, with Kerr being carried, Evan, and myself ventured down to the shore to explore the rock-pools, and, albeit tentatively, dip our toes in the cold North Sea. Being still early in the year, the East wind remained a chilly force, and thus, on our occasional visits in order to build sand-castles etc., refuge had to be sought in the lee of a convenient rock. Football with Evan was hopeless as the strong breeze tried our patience and energy levels to the limit any missed pass, one to the other, usually finishing up fifty yards or so down-wind!

My school-mastering and teaching continued to be very enjoyable, and particularly so because of the children's pleasure being so obvious as we practised and practised the songs and scene-acting for the planned performance of the pantomime, 'Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs' in late June.

Here is a well-thumbed copy from my archives



The rugby season wound down in mid-April after a very promising revival in Montrose RFC's fortunes, and with me, 'the incomer', winning the annual end-of-season place and drop-kicking contest for the 'Noel Smart Cup' One might say that I coped with the on-shore Broomfield gales better than the rest in what turned out to be a very low-scoring competition!

Although I was feeling slight withdrawal symptoms from the smells and sounds of well linseed-oiled willow on leather, I yet again resisted the temptation to turn-out for Montrose Cricket Club. My promise to Olive regarding cricket abstinence was thus kept, and, anyway, I was perforce becoming a sort-of all-round gardener for the first time in my life after having been a mere very willing mower of grass in my former minimalistic horticultural escapades. As it happened, I was really needing a break from the game after seventeen years of Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday/Sunday practices and play ... but I did have the less time-consuming alternative of playing occasional games of tennis at, and for, our small village club, and these outings were very friendly and enjoyable especially so when I had our huge 6 feet 4 inch Montrose RFC lock forward, John Forbes, as my doubles' partner for the few inter-club matches that we in St Cyrus were invited to contest! In addition, in the context of 'double summer time' light, we could also play on until nearly 11 o'clock in the evenings ... quite amazing as were the post-match delicious sandwich and cake suppers!

Soon, however, the preparations for the fund-raising pantomime/concert took over most of my spare time. The Infant class and Mrs Shell worked hard rehearsing the story of 'The Billy Goats Gruff'; the Middle class, with Mrs Dickson at the piano, practised the pantomime's choruses in readiness for fulfilling that role from the front two rows of 'auditorium' (Church Hall!) on the night; the visiting

teacher of music volunteered much extra time, without payment, to coach the principal 11 year-old female soloists, bonnie wee Dorothy Pirie as 'Snow White', the accomplished Marion Stott as her maid 'Angela', and the boisterous Edna Stewart (almost as tall as me!) as the wicked 'Queen'; and I worked with all participants, singly and in groups to get their spoken words and acting moves 'done to a T'; and everybody, parents included, beavered away with the making of costumes, furnishings, props etc. Then, to cap it all, the dominie decided to get on-stage too, by involving the non-on-stage-pantomiming-senior boys in his musical version of 'Who Killed Cock Robin' aka 'Here Comes De Judge' [from ideas gleaned from USA TV's 'Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In'].

Having never done any thing like a pantomime before, I was worried sick as the 'big night' approached. And when it poured rain on dress rehearsal day, and some of the paper/cardboard costumes and props got dampened on the journey from school to hall, I was in a right state until the church officer said that it would be OK because he would turn on the hall heating a day early to allow things to dry out. Phew! This worked!

My father phoned to see how things were going and calmed me somewhat with his experienced comment ... " Even if you think the show is a disaster, the parents will think that it is wonderful because their own bairns are taking part." In the event, I was quite pleased with what transpired – the hall was packed to the rafters, the children excelled themselves, and laughter and applause rang in their ears for days after but I said to myself, "NEVER AGAIN!"

Here is a taste of the fun!

No. 4.—MERRY LITTLE MEN.
(Song—*The Dwarfs*)

Verse 1: We are seven little dwarfs as you can plainly see.
We live down in the forest in a cottage 'neath a tree.
We work all day from morn till night.
We never, never stop.
When we get home at half-past seven
We like a nice pork chop.
Pork chop! Pork chop! Pork chop! Pork chop!
Oh, pass the H.P. Sauce. Oh!

Chorus: Merry little men are we,
Living all alone.
We're light-hearted, gay and free,
Happy on our own.
We've no time to sit and stare,
Our work is never done,
For working is our only joy,
And that's our only fun.

Verse 2: I am Cheerful, just get an earful of my funny jokes,
(**Cheerful & Friendly**) And I am Friendly, Oh, so friendly, like to mix with folks.
We always work together, and
We're never, never shy,
And when we're feeling hungry
We adore a nice mince-pie.
Mince-pie, mince-pie. Oh my, Oh my!
Oh where's the Christmas pud-ding?

Chorus: Merry little men, etc.

Verse 3: I am Twinkle, can't sleep a wink-le, always on the go;
(**Twinkle & Drowsy**) While I am Drowsy, oh, so browsy, often feeling low.
We are directly opposites,
As everyone agrees,
And it's quite plain that we're as different as chalk from cheese.

He's chalk, he's chalk. He's cheese, he's cheese.
Oh pass the pickled oni-ons,

Chorus: Merry little men, etc.

Verse 4: I am Brainy, see my cranium oh, so short of hair;
(**Brainy, Snappy & Rum**) And I am Snappy, so unhappy, cross me if you dare.
While I'm the last of all the dwarfs,
My name is Rum-tum-tum,
And I am on a diet, that is why I look so glum.

All: Have a plum? Have a plum?
Rum-tum: Not a crumb. Not a crumb.
All: Then try some gooseberry pie—Oh.

Chorus: Merry little men, etc.

(*At the end of the song all the dwarfs sit down exhausted and Snow White addresses them.*)
Snow White: That was a very good little song. Now, what about some supper?
Rum-tum: (*Rising*). Ah! Supper! (*Goes off to door L. singing "Let's have some Gooseberry pie"*).
Brainy: Now, Miss Snow White, we have all decided—
Snappy: I haven't.
Brainy: Be quiet, Snappy. We have all decided that if you will look after us and our house, we'll let you stay here as long as you like. How's that?
Snow White: (*Gratefully*). That will be really lovely.
Brainy: Good. So you can have this room for tonight and we'll sleep upstairs in the spare room.
Snow White: That's very sweet of you all, and I do thank you for your kindness. I'll really work hard to repay you.
Cheer: That's all right, Miss.
Snow White: Thank you. Now, as I said before, what about that supper?
(*Dwarfs all rush off through door L. while Snow White starts to arrange the table.*)

CURTAIN