Denis Riley

Schooldays and Childhood Memories 1905-1921

Edited by Margaret Wigglesworth

BLENHEIM BOYS' SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL

To the

SCHOLAR

on leaving the

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Don't think your education is finished. You have only taken one stage on the journey.

If it is not possible for you to continue your education in a Secondary School, continue it in the Evening School, and join at once. Continue to use all available means of self-improvement. The Public Library is one means.

When looking out for Employment, choose something that will prepare for the future.

Don't take up "odd jobs" that lead to nothing better, and which may leave you without suitable employment in after years.

W. S. C.

Denis Riley born 1905 died 2003

Contents **Page**

Roundhay Mount, Leeds

All his life, my father Denis kept meticulous notes, newspaper cuttings, letters he deemed worth saving, etc. chronicling his life and when he retired he spent many hours writing his memoirs. His hope was that eventually they would be published and, he hoped, make him into a millionaire! Alas, his ambition was never realised and in his last years I was a great disappointment to him because I declined to put them into book form. When he died three years ago I was left with two large boxes of papers and memoirs and now, finally, I hope, at least in part, to carry out his wishes, starting with an account of his somewhat unusual boyhood and using his own words as much as possible. He was born at 33 Roundhay Mount, Leeds, on 25th March, 1905, the third of four children, to Tom and Norah Riley.

Early childhood

As I grow older, I wish the more that when my parents, and indeed my grandparents, were alive, I had asked them countless questions to learn whatever in the earlier years of their lives, might be of interest to me. However, it is not too late to start to record events in my own life which will be available to fill gaps in the knowledge of my progeny should they have the yen to know more of their sire's earlier years.

A natural embarkation point on my journey through the years must surely be that of my birth on Ladyday in 1905 in a middle class terrace house of the period, probably newly built, at any rate typical of that class of housing. Two cellars, dining room~cum~kitchen, 'front room' or 'parlour', with stairs to double bedroom, small bedroom, bathroom with W.C. and two attic bedrooms. Small garden at front with hallway entrance and rather larger garden at the back with entrance straight into the dining room. [Despite the many changes in Leeds over the last hundred years, Roundhay Mount is still standing, looking, I imagine, little different, apart from cars parked in the street.] Some twelve years later, having meanwhile lived in some half~dozen different houses elsewhere in Leeds and one in Northampton, we returned to live for about four years in the house of my birth. I know that the reason for the frequent moves was not gypsy blood but due to the fluctuating fortunes of the family of my father's employers, a firm of boot and shoe manufacturers and wholesalers, E. C. Midgley & Co. Ltd. of Leeds. His final association with the firm ended with redundancy early in the 1920s during the economic depression of that period. We returned to live at Roundhay Mount about 1913. It had been owned by my parents for at least fifteen years, a purchase which would have been beyond the means of my father whose wage even in 1913 was only £2 a week and I think it must have been the gift of my mother's father.

Throughout my life I have been a vociferous protester against various things and reflecting on parental accounts of my earliest years, I think it must have been born in me. My mother liked to take her young children by tram from Harehills to Roundhay Park but had on occasion to endure my screaming the whole way, to her great embarrassment. An event which I do not remember but have been told was that I was taken by Frank to have my first professional haircut and screamed the place down. After that haircuts were carried out by my mother in the traditional manner with a pudding basin on my head. This puts me in mind of my mother telling me of going into Leeds. On the tram was a mother taking

her little boy to Leeds General Infirmary to have an iron pan removed from his head where the poor lad had placed it.

I would be about four when we moved to Bramley and while there we lived in three rented houses. Several events from our life there remain in my memory. The earliest is of when we lived in Landseer Avenue at the foot of a steep road into Bramley called Outgang. I had walked to the top with big brother Frank. For some reason I had a disagreement with another small boy and we came to harmless childish blows, egged on by Frank. It ended with my knocking the other boy down. That was the first of many fights in my long life, both physical and, later, mental.

Ted, Frank and Denis

It was not long before we moved 'uptown' to a small terrace house at No. 7 Westover Road where my sister Mary was born. It had no garden, the front door opening on to the street and the back down steps into a paved yard with outside closet and dry midden, giving on to an unpaved road between the terrace of houses and Bramley Park. One Saturday morning Frank and Teddy and I went into the park with baby Mary in her high pram. Frank would be thirteen and it was not easy for a small boy to negotiate a top heavy perambulator down the four steps into the park and the inevitable happened. It tipped over. Fortunately Mary was unharmed.

One thing I remember is the butcher's shop and Frank taking me one morning to the open slaughter house behind and witnessing a bullock having to be dragged by several men to meet its doom. Another, less gruesome memory, is of playing in the street outside the tin chapel, in Westover Road with Ted and a little girl and of Ted lying down on the pavement to get a worm's-eye view of her knickers as she stood above him. I was rather annoyed because when I wanted to do the same Ted said I was too young.

A year or so later we moved to a somewhat superior terrace house, with a bathroom, higher up Westover Road on the other side of the street and we lived there for about a year, during which I started at a Council Infants School in Hough Lane. There was only a small back garden but our next-door neighbour rented an allotment on the opposite side of the back road. One day Ted took me on a foraging expedition into a well-stocked strawberry bed. Well, who can blame a six-year old for indulging 'not wisely but too well'? Back home some time later I was violently sick and the circumstantial evidence of our sins was there for parents to see. Retribution followed swiftly, and painfully, when our wooden 'bottom smacker' was temporarily removed from its resting place beside the fireplace.

Ted and Denis

My only memories of the school at Hough Lane are of singing a hymn at the start of morning school, "All things bright and beautiful", and of a teacher performing a disappearing egg trick at a Christmas entertainment. That school was not graced with my presence for very long because the next of our family's frequent removals took us to Northampton.

Many memories come back as I think about our house and home life at No. 27 Collingwood Road, a modest terrace house with a good back garden; but I have few memories of school. One clear recollection is of a playground where once a week we did Physical Exercises, no doubt well remembered because on one occasion I desperately wanted to relieve myself but was too shy to ask and so ended up weeing in my breeches. There were also occasions in the winter when the playground was a sheet of ice and I enjoyed sliding on it. Another memory is of receiving a medallion commemorating the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary which would be June 1911 [twenty-six years later, at infant school myself, I received a silver spoon in honour of the coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth] and of going with my brother Ted to see the celebrations on the town racecourse where I had my first sight of an aeroplane.

On Saturday mornings Ted and I each had household chores to do ~ dusting the metal lattice frame of the Singer treadle sewing machine was one I especially disliked ~ on completion of which we were given our weekly pocket money of one penny each. After dinner we went together to a local sweet shop and each bought four separate farthingsworth of sweets; a khali sucker was invariably one. In the summer our weekly pennies were supplemented by Father paying us a halfpenny for every fifty flies we killed in the house, duly set out in serried ranks on a newspaper which had been our instrument of destruction. There was occasional cheating when an extra large specimen was turned into two by Ted. One amusing memory regarding Ted was, before going to school one morning, he reached up to get a 4 lb tin of Lyles Golden Syrup down from a kitchen shelf.. Alas, it was rather too high and as he tried to manipulate the tin over the edge of the shelf it tipped over, fell upside down, the lid came off and it ended up on his head. There was very little time for mother to wash his head before he had to be off to school where he arrived with spiky hair which might have been the envy of a modern youth in the 1980s.

Sundays were special days when we had the luxury of a coal fire in the 'front room'. My sister Mary, four years younger then me, was still in the baby stage and had been left in her high chair in front of the fire in the charge of Ted. By some accident he knocked the chair over and Mary was shot onto the fire. Luckily, as Ted ran to alert our parents, I was able to pull her safely off and although her face was scarred, in time this wore off. Two other outstanding memories are of my mother telling Ted and me about the death of the explorer Scott on his return from the South Pole and on another occasion of the sinking of the 'unsinkable' Titanic.

Mary

Blenheim Boys' Council School.

In 1912 we moved back to Leeds and Ted and I started school at the Blenheim Boys' Council School. I was then seven years old. The school was situated not far from the centre of Leeds in a largely working class district with a fringe of very poor families on one side and of lower middle class on the other. The buildings were fairly old but had been modernised and had the unusual advantage of two flat roofs on which we sometimes had lessons in fine weather. There was also a swimming bath but of course no playing fields. The school was about half a mile from Leeds University where we occasionally went in a long crocodile to one of the lecture theatres to give students practice in teaching. [The 1913 cover for the yearly Term Reports is simply headed *Blenheim Boys' School*; from 1914 onwards *University Demonstration School* had been added.] We were also conveniently near to the Leeds City Museum and Art Gallery for occasional class visits.

As the years have passed since I left school I have been increasingly appreciative of my good fortune in as much as the Headmaster W. S. Crowther, under whom my mother had once been a teacher, and all the staff were conscientious, capable and caring for the welfare of their scholars.

As can be seen from my school reports I did very well in schoolwork, being first or second in classes of nearly fifty pupils for several terms. But I was popular out of class as 'Podge Riley' and always very much involved in all playground games, pranks and fights. The last mentioned were very much in evidence at election times when many adopted the political colour of their parents' favoured party and grouped together armed with 'bangers' of tightly rolled newspapers on the end of string to fight rival groups. One fight in particular was with a boy called Metcalfe who was built on the lines of the bulls his butcher father slaughtered. It went on after school finished for three successive days in a side street. On each occasion we were driven away by irate housewives before a decisive blow had been struck. But by agreement we continued the fight the next day in a different street! The third day happened to be my birthday and that day I was unlucky and carried home, an all too obvious sign of what had caused me to be late from school. In our family birthdays were never made special occasions but even so my mother did not appreciate my taking home in the form of a birthday present, a black eye. So after suitable treatment I had to promise to make peace with Walter Metcalfe.

I would scarcely be eight years old when two indications showed a tendency to take a lead in any action; a characteristic which has been part of my life. One arose from the death in a road accident of the small brother of a classmate called Wells. I and another youngster were chosen to take a wreath, to which we had all subscribed ½d or 1d, to the parents, who managed a pub at the end of Reservoir Street. So we carried it all the way on foot up Woodhouse Lane: my mother was pleased when I told her that I had declined an offer for a sight of the dead boy. [Since writing this I have learnt from the aunt of the little boy concerned that he was called Leonard Wilkinson and was six. It was in the summer of 1917 and Father was by then in his last term at Blenheim and was actually aged twelve. The Wells family lived further up Reservoir Street so perhaps he was the other wreath bearer.] The other occasion followed the issue by a Liverpool shipping company of a free world atlas. I was the boy who responded to a general request and wrote a postcard ~ ½d stamp in those days ~ asking for a supply for the whole class. Not surprisingly there was no response!

My respect and appreciation of my teachers was shown when we removed once more from fairly near the school to a better class neighbourhood much further away. I was able to persuade my parents to let me stay at Blenheim although this involved a 1½ mile walk there, taking my dinner (the only boy in the school to do so) and walking home after school, whatever the weather. A year or so later we moved again, to the house where I had been born. Once more I maintained my desire to continue at Blenheim, equally far away though now I had the benefit of the occasional company of my class teacher, Louis Arthur Jones, whom I admired.

The First World War

The Great War of 1914-18 started on 4th August 1914. Our family was on holiday in Scarborough at the time and I have vivid recollections of being on the crowded north beach which became littered with discarded newspapers as special editions succeeded one another and were eagerly bought by the tense holidaymakers; only ½d for papers at that time. The next day Ted and I were almost alone on the beach where we watched the Yorkshire Hussars or Yeomanry training, galloping along the beach; to us a very thrilling sight. The following day our family joined the general exodus of holiday- makers, in time before Scarborough was shelled by a German naval vessel which had eluded the British fleet.

As the war progressed and the annual prediction of "It will be over by Christmas" proved false, conditions of life gradually changed. I 'did my bit' to defeat the Kaiser and 'the unspeakable Huns' by collecting empty jam jars for salvage, sewing canvas sand-bags, knitting scarves for the troops and dishcloths for the canteens, taking home-made jam to the military hospital and digging a school allotment. One evening I walked to town to join the cheering bystanders as a convoy of army ambulances took wounded soldiers from the railway station to Beckett Park Hospital. Scarcities of food, etc. became acute after the German U-boat attacks on merchant shipping increased and at school slates and slate pencils had to be used for some lessons.

In 1915 my brother Frank, seven years older than me, joined the flow of eager volunteers and got into the army by giving his age as nineteen, the minimum, and 'took the King's shilling' from the recruiting sergeant who had a penchant for turning a blind eye on underage recruits. A fortnight later, at the age of seventeen, Frank was in France. Fortunately, thanks perhaps to having declared

his education as at 'Clarks College', which was only an evening class in Leeds where he learned shorthand but was probably assumed to be a college of higher education, he was put in a clerical job in the Intelligence Branch, General Staff of the 11th Army Corps. He served in that capacity throughout the war in France and Italy without becoming one of the millions of casualties. Although nowadays I often cannot remember my own telephone number I can unhesitatingly give Frank's army number – S4/125399 Army Service Corps.

Frank

My cousin Willie Riley had been an early volunteer and had joined the local Leeds Pals' Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment. As an infantryman he suffered the worst of trench warfare in Flanders and when on home leave in 1916 he did not return to his regiment. I remember sadly his calling at our home when he was being sought by the M.P.s. (Military Police) for being AWOL (Absent without leave) and what he told me of the horrors and dangers of life in the trenches, sometimes up to their armpits in foul water and sometimes so close to the German trenches that hand grenades could be lobbed from one to the other. He knew that return to France meant death and so he was making the most of his last home leave by dodging the military police before he was taken back to trench warfare. So we were not surprised when on July 16th news came that Willie was one of the appalling losses in the Battle of the Somme offensive when British losses were 420,000 and over 100,000 were killed in one day. The Leeds Pals' Battalion suffered heavily and it was a black day for the people of Leeds.

[In fact, my father was slightly mistaken here. Willie died on 19th September 1917, aged 21, and his name, 'Remembered with honour', appears among the nearly 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom and New Zealand who died in the Ypres Salient after 16th August 1917 and whose graves are not known. Their Memorial is alongside the Tyne Cot Cemetery, where almost 12,000 servicemen are buried, some 9 kilometres north-east of Ypres town centre.]

On a lighter note and going back to 1915, military service was still on a voluntary basis and for a time recruiting in Leeds was stimulated by a tram, illuminated with coloured lights, travelling in the evenings to various suburbs, appealing for recruits. Young men caught up in the emotional appeal would go into the tram at one end and shortly afterwards come out again in khaki uniform; soldiers! Uncle Willie had been a Colour Sergeant in the Royal Scots Fusiliers, having run away from home because of the unhappy conditions there, and served his time in India. On retirement he had taken a news-agency, sweet and tobacco shop and was well known in the locality as an old soldier. Cousin Willie's younger brother, Laurence, was under military age but anxious to join the army like his elder brothers but his father forbade him to do so. However, one evening when the recruiting tram stopped near his father's shop, Laurie rushed out and, to the cheers of the crowd, jumped on to it. Almost immediately he was followed by his father to even greater cheering as the crowd thought that the old soldier was joining up again. But half a minute later Uncle Willie came out of the tram holding Laurie by his jacket collar!

The middle brother, Vincent Charles, had also joined the army and became a sergeant in the Royal Scots. When an officer in the Army Post Office noticed that letters were being addressed to cousin Vin as 'Sergeant V. C. Riley', he decided that future mail should be addressed only as 'Sergeant V. Riley'.

Military conscription was introduced in Britain for the first time ever in March 1916, at first for single men between 18 and 41, for married men two months later. As casualty numbers kept increasing and the military leaders called for more cannon fodder the age limits were raised and in 1917 my father, who was then 46, was called for army medical examination. At this time of his life he suffered from an enlargement of the thyroid gland and a consequent goitre neck. For some unknown reason, probably a case of autosuggestion, the night before his examination the goitre swelled up to a huge size and to the great relief of my mother he was rejected for military service. But he did not escape the teasing of his heartless sons, Ted and myself.

Leeds Central High School

Back to Blenheim Boys' School. In 1915 my brother Ted gained a Junior City Scholarship and two years later I had similar success. At that time there were two secondary schools, adjacent to one another in the centre of Leeds, Leeds Central and Leeds Modern. Places for scholarship winners were allocated to these schools largely according to a boy's father's status in the business world. Sons of those with 'a better occupation' were sent to the Modern which was considered superior to the Central where fees were not as high. Our father being only a warehouseman, Ted and I were each in turn allocated to Leeds Central.

What might have appeared to be a disadvantage proved for us a very good thing. The reason for this was that at this period nearly ten percent of the population of Leeds was Jewish. The parents were immigrants who had fled here from persecution and pogroms in Russia and Poland and elsewhere. Many of them could only speak broken English, lived in virtual ghettos and worked in tailoring sweatshops in the area. Their children were now first generation teenagers and most of the boys went to Lovell Road Council School, almost entirely Jewish, where they received an excellent education with a fine headmaster and were encouraged to work hard to obtain scholarships to go to a secondary school. Because of the low status of their parents they almost invariably went to Leeds Central and about half of my classmates there were Jewish. With keen minds and hardworking in studies they were eager to do well. This naturally had its effect on me who had to work hard to compete in the high standards they were setting whilst at the same time the staff were stimulated to give of their best. For this I have ever since felt a sense of gratitude and I have also appreciated the personal friendship of several of these Jewish boys, both at school and in later years. One consequence for me was a hatred of injustice and anti-semitism, reinforced in later years when I met old school mates who had been compelled to change their names in order to obtain interviews and good positions in the teaching profession. For instance, a good friend Mark Juvelovitch told me he was now Mark Jackson. Three members of an ex-Austrian family, compulsorily named Rosenbaum by the authorities, had each adopted a different name, as had their father who was a rabbi..

My first year at the Central was in form IIB and each term I was top of the form. I was then promoted to IIIA for my second year where I was competing with scholars of a higher average standard and my position fell to 6th, then 5th.

The following year, 1919, I went through the term in the knowledge that I was leaving at Christmas and going to a public school in the New Year. This probably resulted in a loss of interest and slackening in my school work and I dropped to 14th in the class. But this was also a time of considerable excitement and distraction in getting kitted out for the new life ahead.

That first year at the Central holds the most and the happiest memories of my time at that school. I was high spirited and something of a leader amongst a group of other pranksters and was generally popular. I initiated and edited the first edition of a monthly Form Magazine which we called the Two Bee Buzzer. There was the usual lack of contributions to such journalistic efforts and it survived for only four or five issues. Wednesdays were days we particularly looked forward to as after dinner we made our way by tram to the school playing fields at West Park. I usually rode with a pal on the open front on top and in season we shied acorns down on the heads of unsuspecting pedestrians as the tram clattered up Headingley Lane.

My high spirits nearly led to my disgrace and possible expulsion from school in my final term. There was an open flat roof over the whole building to which access was by two staircases ascending five floors but it was out of bounds to scholars out of lesson time. A group of IIB baddies occasionally sneaked up onto the roof at morning break where we amused ourselves by lobbing a water bomb or two, at the making of which from sheets of school exercise books we were adept, onto traffic passing below along Woodhouse Lane. We then beat a hasty retreat down one of the staircases to be swallowed up in the crowded playground below. One morning when we went up we noticed a queue of women at the chapel opposite the school, waiting to go in for their weekly pittance of a few shillings 'soldiers' wives' allowances'. We at once saw this as an interesting target for our dastardly bombing. Oblivious of the pain and wet clothing which water falling from such a height could cause, even though we were deliberately avoiding direct hits and aiming at the wall above, we were incited by the women's cries to fill and discharge more bombs. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves when one of us saw coming onto the roof, fortunately from the FAR staircase, the Principal with a couple of masters and a UNIFORMED POLICEMAN!

We shot down the near staircase like rabbits down a burrow. We had some distance start and our pursuers were somewhat out of breath so we were able to reach the safety of the crowded playground without being recognised. But of course that was not the end of the matter. The Principal called the whole school into the Assembly Hall, explained what distress some boys had caused to soldiers' wives and appealed to said boys to go forward and admit their guilt for the good of the whole school who were otherwise going to receive corporal punishment. As we were standing next to one another we had a rapid whispered discussion and then, with no doubt downcast looks and not knowing what punishment we would get, walked to the front in considerable trepidation. We expected at the very least a liberal dose of the cane but I did not particularly fear this as I was inured to this form of punishment through long association with it and, moreover, I knew that I deserved it. It was the policeman who was present and thoughts of having to appear in a police court, and the reaction of my father, which was most daunting.

There is little doubt of what our fate would have been were it not that the then principal, Walter Parsons, had recently taken over from the disciplinarian Dr David Forsyth. The new head was full of 'the boy scout spirit', having been a scoutmaster. He was also a Leeds City Magistrate, and did not, I think, believe in corporal punishment, and obviously would not want his school's shame to be made public in the local newspapers. After a whispered conversation with the bobby we were given a verbal dressing down but no punishment whatever because we had nobly gone forward and confessed our guilt. And to my further relief, he did not inform our parents.

Looking now at my school reports at both Blenheim and Leeds Central, I am impressed by the admirable handwriting of the masters and mistresses, the latter a wartime innovation. How good to see this when in these days handwriting standards seem to be no longer important. I remember my mother telling me that in her teaching days she used to put pennies on her pupils' wrists as they practised their pothooks. Another point which strikes me in the Leeds Central reports is that after my name at the top of each term's report I had to add J. C. which signified that I was a Junior City Scholarship holder. I wonder why they wanted to know this distinction between such pupils and fee payers.

The Leeds Central School buildings still stand and now boast a Blue Plaque, sponsored by Leeds City Council and unveiled in 1997.

Until the late 1880s Leeds School Board provided only elementary education. In 1885 it opened the Central Higher Grade School in temporary accommodation, moving into the present building in 1889 erected at a cost of £48,000. According to its first prospectus, it accommodated 2,500 pupils: Ground Floor 542 Deaf, Mute and Blind children and scholars taking Cookery instruction, Physical Training, etc; 1st floor 752 boys; 2nd floor 752 girls; 3rd floor 454 Science and Art students. One unusual feature was the flat roof, which was used as an extra playground. [not according to my father!] The school did not close until December 1993 when it moved to a new site and the building was converted to a building as a pioneering one-stop shop, offering a wide range of Council services and advice to around 1,200 people a day. The renovated building contains many original features of the school such as the tiled staircase, the chalkboard and the school clock. *Blue Plaques of Leeds Peter Dyson and Kevin Grady, published by Leeds Civic Trust, 2001.*

Harehills Lane Baptist Church

My change of school to a famous and expensive Public School in the south at the beginning of 1920 was perhaps unprecedented in those times as it was way beyond my father's financial state. The romance, for that is what it was, started at the Harehills Lane Baptist Church which was close to our then home at 33 Roundhay Mount. At previous addresses Ted and I attended Church of England Sunday Schools regularly and also the churches; Ted was a choirboy. My father never attended church and my mother was always too occupied with home duties to be able to do so regularly; she was not a dogmatic Christian and I well remember her always stressing "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you".

It was simply a matter of convenience, the Baptist Church being the nearest to our home, which led Ted and I and sister Mary starting to attend the Sunday school which in turn led to our quick and close involvement in all the religious, social and sports activities associated with the church.

Some two or three years after we started attending, an elderly gentleman named Percy Stock became a regular attender there. Owing to a broken engagement when a young man, Mr Stock had never married but had devoted his desire for Christian service to the interests of young people. Prior to the 1914-18 war he had personally organised and financed a successful Boys Rifle Brigade of which he was the self-styled Captain. At that time he lived in a large house outside Grassington and the brigade spent week ends there under canvas in the extensive grounds.

Mr Stock was the Manager of the Leeds branch of The London Assurance Company. He had continued working throughout the war, retiring in 1919 at the age of 70. After thirty years in the business he had built up a very substantial insurance connection in the Huddersfield area where there were many wealthy mill-owners who were also Baptists. On retirement he opened a small office in Huddersfield as an Insurance Broker and Consultant. He already had fairly considerable investments on the Stock Exchange as well as a substantial pension from the 'London' and so was "comfortably off". With no living relatives apart from a widowed sister and her wayward son and with few friends, he was a lonely man. When he became an attender at Harehills Baptists he had moved to Hayfield, a large house with a field attached at Shadwell, near Leeds.

He soon became an important influence in the church, starting football and cricket clubs for former soldiers on the so-called Military Field near Roundhay Park. These were successful and junior clubs were started for teenagers of which Ted and I both became members. He also helped the church Scout troop by allowing the use of his field and the bell tents, groundsheets, etc. which he had kept from his Boys Rifle Brigade, for camping. Although I was never a Boy Scout, I was permitted to take part in their weekend camps and, without uniform, I trudged along with the others, pushing a trekcart to and from Shadwell.

In the school summer holidays of 1919 Mr Stock, who still insisted on being called Captain, took a party of about ten boys from the Sunday School for a week's holiday at Bowness-on-Windermere, Ted and I among them. We stayed in a Sunday-school room, sleeping on straw palliasses on the floor and doing our own cooking. We had good weather and had an excellent time with many new experiences, including day trips in horse-drawn wagonettes, boating on Windermere, fishing and climbing Langdale Pikes. It was through these various activities that I came to Mr Stock's notice and he chose me to be treated almost as an adopted son. I think that somewhat later on he did suggest to my parents an actual adoption; if he did they did not agree to it. The matter was never mentioned to me. [An official register of Adoption was only introduced in 1927. Before then there was no formal mechanism unless the parties drew up a deed.]

There followed what may have been a trial period which he needed to be sure of my character and ability and fitness to become what he had in mind - the Junior Partner in his insurance broking business. During that period, and subsequently, I spent several weekends and holidays at Hayfield which became virtually a second home for me and, probably to compensate for never having had a son of his own, Mr Stock treated me as such and was constantly providing new experiences in ways which were impossible in the humble Riley family.

Nevertheless, there were family holidays, in Scarborough in August 1914 as we have seen and the following year there was a family holiday on a farm near Harrogate. In 1916 the three younger children went to Knaresborough with their mother where they enjoyed boating on the river as well as going to Harrogate market in a pony and trap. Some time in the early 1900s Denis's Auntie Minnie and Uncle Edwin moved to a bungalow at Collingham, a village a few miles north of Leeds. They had no children of their own and so the three boys would sometimes be invited for the weekend. Apparently Denis and Ted were dispatched there to convalesce after such childhood ailments as measles and they always had a good time. My father told me about playing Red Indians with the local boys, picking wild strawberries along the railway track and punting on the river Wharfe, as well as generally getting up to mischief, as when he broke an ornament in their garden pond.

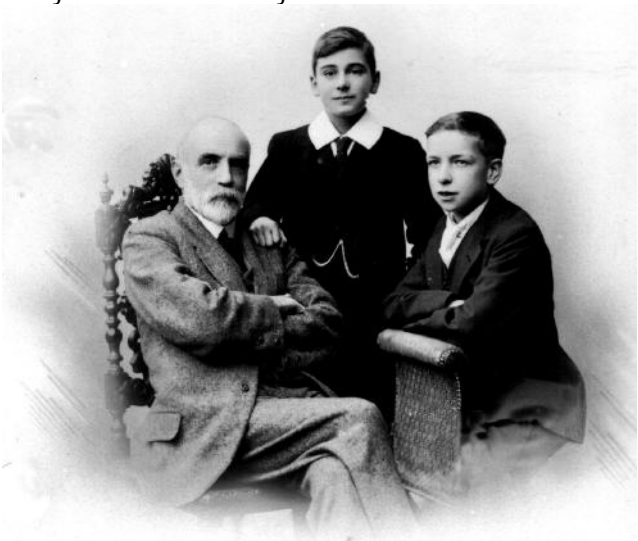
My first visit to Bonnie Scotland was an outstanding holiday, staying at the expensive Glenburn Hydro in Rothesay, with several steamer trips. Then we had a week in Bridlington which must have been on a sudden inspiration because when we got there we found all the hotels full and had to put up at the Black Bull pub in the old town. I was in some trepidation on seeing the type of customer at the bar and then finding there was no lock on my bedroom door. However, Mr

Stock showed me how to secure it by wedging the bedroom chair under the door handle, a tip I have since found useful on occasion. Another sudden decision took us one day to visit his old stamping ground near Grassington where we stayed overnight at a hotel in the High Street. This was partly to find out whether the perch which he had once transported live from Lake Windermere and put in one of the old lead mine workings which were now ponds, had survived. Imagine our surprise when every time we put our lines in we quickly hooked a nice perch. Two local workmen who were walking past on the far side of the pond stopped, and shouted across with some derision , "Tha'll noan catch any fish there mate". Surprise for them when they saw each of us in quick succession bring out a reasonably sized perch. No doubt they would have fish for breakfast more than once thereafter! Many years later this was the subject of a prize winning story on the angling page of The Dalesman for which I won five shillings (25p).

I remember a visit to see *Charlie's Aunt* at the Grand Theatre in Leeds, sitting in the dress circle in the days when lots of folk wore evening dress.. Then we had a week at a hotel overlooking the lake at Bowness. Mr Stock took me on my first visit to London where we stayed a week at the Ivanhoe Hotel in Bloomsbury. Another new experience for me was a round of tourist attractions such as Madame Tussaud's, etc., an evening dinner, with orchestra playing, at a posh restaurant in Holborn as guests of one of the London Assurance's management, a Mr Hoy. We also went to a theatre in Haymarket to see *Daddy Longlegs*.

This was a very exciting period of my young life but the most exciting day during that time was when Mr Stock told me that he had arranged for me to go to a public school for two years to "learn to be a gentleman" fit to become the Junior Partner in his business. This was in spite of my having not long previously incurred his wrath when he had to cancel a planned trip to Paris for us, a punishment for when I foolishly had an accident, which might easily have been fatal, caused by hanging on to the back of an army lorry on a bicycle which he had bought for me. What a shock for my poor mother! ~ and she wouldn't have a doctor in but nursed me back to health. To this day I still have one scar to show for this episode.

When and in what order all these events took place I cannot remember but sometime during this period a third person fitted into Mr Stock's plans, a boy of similar age to myself, one of the church Scout troop, named Arthur Senior. He was more technically or mechanically gifted than of an academic nature and Mr Stock paid for him to be apprenticed at a leading auto-electric works. Later he set Arthur up in business as an Automobile Electrician, also buying him a combination motor cycle and then a car. Meanwhile he shared with me the weekends at Hayfield and a holiday in Scotland.



Mr Stock with Denis and Arthur

Mill Hill Public School

Mill Hill was founded in 1807 by wealthy nonconformists who did not wish their sons to attend a Church of England public school. It is situated outside Mill Hill village about twelve miles from London in what in my day was open country. The choice of school for me was largely governed by Mr Stock's having been a master there for many years and this fact enabled him to overcome the difficulty of obtaining a place for me at such short notice and without my having been to a Prep. school. Also it was not the beginning of a school year when I was to start. So it was something of a favour that I was given a place at Burton Bank where his late brother had been housemaster. It was a large old house which held only thirty-six boarders, about half a mile's pleasant walk on a country road to the main school premises. So there was a much more intimate, friendly life there than in the larger School House which was a good thing.

My departure in January 1920 to start my first term was made quite an occasion at our church. Mr Stock, as President of the football club, which at the time was named Hayfield after his house, arranged a dance to celebrate my going. Quite an event. I suppose I should have been swell-headed but I think my head was in such a whirl at that time, with the rush of events and the excitement of my first dance, for which we youngsters at the church had been trying to learn, that I do not recollect being unduly affected. I was probably too nervous. At any rate I have very scant memories of the evening. It was all arranged in conventional form for the period, the 'Reception' being by Mr Stock's widowed sister-in-law and my mother. Poor Mother; not the kind of occasion and duty to which she was accustomed or would have sought but she bravely played her part. Having to buy an expensive dress for the occasion would be another worry. I guess she lost a lot of sleep on preceding nights wondering whether she would fulfil her duties well. I have a vague recollection of my father being there, and of the kindness shown to me by some of the Senior Club men.

Programme
The President will be pleased to receive Denis Riley at the Institute, St Edmund's Church, Roundhay, on the evening of Monday, January 12th, 1920.

7-0 Reception by Mrs E. Stock and Mrs T. C. Riley
7-15 Conversazione and Entertainment.
Denis Riley of the Harehills Lane House, who will shortly be leaving Leeds for school in London, will take the opportunity of saying goodbye to his friends.
8-30 Supper

9-15	Juniors' Dance	10-30	Juniors' Carriages ordered
10-45	Seniors' Dance	1-00	Seniors' Carriages ordered

The Juniors had six dances, starting with a Waltz and finishing with a Military Two Step. Denis had five different partners, including a Clarissa who was favoured twice.

My becoming one of the fraternity at 'BB', as I soon came to know my new home, was unlikely to pass unnoticed. In fact my arrival at Kings Cross Station, did not, my large cabin trunk having my name (and number - 6) stencilled in black paint for all to see including the porters, who gave me a musical send-off as it was trundled to the adjoining station for the local train to Mill Hill. *"Oh are you Mr Riley they speak of so highly, Oh are you Mr Riley who keeps the hotel?"* etc. They were deprived of this vocal exercise in the future as I learned the advantage of sending that cumbersome trunk 'Collect and Deliver' for 2s 6d.

For some reason on my arrival at Burton Bank I had a nerve-racking meal with the House master and Matron in his private room. There wasn't much conversation (perhaps they couldn't understand my uncivilised Yorkshire speech!) but I was asked by the Matron (who fancied herself as of the same 'quality' as the boys in her charge, which she wasn't) what my father did. I avoided the trap of answering ,"He's a warehouseman," but boobed by saying, "He goes to work in Leeds". Very pointedly she repeated this with one word changed, "Oh yes, he goes to business in Leeds". Lesson Number One!

In the school playground the next day the same question was put to me by an older boy called Giddings. My instant reply was, "He paints stripes on humbugs". He naturally took umbrage at this insolence from a 'new bug' but dared express his feelings no more than to call me a 'guffy squit', and I had been brought up with the saying 'sticks and stones will break my bones but calling will not hurt me'. No doubt the word got round because nobody else ever asked me that question. For a long time Giddings was not on speaking terms but later he relaxed and even took me out for runs on his (in)famous RADCO motor cycle, but possibly this was because I was the only boy rash enough to risk life and limb riding on the pillion!

My first night found me in real trouble. I had been given a bed in a small bedroom with only three beds in it and apparently I was standing talking to the other two boys, who were in bed, when I also should have been in bed. Discipline was largely in the hands of monitors and prefects and a newly appointed monitor called Atkins was going round the dormitories etc. to see that all was as it should be. Through a dormitory window he saw me standing beside my bed and the light still on, so signalled me to get into bed. Unaccustomed to being ordered in that way, without hesitation I cocked a snook at him by putting my extended fingers to my nose. In a couple of minutes he appeared with the punishment cane and I had to bend over and pull my pyjama trousers tight for 'six of the best'. One good thing about this was that news of my audacity on my first day at school was soon all round the house and apparently established my reputation as a lucky new bug.

Later that night when I was sound asleep my two bedroom mates suddenly stripped the sheet and blankets off my bed and in the dark it wasn't easy to replace them. They no doubt thought this was a good trick worth repeating the

following night. But they had not reckoned that I would be awake playing possum and, as they got to my bedside in the dark, they were met with a volley of fists which sent them scurrying back to their own beds in discomfort. Thereafter ~ peace.

On the evening of the first Sunday of a new term a 'new bugs' concert was held in the basement and on this occasion Atkins was in charge. Here was a chance to get even with him. When my turn to perform came I pleaded with him in a weak voice that I knew only a short poem. He magnanimously agreed to hear it and when I further explained that it was only a very short one he fell further into the trap. So in my broad Yorkshire vowels I quickly recited, "The thunder roared, the lightning flashed, and all the earth was shaken, The little pig curled up its tail and ran to save its bacon.", with which I ran to safety amidst a roar of laughter at Atkins' expense and the customary hail of old books, some of which seem to have been accidentally (?) aimed at the unpopular Atkins.

Earlier on that day I had suffered an embarrassment which could not be remedied and I had to live with it each Sunday until the holidays at the end of my first term. Due to Mr Stock's out of date ideas of public school life, when he had arranged for me to have three suits made as required by the school clothing regulations, the 'black jacket for Sunday wear' had been made an Eton jacket. And except for one other boy I was the only one in the whole school wearing a 'bum starver'.

There were other indications that I did not come from a family background conversant with public school life. For example, whilst everyone else had half-sized cabin trunks, I had a full-sized one which caused difficulties in the store room and for the first few days had to be kept in the dormitory. This presented an opportunity for some fun by my being placed in it and swung about in complete darkness. My tuckbox had, on Mr Stock's instructions, been made by a local joiner and instead of the customary white wood with black iron bindings, it was very much larger and made of mahogany-stained wood; again the odd one out. After taking part in any sports on the school playing fields it was compulsory to have a hot bath which consisted of a long tiled trough through which there was a constant flow of very hot water. Boys entered at one end and we shuffled forward, propelled by those entering behind, and got out at the front end. We then went to the adjoining swimming bath into which we had to jump before getting dried and changed. Following the printed instructions

about regulation clothing, I had a full length dark blue bathing costume; rather embarrassing for me to find that I was alone in my glory as all the other boys were wearing bathing drawers known as 'bimbags'. Fortunately that faux pas was soon remedied by a boy giving me a spare pair of old bimbags.

But the foregoing were overshadowed by a near disaster within a few days. Whether or not it was done intentionally I don't know but I overheard a boy telling another that I scratched my head in my sleep. I had already noticed without giving much thought to it that my head seemed to itch during daytime but this alerted me to the fact that there was something wrong. Careful combing revealed to my horror that my head was quite infested with lice, generally known as nits. and regarded as a 'dirt disease'. I immediately wrote to my parents asking urgently for a 'dust comb', and this arrived by return of post. I quickly retired to 'the bogs', the only place for privacy and was astounded by the dozens of head lice I was harbouring. Only after repeated visits at short intervals and combings for another two or three days was I satisfied that my scalp was clear. This was only just in time because a day or so later it was announced that the hairdresser who visited us at regular intervals for hair cuts was coming and had special instructions to examine our scalps. Evidently some boy had complained. Luckily I passed all right but I was too nervous to ask any boys about the whole affair. Whew!

However, in spite of these dampeners to my spirits it was not long before I was enjoying my new environment and communal life. In fact, before very long my Yorkshire way of speaking had been replaced by the cut glass, southern speech which was the lingua franca at the school. This must have been a trial for family and friends when I went home for holidays but I don't recall anyone asking me, "Since when has bath been spelt with an 'r' in it?" [He quickly reverted once back in Leeds.]

So began a very happy, privileged period of my life, of which I have many pleasant memories.. Mill Hill had a high reputation for sports, especially rugby, and three or four boys of my age group later gained international caps. Burton Bank, owing to the small number of boys, did not shine in the inter-house sports which were a big feature of school life and we had only one house shield. My only contribution was to run in the five mile Junior Race in which I finished thirty-fifth out of about seventy. The games I enjoyed most were tennis and single-handed hockey which was a Mill Hill speciality. It was played on the asphalt

tennis courts with ash walking sticks, with the bent head planed down by the school carpenter to produce a flat face on each side, and a solid rubber ball about the size of a golf ball. A very fast and exciting game in which my lack of stature was not a handicap as in many sports. Caps and blazers of various designs and colours were awarded for being in one or other of the games teams, including shooting. Cap wearing was compulsory and the school cap was of brown velvet with a white silk circle and top button and the school badge at the front.

Burton Bank House, 1920. Denis appears to the right of the shield.

We were fortunate in that one of the boys at Burton Bank named Percy Baynham Henri Thompson whose father was a music hall artist, Baynham Henri, had a 16" movie camera and projector. Through his father's connections he was able to obtain the loan of up-to-date films, free, and show them occasionally in the school scriptorium and much more frequently on Sunday evenings at B.B. He also made a short movie in which I appeared as one of the extras whose part was to throw clods of earth into the village pond when Terence Macnamara, son of a Liberal M.P., had to ride his bicycle into the pond and fall off there. Perhaps some of us didn't hear the instruction that we were not to aim at Terence!

[This could explain Denis's delight some sixty years later, in making movies with his grandchildren, elaborately scripted farces including a blood-curdling melodrama about Sweeney Todd.]

New boys were 'new bugs' , or fags, until their second year and a regular duty was to get out of bed at first bell and go to the bathroom where metal cans had already been put, full of hot water, by one of the housemaids. These had to be carried and placed one at the side of each of the washstands, which were simply enamel washbasins on iron tripods, beside each of the boys' beds. Most of them slept on until the second bell or later; at the third bell they had to be downstairs in the dining room for breakfast. Another, more acceptable duty, was when a monitor or prefect wanted a meal in his private study for himself and possibly another boy, generally in an afternoon. My task was to fry sausages and eggs in the photo darkroom in the basement. Of course I had to sample my culinary efforts and my deft shortening of sausages was never noticed.

Sunday afternoons were the occasion of compulsory walks in a long crocodile in charge of a monitor. Not very exciting but we did get into some pleasant country. Totteridge Long Pond stays in my memory, as does bird nesting and grass-snake hunting.

Always of a mischievous spirit, I recall one risky prank which, had I been caught in the act, could have been disastrous. Between the Upper and Lower Dormitories there was naturally a degree of rivalry which occasionally erupted into pillow fights or other horseplay. My one-boy raid into enemy territory was carried out in the wee sma' hours one morning when I judged, luckily correctly, that all in the Upper Dorm would be sound asleep. Although the school dress regulations allowed some latitude in shirt material it had to be cotton with narrow stripes for pattern. My foul deed was to crawl in and out between the beds collecting all the shirts and putting them, all mixed up, in a single heap. No doubt there was chaos after second bell sounded which unfortunately I could not witness. But I was able to see the amazement on the face of Housemaster Bill when, after third bell, when all the Lower Dormitory boys were in their places, most of the Upper Dorm, with seniors amongst them, trailed in later looking somewhat shamefaced. Tempting as it was to acquire some kudos, I had sufficient sense not to breathe a word to anyone and no-one ever knew who the culprit was. Although I wondered what the punishment would be if I were found out, I did not at the time think of the dire result had I been caught in the act and accused of stealing from beside boys' beds.

Mention of money and of Bill in the dining room puts me in mind of a weekly ceremony which took place when we had finished dinner on a Saturday. Bill would walk round behind us and solemnly place in front of each boy a shilling coin. [5p] That was our weekly pocket money, debited to parents on the bill for school fees, etc. Even allowing for its relative value as compared with today, it was not a great amount and most boys received subsidies from parents. For my part, as I never asked or received anything of that nature, my shilling was very soon spent in the school tuckshop.

Sunday mornings were a regular time for parents living within reasonable distance of the school to drive over to spend an hour or so with their sons. I mentioned earlier visiting London with Mr Stock and our evening as guests of Mr Hoy. One Sunday morning a phone call was passed on to me that a Mr and Mrs Hoy were at the school waiting for me. I think they had probably come at Mr Stock's request. He never visited me. Off I went from Burton Bank and on arriving at the school was rather taken aback to find, amongst the array of parents' motor cars, a rather old-fashioned horse-drawn open carriage with Mr and Mrs Hoy in it, no doubt causing some amusement to those boys who saw it.

I do not remember any instance of corporal punishment of a boy by a master. It appears to have been a prerogative and duty of monitors and prefects; masters handed out detention and lines, and I do remember those! Not very onerous in themselves but deprivation of one's liberty on a Saturday afternoon did hurt. Memories of one such afternoon spent with other detainees writing out some sadist's bright idea, in my case a thousand times *That that is, is That that is not, is not, Is not that so?* linger on to this day. Another memory is of cleaning O.T.C. (Officer Training Corps) army rifles in the armoury; as there was no subsequent inspection of one's efforts not many were cleaned but there was no alternative to boredom. [During his time at Mill Hill Denis was a Private in the Middlesex Regiment, Mill Hill O.T.C.]

I mentioned earlier a tendency for me to take a lead when any action was called for. This characteristic showed itself again at the end of my time at school. There were fourteen of us at Burton Bank leaving at the same time and it was agreed that in accordance with tradition we should have a farewell meal together. I was the youngest but who else would be deputed to organise everything? No prize for guessing! I must add that the shopkeepers in the village were very helpful with advice and suggestions and the affair was a success. It is interesting to reflect how small kindly actions live long in one's memory.

And on the matter of kindly actions, perchance any of my grandchildren should read this, I would commend to them the words of Stephen Grellet on *PRESENT DUTIES.* (see back cover) Those words faced me from their stand on my dressing table for many years and as I now approach the end of my passage through this world I feel glad and appreciative to have had inspiration on each new day. [Even in old age when Denis was in a residential home, they were always on display.]

My leaving Mill Hill took place a term earlier than the two years for which I had been accepted. The reason stems from the preceding holidays. For some reason or other my mother had walked to Hayfield, probably to do some cleaning and tidying up for Mr Stock, who had sacked a village woman who had cleaned for him for being light-fingered. He then had a young unemployed ex-serviceman, charitably employed as a general daytime handyman, who apparently confided in Mother that there was very little work for him to do and he was unutterably bored. When Mr Stock arrived home later, Mother, anxious to help the man, told Mr Stock that the boredom was demoralising him and in doing so she must have conveyed a sense of criticism of Mr Stock. No man in his seventies likes an implied reprimand, especially a lifelong bachelor who has been a law unto himself for so many years and it made things worse in that it came from a woman. Mr Stock's reaction was swift and uncompromising; all was henceforth finished as regards his plans and provisions for Denis.

Poor Mother. She had plenty of troubles in her life and this was one more cruel blow. At any rate I did not add to her regrets and sorrow by complaining or blaming her, or bemoaning the bitter blow to my high hopes which she had brought about, although my subsequently telling Mr Stock that under the circumstances I wished to leave school as soon as possible might have unwittingly caused her more pain. So he arranged with the school authorities that I

be allowed to leave at the end of the summer term despite his two years contract; apparently they assumed that he was a victim of the economic slump of those years which was hitting businessmen in Yorkshire particularly hard.

As my school reports showed only too well, Mill Hill was not losing a scholar of whom they could be particularly proud. Having an assured business future, as I thought, and not having to take any examinations for university entrance, I did not work particularly hard and conscientiously at studies. 'Satisfactory' is the term that appears most regularly and in my last term I was ninth out of fourteen boys. This may not be so bad as it looks given that I was nine months below the average age. I did win a Maths prize of a volume of the works of Shakespeare but this I have always felt was due to a master's mistake. Incidentally, Mr Stock, probably feeling he had been too hard on me who was being made an innocent victim for my mother's indiscretion, subsequently offered to pay for me to go to Leeds University. Once again my independent nature (pride?) took control and I declined his offer.

Nevertheless, leaving school in July 1921, I was faced with having to find suitable employment in a period of economic depression in the industrial West Riding of Yorkshire without either a School Leaving Certificate or Matriculation Certificate, one of which was almost mandatory when applying for a job other than a manual one. The outlook was far from propitious but fortunately Mr Stock, no doubt feeling responsible for my being in that position, offered to employ me in his office in Huddersfield. So instead of starting on my business career as a Junior Partner, I started as a Junior Clerk at a salary of seventeen shillings and sixpence [85.5 pence] a week and a third class railway season ticket between Leeds and Huddersfield.

My final night at Burton Bank surpassed my behaviour on my first night there. The House Captain, an Irish boy called Scott, who was going on to Dublin University, was unpopular, partly because he was an academic who contributed very little to Burton Bank's sporting efforts when to most of us sports results were more important than scholastic achievements, and more perhaps because he was of a bossy nature. When he went round the dormitories on the last night he had cause to reprimand me and a boy who were chatting together from our respective beds. Because it was our last night we had expected some latitude in behaviour and as we had nothing to fear in the way of discipline and punishment, we gave him a rude answer. This of course he could not let

pass and angry words ensued which quickly gave way to angry blows. He was much larger and physically stronger than us but both I and my Welsh pal, though small were tough and wiry and it was two to one. Scott got a bleeding nose and had to retire and he did not return.

But his troubles were not over and the next morning, when everyone went home for the holidays, he found further evidence of his unpopularity when he got up to get dressed and lo and behold his trousers were missing! All his clothes were already in his trunk, collected 'Luggage in Advance' and on their way to his Irish home. If he didn't actually weep with anguish he very nearly did when all his appeals for his nether garments fell on deaf ears. In the end he was given a pair of khaki trousers, minus buttons, and had to travel home in these, tied round the waist with string. How cruel can boys be?

An indication of how I fitted in and enjoyed my school life whilst at Mill Hill is the fact that after leaving I joined the Old Millhillians Club and received the school magazine for some years. Also, when Burton Bank Jubilee Celebration was held in June 1925 I travelled to London for the occasion at what was for me at that time, a considerable expense. Afterwards I was taken by an 'old boy', A. L. Binns, for dinner in the West End and an evening at The Gaiety Theatre to see *Katja the Dancer.* Coil, as he was known, and I maintained a correspondence for many years and he sent me an expensive clock as a wedding present. But when, on the outbreak of war in 1939, I informed him that I would be standing as a conscientious objector, I did not hear from him again. Much later I learnt that he had been killed in the war.

In 1932 when the Old Millhillians Club Annual Northern Dinner was held in Leeds, I went to the expense of having a dinner jacket made, costing four guineas [£4.4s or £4.20p.] and attended the function at the Queens Hotel. By that year my political thinking had developed along socialist lines and I think it was that occasion which convinced me that 'their ways are not my ways' and shortly afterwards I ceased membership of the Old Millhillians Club and all connection with the school.

MILL HILL SCHOOL

ET VIRTUTEM ET MUSAS.