

Chapter 53
1958 – 1961
Bannockburn / Summer Vacation – 1959

Jim and I were together again for this ‘race for the coast’ and succeeded in getting to the centre of Brussels with a kindly elderly couple by late afternoon. It wasn’t the best place to be dropped off, but it was as far west as they were prepared to go. So, nothing else for it, (lack of cash!) we walked, and walked for what seemed like hours, until we got to the outskirts of the capital. But it was very clear that we were nowhere near the ‘autobahn’ that had served us so well on the outward journey.

Then, ‘out of the blue’ [*actually early evening*] an open-backed sports-car screamed to a stop beside our hungry and weary persons. “Jump in lads” (*or the equivalent!*) shouted an elegantly dressed stranger over the din of his super-charged engine and exhaust. We just about discerned that he was heading somewhere near the coast, so sat back, and were dramatically powered west at breakneck/windswept speed along country roads before being peremptorily dumped out with a cheery wave in the twilight at a signpost that indicated, ‘**Ostende 20km**’.

“So far, so good, I said. That looks like a village over there. Let’s see if we can get some help there.” [The rest of this episode was so memorable that I have recorded it in verse]

Whilst donn'rin throw an ull lit 'ville',
A wabbitlookin' pair,
The youthheid jined us in force,
Tae gawk an' smirk an' stare.
Richt suin ay bricht spark sang wi' glee,
'Ces hommes sont tres belles filles',
an' syne the loat o' them jined in
This chorus us tae tease.
Unfazed by sich attention,
We grinned an' jined the fun,
An' fan a' ditt'yn hud stoapit,
We kent thit we hud won.
'Amis Eccosse', we fusered,
An' this sure wirked a treat,
An' 'Pouvez-vous - aidons-nous',
Made chinge o' luck complete.
'The fathers they will help you,
A bed they're sure to lend,
So follow us and you will find
A chapel round the bend'.
Twas Faither Pierre fa weelcomed us
An' teuk us tae a dorm,
'Just wipe the dust and lie you down
We'll see you in the morn'.
First licht brocht claitters doon the stair,
An' guffs sae unca fine,
An' calls o' ' Pret! Le dejeuner'
'Come down and with us dine'
The crack aroond 'la table'
Wis suin brocht roon tae 'POOLS',
'Bit bettin' cannae be for them
Thon's a' agin kirk rules?'
'Mais non, amis, each week we send
Our coupon on its way,
And what we win just now and then
Well beats what all we pay'.
'But this week Father Paul forgot
To post our righteous bets,
So we were well ... just hoping,
That you could do the rest?'
'Nae problem', we assaired him,
Just suin as we win hame
We'll post the bettin' env'lope,
An' ye'll be in the game'.
They 'comprened' weil oor doric
For a' jined tae oor praise,
An' poor'd yit mair fine coffee
I' cups a toast tae raise.

Father Pierre arranged a lift for us to the youth hostel in Ostende and there we found the other two just itching to say again, “And where have you two been?” But it was worse this time because they had arrived the previous day!

We then spent a wind-swept but pleasant morning playing football (of sorts) on Ostende Beach



before catching the ferry for an evening arrival in Dover and then London ... and the start of yet another unforgettable journey.

On arrival at Victoria Railway Station in the dusk we only had a phone number to guide us to where the McCallum lorry depot was in the city. So, fingers-crossed, as no scheduled arrival date or time had been deemed worth suggesting beforehand, we hoped that someone would be on duty to answer our call. All was well, and, with a little difficulty, a taxi being way beyond our means, far less our inclination, we eventually found the depot at about nine in the evening. The good news was that transport was indeed going north to Airdrie that night. The less-good news was that only one lorry was going. However further good news was that it was travelling back empty and that the driver intended doing it fast and in one go. Further less encouraging news was that it was an un-sided vehicle!

However, the foreman said, “If you are prepared to take the risk and take two hourly ‘shifts’ – a pair in the cabin and a pair under roped tarpaulins against the headboard up top, you are welcome to ride on that motor.” Without demur we jumped at the chance and quickly tossed for who would take the first dangers of exposure under the haps. That decided we roared off through the night, which of course, despite it still being summer, got chillier and chillier for the pair huddled under the windswept tarpaulins. It was quite a survival test for all outside until, safely over the border at Gretna, the dawn came, and with it some slightly greater warmth from the rising sun. However, as it is said, ‘Every cloud has a silver lining’ and our major reward was to witness sights that none of us are ever likely to forget – the magnificence of the rolling hills and rushing streams of Scotland’s Southern Uplands in all their morning glory!



Although later in the morning we were indeed glad to be picked up at Airdrie and driven home to Stirling by car, I could not help but feel the ante-climax of such a pedestrian mode of travel after the sheer exhilaration, if not palpitations, experienced over the previous fourteen hours.