



Scotts' on the Irish.

THE SILK TRAIL (two-wheeled) — Chapter two

School and first Scott

Most of our family were a seafaring lot, Gordon cox of the Selsey lifeboat and especially great uncle Harry. One of the last Royal Navy sea captains to sail round the Horn. He was a very impressive gent and would regale us with sea tales, some funny, some not so. The worst bit was tacking, sending men aloft crossing everything that all would come down, in Winter the ropes were frozen solid with ice, no guarantees.

One day he brought with him a tin box (bit like a two-speed tank); inside was his Rear Admiral's hat, complete with white plume feathers. Uncle Harry had gone to the Royal Hospital School at Greenwich (the two iconic buildings) which was for the sons of serving seamen. Some time earlier the RN had saved a wealthy landowner from shipwreck. He had gifted his estate to RHS and they built a fantastic school at Holbrook on the river Stour near Ipswich between 1936-40. Ed and I were to discover that our names were on the list — Harry still had a bit of clout!

Malta was buzzing in '53 with the coronation; Prince Philip had been stationed there, as was Earl Mountbatten. The word was that both blokes were OK, in fact Dad made him a pair of wooden sun beds. December came and found me flying back, on my own, to the U.K. (eight hours up the valleys); this time no problem, the stewardesses looked after me very well. We landed at a wet and windy Northolt.

After a few days at Grayshott we were on the steam train to Ipswich, funny a lot of the pictures in the carriages were by a bloke called Constable. So started an education which was quite tough, not helped by my thin blood (three years in Malta) and the biting east winds, straight off the Russian steppes, they said. Soon go the hang of marching, learnt the hard way that you should treat a bully like a naughty puppy: bang him on the nose. Two years flew by and I soon progressed from the lowest rung of the ladder (guess it's tough at any boarding school) to the seniors and Ed joined.

Dad had bought a Bradford Jowett van on his return from Malta and he and Mum came up on visits. Did I mention food?; well, it is THE subject for 650 lads, all hungry. In the land of hunger, he with the food parcel is king (until it runs out). We had all sorts of scams: I'm a bellringer and the local vicar worked out he could get his bells rung for Mars bars. The old post lady who spoke broad Suffolk had food delivered from the kitchens, the bloody cat didn't get all of it, even though I was paid in a couple of slices of tart.

I had been a bit short with the PO and was having to Ronuk the wood floor; the housemaster wants to see you. Now, this was very serious, I didn't know what to expect. Mum had started work and was really enjoying it. He broke it as best he could: "your mother has died". Worse still, Dad had a Far East posting to Malaya, on HMS Newfoundland. We would be taken to Southern Ireland, a place called Monstrevan, by Uncle Splonk (don't ask) and Aunt Alice for four weeks.

I could fill a book about Ireland, of which I still have very fond memories: of going to church all dressed up in our Sunday best, all hail mary's and incense waiting 20 yards round the corner into the pub, going home for dinner about three, everyone rat a***d. Or about the way Grandma cooked the cake in and underhearth oven, and everyone peeled the spuds when they were cooked by squeezing them out of their skins.

From the minute we arrived at the derelict farmhouse where we were billeted, after travelling through three fields, with just two habitable rooms, the pond in the farmyard with wild horses galloping around, to a roaring peat fire and a whole crate of Guinness, things did look a hell of a lot better.

Our personal transport was to be a donkey! To fetch it we were driven over to Kildare, picked up the donkey (can't tell you what we christened it, but if you keep reading you might guess) and w were left to find our own way back about five miles. Unlike motorcycles, especially Scotts, where if you kick 'em right they'll start. No amount of pushing, pulling, shouting, swearing, would move it. In desperation, with Ed on board, I cut a hazel twig and gave the donkey's wedding tackle a flick. This worked quite well until close to home, during a pilot change, the donkey bolted. From midday till dusk we searched everywhere, and eventually, with tail between legs, we went back to the main farm/forge to own up. What made matters worse, there they all were, sat tight lipped and straight faced while we regaled them of our troubles. Eventually the place erupted in uproar, the blasted donkey had recognised the area and gone to one of the family's bungalows and set about mowing the lawn with his teeth! (Moral: four legs, bad starter, no brakes, even a four-stroke looks good.)

Just before my 16th birthday, with Dad back from Malaysia and

home on Summer leave, we were down at Syd Puttick's, Dad's old schoolfriend motorcycle dealer in Haslemere. Dad was negotiating to buy a Brum Scott through Syd. He suggested a trip up to Birmingham. He also said £12 seems reasonable for a Brum Scott. On my birthday Dad said "get your stuff on, we're going to a rally at Beaulieu" (my Aunt was not too keen). Dad said "he can do it", so my £12 pride and joy was wheeled out, my 1929 three-speed Flying Squirrel hand change. First trip about 140 miles with Ed and Dad on the Brum Scott and me on mine. Did I like it — not half — a smile three times round my face said it all. Aunt was just glad we got back in one piece.

When Dad was a boy he had emigrated to Australia, returning prematurely because of his mother's ill health (she went on to clock 101!), but he always wanted to return. So off to Australia House in Guildford, passed all the tests and medicals. On the way back down the Hogs Back the '29 Flyer lifted up her skirts and Dad clocked her at 75, a cracking little bike, with one flaw, which I was soon to find out.

I went back to school to finish my GCEs, with a promise if I passed I would get Dad's Brum Scott and he was going to twist Matt Holder's arm for a Swift. There were six supposed to be about; we had seen two at the Scott Rally at Stratford, very impressive. Bill Read and Matt Holder had ridden them down. In the event he ended up with a Swift tank, on a Brum Scott. About this time the ACU Rally had happened (see Broken Crank).

Anyway, in December 1958 I left school and told Dad Ed and I weren't going to Australia and went down to the labour exchange for a job. Would I be a pair of hands, this farmer's wife in Fernhurst had gone into hospital to have a baby. So I went to work for six weeks, which turned into six months. I enjoyed ever minute of it. My long-suffering Aunt made me park my silage-smelling togs outside in the coalhouse. The '29 three-speeder flared its head. The back road out of Haslemere has a very steep hill and my cork clutch didn't like it, not one bit. After the first time we cleaned the chemist out of corks I stamped my foot a bit, there must be a better way. So we contacted this chap Tom Ward in Derby; he sent me three Ferodo plates, problem solved. He was my new hero.

To this day we are still in touch with Mike and Anne (the farmer and wife); they now cruise the canals on their narrow boat. This year we joined them and they took us over the Ponticicly Viaduct, a very impressive piece of engineering finished in 1805 (battle of Trafalgar). Cheeky comment in the visitors' book: if they built it today, odds on it would wobble! (Wonder who wrote that?)

Heart said farming, head said engineering. Dad had a long chat with Tom Ward and soon I was on a train to Derby, the address in my hand, 59 Wilfred St. The corner house on what had been quite a posh area. With a stable, coachhouse, a yard, a long side to quiet road, ideal for customer parking, it had been a doctor's residence. This big old house was to loom large for me in the next few years.

George.

CENTENARY OF THE COLMORE CUP TRIAL - 2011

In February 1911, 46 motorcyclists took part in a reliability trial