

Chapter 40 1957 – 1958

Bannockburn /Glasgow University (ii) – 1957/58

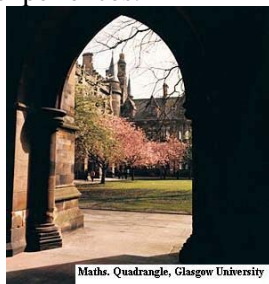
As a country boy I found life in the city to be, strange, very noisy, and, although full of new experiences, also rather impersonal. Typical of this last feature was while travelling by ‘tube’ in the morning stuffed to the gunwales with people hidden behind newspapers, or hanging on for dear life inside our swaying, rattle-ly ‘wood and metal sausage’ that nose-dived into tunnels for several minutes before ‘surfacing’ into the bright lights of the next subterranean poster-lined ‘cave’! However, for variety on Monday and Tuesday late-afternoons, I often took the longer route home by tramcar through the city centre and over the river to Pollokshields.



These trams rattled and shoogled along in fits and starts. But, despite their relative discomfort, they provided me with more than a glimpse of city-goings-on in the raw.

In between times, I enjoyed the nine o’clock physics lectures immensely, because here the traditionally roisterous behaviour of some of the more adventurous members of the student audience was curbed by each of our seats, from the front row on the floor up to ‘the gods’, being individually numbered, and by the presence of a ‘protective’ janitor out front who we had been told would note the number, not only of absentees, but also miscreants.

The ten o’clock chemistry lectures were interesting when I, along with about two hundred others, could more than just see what was on the blackboard down in the well of the modern un-numbered, ‘sit-where you wish’ tiered benches. Thus hearing became a bit of a lottery, unless I got a place near the front. It was then a close call whether to go further up towards the back and be deafened, or risk being struck by the variety of (usually innocuous) ‘missiles’ hurled at any boring incompetent lecturer on display. The trouble was that this was my weakest subject and I really needed to get good notes in order to survive subsequent tests. Unhappily this just did not become a reality. And I paid the penalty the following June in its degree exams. In contrast, and ironically, in my strongest suit, mathematics, the smaller groups, taught in the ancient classrooms above the cloisters of the quadrangles of the main buildings, provided more amenable experiences.



Also, little of the mathematics’ course touched on anything that I had not done in my advanced studies during my sixth year at school. Just as well perhaps, as a third hour of intensive note-taking, with no coffee-break in between, took its toll on both the mind and stomach. So daily, come the chimes of noon on the tower clock, my close-in-the-alphabet named comrades, Angus Kerr and Alistair Johnston, and myself, would head off with great alacrity down University Avenue to the Union Building to gain a good place in the refectory queue.



The three-hour chemistry laboratory sessions on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons were ‘pressure-cooker’ experiences that I gradually came to dread. Each day one had some experiment to attempt from written instructions, on ones own, at ones own allocated and numbered bench-place, and the results in each lab.book was checked and graded by the supervising PhD student ‘demonstrators’ the following day or week. It took me a few weeks to realise that, somewhere else in the huge laboratory, other students were trying to tackle the same problem experiment as I was. So I learned the hard way to have a stroll about in the first quarter of an hour or so to find someone to share my ‘troubles’ with two heads undoubtedly being better than one when undertaking university level work. By the end of the first term of this kind of trauma, I was utterly sick of the sight of chemicals! Worse still, it drained much needed energy from my efforts at my nightly ‘catch-up’ homework.

On a lighter note, Monday and Tuesday afternoons were great fun, as a few of us always went down-town immediately after a brisk lunch to join other lunch-time dancers at the Locarno Ballroom near Charing Cross at the west end of Sauchiehall Street.



Here, for a totally relaxed three-quarters of an hour or so, we made new friends with the opposite gender from a wide cross-section of occupations, backgrounds and interests; and we soon learned how to chat-up such ‘burds’ and ‘jive’ after a dialogue like the following had occurred:- “Are ye dauncin’?” ... “Naw, it’s jist the wye I’m staunin’, bit, OK, if ye’re askin, then I’m dauncin’.”

The following couple of hours or so that were then usually spent in the nearby Mitchell Library, studying, or referencing,



(or just ‘girl-watching’!), also became pleasant interludes away from the less-appealing aspects of my introduction to student life up on Gilmorehill at Glasgow University in Autumn 1957!