

Down Memory Lane by Peter Etherden

This piece of autobiography started life when Mischa Sumrall of Tempe, Arizona challenged his stable of Facebook Friends to go public with 25 things about themselves. I responded by searching the [Shepherd Chronicles](#) for evidence of Mischa-related happenings from my 8-year sojourn at Six Forest Street in Cambridge across the Charles River from Susan May at 26 Garden Street on Beacon Hill...a period from 1980 to 1987 when Susan's children, Kristin and Mischa, attended Cambridge Friends School in the company of my children, Linda and Nicholas.

List of Headings

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 01. Tale of Misalignment | 10. Bars of Barfleur | 19. Underground Adventures |
| 02. Faulty Towers | 11. Gospel of Saint Thomas | 20. Concrete Evidence |
| 03. Education Professors | 12. Powder of Wolf | 21. Murder Most Foul |
| 04. Martha's Vineyard | 13. Freedom of Information | 22. Escalators & Greasy Poles |
| 05. Colombian Connections | 14. Fine Eyes & Pert Opinions | 23. Tank Tales |
| 06. Divine Interventions | 15. On Board | 24. Fertility |
| 07. Clean Slates For All | 16. My Karass | 25. Mortality |
| 08. Man of the People | 17. Radio Futures | |
| 09. Road Runner | 18. Swedish Memories | |

01. Tale of Misalignment

The setting is Sweden...forty years ago...and my first job. In January 1969 Swedish clogs were standard issue on Stockholm building sites. By six in the morning *Hallonbergen* was bitterly cold and it took an hour for the industrial heaters to get the site warm. My job was to have everything ready by seven when the proper workers arrived. Then breakfast. Clogs keep feet surprisingly warm but nonetheless I was overjoyed to be sent to *Hammakullen* for a couple of weeks.

Gothenburg winter days vary between grey & wet and black & wet but the Gulf Stream ensures that the climate of Sweden's western capital feels positively tropical compared to its ice-bound Baltic rival in the east. We were putting the final touches to an estate of factory-built apartments. The factory-built units with their triple-glazing had been supplied on a design & build contract from the company's *Växjö* factory in Småland several months before. We were tidying up by furnishing the gardens and playgrounds on the roof of an underground car-park.

I was given the job of marking out where the lamp posts were to go. Off I went with the architect's drawings under my arm...chalk, ruler and measuring tape at the ready. Later that day the proper workers came along with their *Clipper* concrete saws and *Hilden* hammer drills and busied themselves interpreting with my runic messages. By clocking off time the next day the six plinths were ready for their lamp posts. We signed off on the job two weeks later. Platschef Per Skanz took his Alsatian dog and his work gang to another site and another employer and I never saw him again. As it turned out this was just as well.

I went back to Stockholm to freeze until the first of May and gave the matter no more thought...until later that year when my boss came to my wedding and was persuaded to give an impromptu speech. To the amusement of the assembled company he chose to tell the tale of the *Hammarkullen* lamp posts. His story went like this. The lamp posts arrived late and were erected an hour before final site inspection. Skanz the platschef was there; my boss drove from Stockholm to be there; his boss had come from Småland to be there; and assorted local dignitaries from Gothenburg's planning and housing royalty were there. To my eternal gratitude nobody thought of asking me to be there.

As fate would have it the worthy gentleman chose to assemble themselves for the signing off ceremony at the end of the row of six lamp posts. With pen poised and our firm's final contract installment of millions of kronor just seconds away, one of the dignitaries chanced to look up, frowned, deftly placed his hand between pen and paper, and pointed in the direction of lamp post number four. It was a half a metre out of line. As I have pointed out on numerous occasions it wasn't all bad. Lamp posts number one, two, three, five and six were in perfect alignment. Five out of six. But four was in the wrong place and this undoubtedly ruined the effect.

Swedes tell a good story and my boss was not one to miss the chance. But the story rings true. Skanz, we were told, went ballistic at this point in the proceedings and swore to do some rather nasty things to various parts of my anatomy. The planning dignitaries spent several minutes calming him down. They were so pleased at their success they signed off anyway on a promise from Skanz to sort it. It was unclear whether Skanz agreed to sort me or the misaligned lamp post.

Our real honeymoon was to be in *Mamaia* on the *Romanian Black Sea Coast* after the English wedding guests had gone home several days after the wedding. The wedding night was to be spent at *Saltsjöbaden's Grand Hotel*...the setting for a famous agreement between the *Swedish Social Democratic Government* and the *Labour Unions*. Unfortunately it was less than an hour's drive to Saltsjöbaden so there was no early retirement. I spent the wedding evening explaining myself endlessly to each guest...one at a time. My excuse got lamer and lamer with each telling.

I couldn't get away for my mini-honeymoon soon enough...for one or two reasons. Here is the case for the defence for the very last time.

I should have stretched a length of string like brickies do. Instead I diligently marked off the distance of each lamp post on the architect's plan view, scaled it up and laid it out in situ with my tape. Number Four must have been six millimetres more than the other five. Surprising that I didn't notice. *Sod's Law* no doubt...the canteen truck arriving with coffee and sandwiches between setting out three and four. I chanced across my old boss Roger Everett at Västerås airport last year and was invited to his seventieth birthday. He told me the 'remedial work' was easy to spot from inside the garage. I don't think I'll bother to find out.

02. Faulty Towers

Way back in the dim distant mists of time is my *Fawly Towers* period. From 1982 to 1984 I was the proprietor of the *Forest Garden Guest House* in Cambridge Massachusetts. Many visiting scholars from the far-flung corners of the American Empire...Vermont and North Carolina...will have happy memories of their Forest Street lodgings and their walks to [Harvard Square](#).

03. Education Professors

In 1980 I started working with Dr Ed Klugman at *Wheelock College* in Boston. Ed and his wife Hertha are two of the nicest people you would ever wish to meet and for a few years I was treated more like an adopted son than a colleague. We went sailing together out of Gloucester and worked hard to put some oomph back into the New England branch of the *World Education Fellowship*.

04. Martha's Vineyard

Dr Klugman was *Professor of Early Childhood Education* and in those days *Wheelock College* was vying with the top college in New York for the Number One slot in teacher training and further education. Empowerment was our thing. Out of our collaboration came a journal *Take Charge* and a graduate summer course at [Solviva Gardens](#) in West Tisbury on Martha's Vineyard - *The Ecology of Learning*.

05. Colombian Connections

Constanza Leal-Melo was one of our students. Her father runs a private school [Gimnasio Jose Joaquin](#) in Bogotá Colombia and her aunt runs the girls' school. Constanza had arrived at *Wheelock College* as part of her grooming for the family business. But her Roman Catholic Triple Goddess had other ideas. She married an Oxford Graduate from the North-East of England and has devoted her time and energy to the nurturing and education of their three children, Gabriela (14), Christina (13) and Nicholas (9).

06. Divine Intervention

Constanza's son Nicholas laid claim to his mortal coils on the very day that the intrepid [Crocodile Uppsala](#) reached his eleventh birthday. The family lives in Mexico City...and live has a whole meaning all of its own after Nicholas barely survived a lethal urban illness three years ago. I probably saved his life. When things were at their worst I went into [Västerås Cathedral](#) and gave Constanza's catholic god a piece of my mind. Nicholas' recovery dates from that moment. I was seriously annoyed with the gods anyway as they had just taken Connie from me without so much as a 'by your leave' or a 'would you mind awfully'...bloody furious would be closer to the mark.

07. Clean Slates for All

Let us return to Wales where I spent the winter of 2005/6 when my daughter went to Sweden for two months. This piece was penned on [Thursday 26th January 2006](#). 'The contours of my day took on their traditional homeday pattern. My weblog was done by ten. It was a lovely Welsh winter's day...blue sky, a few clouds, bracing temperatures. It took me an hour to walk to Efailwen picking up my copy of the *Daily Mail* at Glandy Cross on the way. An hour at Caffi Beca and an hour to walk home. The final stretch took me along the river and above the slate gorge just a few minutes from home.

The [slate industry](#) was as vital to the local economy, culture and history of Wales as the coal industry. Both industries arose out of nothing, became giants on the world stage and then suffered catastrophic decline and almost total extinction. In the boom years prospectors would be out scratching at barren hillsides all over Wales. There were many speculative sites but the giant quarries employed thousands. Water power was the primary source of energy with networks of dams feeding the [water wheels](#) through wooden or slate lined leats. At the quarry water would cascade from wheel to wheel.

Even after the advent of steam the water wheels were retained to save on coal and wood. Conditions in the quarry barracks and lodging houses were appalling and accidents in the quarries were frequent. Unguarded machinery, roof falls and lung diseases all took their toll. Working underground in the industry was more dangerous than in coal mining.

Welsh slate went all over the world from small ports like Porthmadog and purpose built harbours like Port Dinorwig. Narrow gauge railways were built to access these ports and connect the quarries to the nearest town or

main line railway. Welsh slate peaked in the 1890s. After this capital dried up, imports grew, roofing tiles became cheaper than slate and men left for easier ways to make a living. The once mighty *Dinorwic Slate Quarry* finally closed in 1969. I am rather proud of my local [Llangolman Slate Workshop](#) at Pont Hywel Mill.

08. Man of the People

I have many dreams. One of them is to visit South America. Can I fix it? Yes I can. My son and daughter have been there several times. Indeed on one occasion my daughter met the Bolivian President [Evo Morales](#) in Cochabamba...before he was elected to the top political spot in the country. She reports that in those days he was 'a true man-of-the-people!' Unusually, not much seems to have changed. I proudly wear my Morales sweater around Totnes but nobody yet has noticed the significance of my fashion statement. The colourful sweater is on the clothes line as I write. Paccha brought it back from Bolivia for me.

09. Road Runner

I almost made it to Colombia last year. I was paid the airfares to attend a workshop in California and turned my two days of work into two weeks in America. Bogotá was one option. But in the end I rode *Amtrak* and *Greyhound* and knuckled down to a week at the [Roadrunner Hostel](#) in Tucson Arizona. My son's old friend Mischa was living in Tempe the last I heard...just around the corner from Tucson by American standards (i.e. a few hours drive away). I left Arizona in a flight from Phoenix Airport to Washington D.C. but never got to see Mischa.

10. Bars of Barfleur

Susan May lives in Jackson New Hampshire. In 1980 her children Kristen and Mischa were in the same classes at [Cambridge Friends School](#) in Massachusetts as my children, so we go back 25 years. Susan has an endearing habit of turning up in out of the way places. The first stop on *Vemara's* Brittany voyages was always [Barfleur](#) - a tiny fishing village on the *Cherbourg Peninsular* with a post office, a bakery, a local store and a tabac. One year Susan was sitting drinking coffee outside the tabac in Barfleur when *Vemara* moored up after a 20-hour run down channel. She stayed with us in Alderney, Guernsey and Sark before jumping ship at St. Helier in Jersey.

11. Gospel of Saint Thomas

I am one of the healthiest people around. I never get ill. I spent a while in *St Thomas' Hospital* after being knocked over by a *Royal Mail Van* on Westminster Bridge in 1963...and have a 15 inch steel pin in my right femur to prove it. Wordsworth had the quaint notion that earth has not anything to show more fair than the view from this bridge...and wrote so on 3rd September 1802.

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky,
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

But forgive me for seeing things otherwise. Besides Wordsworth forgot to write the last line in the last two verses and my Bill Gates grammar checker insists on replacing 'more fair' with 'fairer'.

12. Powder of Wolf

Until two years ago Susan was the other person I knew who never got ill. But then back in February 2006 while I was wintering in *Llangolman*, Susan phoned to tell me she had been diagnosed with *rectal cancer*. Not a lot of people know this, but some Mongolians believe that powdered wolf rectum is a cure for haemorrhoids. *Wikipedia* told me this so it must be true.

13. Freedom of Information

The *rectum* is connected to the *colon* and my mother died of *colon cancer*...at least I suspect she did. She certainly caught it, had an operation, got the all-clear but then was rather secretive about the results of her check-up nine months before she died in September 1999. She never told her children the cause of her rapid decline in 1999 at the age of 84. Five years on I am beginning to suspect it was what our parents' generation nervously whispered as *The*

Big C. Medical records are hidden away in the salt mines of Cheshire for ten years after death so I have a few months to find out how the [Freedom of Information Act](#) works where medical records are concerned.

14. Fine Eyes & Pert Opinions

In February 1982 I returned to *Boston* from two weeks in *Philadelphia* on a 10-day *Buckminster Fuller Marathon*, met Ariel Kowalczyk and fell head over heels in love with her. Three months earlier I had run the [Rhode Island Marathon](#) in 3 hours 37 minutes so was looking pretty good. Ariel lived with Marilyn Ferguson's *Production Editor* Connie Zweig on *Tennessee* in *Los Angeles*. Ariel liked me...and may even have loved me...but the relationship was based on a misunderstanding from the start as she believed me to have connections that I did not have...very *Pride and Prejudice* though perhaps the affair was more Mr Wickham than Mr D'Arcy. But it had significant consequences for myself and for those around me...which ripple on to this day.

Ariel was in *Boston* ending a relationship...on the rebound...not the best time to meet up. My son Nicholas John was six coming on seven and his two best friends at *Cambridge Friends School* were Jim Sumrall's son Mischa and Zach Wiesner's son Elisha. I had an exchange going at the time with Elisha's mother which meant child minding the boys every Wednesday afternoon when the school had its half day. I was very happy with this arrangement. When together boys of this age look after themselves particularly when they love the [Children's Museum](#) and the [Museum of Science](#) in *Boston*, enjoy hanging out with me when I have *MIT* errands...and are convinced that riding the *Boston subway* and escalators is what people do in heaven.

15. On Board

I attended an English boarding school from the age of eleven to eighteen. The genesis of *Christ's Hospital* was the dissolution of the monasteries and the resultant overflow onto London's streets of the poor and destitute. Encouraged by a sermon from Nicholas Ridley...exhorting mercy to the poor...the king wrote to Sir Richard Dobbs, *Lord Mayor of the City* encouraging him to act. He set up a committee of merchants to sort it out.

Had this been 21st century Bogotá...instead of 16th Century London...these street children would have been rounded up and forced to endure a life of hunger, harassment, sexual abuse and death...and we talk of progress?

Henry VIII had already granted the use of *Greyfriars* to the City for the relief of the poor and the boy king Edward VI granted the *Palace of Bridewell*, his lands of the *Savoy* and rents and other chattels to create three royal hospitals - *Bridewell*, *St Thomas* and *Christ's Hospital*, which was for the education of poor children.

The first boys and girls entered the school in Newgate in 1552 and the *Royal Charter* was granted and signed by its founder Edward VI the following year. [Christ's Hospital](#) occupied a site in Newgate for 350 years. From time to time children were farmed out around the country...after *The Great Fire of London* in 1666 made parts of the school uninhabitable for instance.

Eventually the girls settled at Hertford and in 1897 the boys were relocated from Newgate to the purpose built site in Horsham. The foundation stone was laid by Edward, Prince of Wales on 23 October 1897 on behalf of the Sovereign, the date being the anniversary of the birthday of Edward VI. A decade ago Hertford was shut down and the girls moved to Horsham. *Christ's Hospital* was given a second *Royal Charter* by Charles II in 1673. This charter created the *Royal Mathematical School* to train navigators for careers as naval officers or merchant seafarers.

[Samuel Pepys](#) Secretary to *His Majesty's Navy*...and later Vice President of *Christ's Hospital*...features strongly in *Christ's Hospital* history. HRH the Duke of Cambridge started a tradition of royal presidents in 1854. In 1919 George V became the first royal patron followed by George VI in 1937 and Her Majesty the Queen in 1953.

The support of the *City of London Corporation* and *Livery Companies of the City* has carried on uninterrupted. Each year on *St Matthews Day* hundreds of boys march through London for lunch with the Lord Mayor at his *Mansion House* residence.

Christ's Hospital's founding principles were to support disadvantaged children and to remain a school for the general public. The more enlightened radical [Old Blues](#)...there will not be many...might like to help Our Ken by chiselling away at the monolithic horrors of the London-based imperial mismanagement from inside the crumbling edifice. We are the school of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Leigh Hunt and Charles Lamb and not just the purveyors of cannon fodder for the *English Imperial Navy* and providers of clever clerks to speculate in overseas adventures with the people's savings...and the billions of pounds of ill-gotten imperial gains...under *The City of London's* fiduciary control.

It really is time for the common people of this green and pleasant land to get rid of all this imperial nonsense once and for all by withdrawing from *The Killingry Business*. Shutting down the arms factories in Mercia is one place to start. Another is to cut off the political need...oil for fighter jets...and the money supply from the *Global Policeman Business*...much of it orchestrated from *The Square Mile*...with little concern for the collateral damage.

On leaving *Christ's Hospital* and starting out in the world all who have studied there are given a *Bible* and a *Book of Common Prayer* and are charged...and I quote...‘never to forget the great benefits that you have received in this place and in time to come according to your means to do all that you can do to enable others to enjoy the same

advantage and remember that you carry with you, wherever you go, the good name of *Christ's Hospital*...? I must have heard these words a couple of dozen times during my school years. How well have the school's sixties generation risen to meet this challenge?

Perhaps as we enter our twilight years with our private and public lives behind us, we should be asked to reflect on this question....starting with the *Best and the Brightest* creamed off at the eleven plus from the country's baby boomers and given the best education the country could provide?

16. My Karass

Ariel got back in touch with me last year...after 26 years. We had broken up after a year or so. Ariel had chanced across my 2006 blog entry and wanted to assure me that she really had loved me...for myself...and I was quite wrong in my analysis. Entanglement, it seems, is forever. [Kurt Vonnegut](#) created a fictional religion in [Cat's Cradle](#) called [Bokononism](#) in which a *karass* is a group of people who, unbeknownst to them, are collectively doing God's will.

17. Radio Futures

Nobody has ever asked me to be a godfather. But I was once asked to be a Best Man. The best *Best Man Speech* I have ever heard was by Hugh Grant in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Unfortunately the film was made many years after my Best Man speech at Alan Pryke's wedding...but Alan is still together with his Swedish bride and I am still friends with the family so I must have done something right.

Sweden's *World Broadcasting Service* has only ever had a tiny fraction of the resources of the *BBC World Service*. But Sweden's influence as an English Language World Broadcaster during the 50-years of the Cold War was out of all proportion to its size. Most world listeners regarded world services as Lord Haw-Haw style propaganda exercises...with suspicions about *BBC* bias steadily mounting since the [Fall of the Berlin Wall](#) in November 1989. But Sweden has always been trusted. Indeed this non-bias ran so deep that even Swedish politicians rarely intervened.

Small budgets allowed producers at *Radio Sweden International* to introduce innovations in style, substance and format that might take decades to permeate through the top-heavy hierarchies of the *BBC*. Alan Pryke invented the *Music Documentary* with his [ABBA](#) programmes in the 1980s two decades before the *BBC* starting commissioning *Outside Production Companies* to prepare this ear food for evening listening at peak time on *BBC Radio Two*.

Programme formats like Andrew Marr's *Start of the Week*, Libby Purves' *Midweek* and Melvyn Bragg's *In Our Time* were features of *Radio Sweden's* short-wave broadcasts...spliced into home-spun imitations of Alistair Cooke's *Letter From America* or Roy Plomley's *Desert Islands Discs*. Indeed 20 years before John Peel took his microphone out of the studio for the *BBC's Home Truths* Alan Pryke was doing *Home Truths* for *Radio Sweden International*.

Unnoticed too has been Alan Pryke's political interviews. In an age of the *Rottweiler Interview* of a Brian Redhead, John Humphries, Jeremy Paxman or Jonathan Ross and the *Talk Show Approach* of a David Frost, Jimmy Young, Michael Parkinson or *Channel Four's* Richard & Judy, Alan Pryke's interviews with up-and-coming politicians like [Anna Lindh](#) have a style that blends respect with curiosity and tempers scepticism with affection for the values that the *Swedish* politician bring to public life...consensus, cooperation, fairness, equality, decency and common courtesy.

From 1984 to 1990 Anna Lindh headed up Sweden's *Young Social Democrats* and from 1991 to 1994 she chaired the board of *Stockholm City Theatre* and was *Stockholm City Commissioner for Culture and Leisure*. She was a close friend of three powerful *Social Democrat* women...Birgitta Dahl, [Margot Wahlström](#), and [Mona Sahlin](#). Today you will find her body in Stockholm's Katarina Kyrka...Catharine's Church. Nearby lies the body of an inheritor of [Carl-Michael Bellman's](#) mantle [Cornelius Vreeswijk](#) who died in 1987 at the young age of 50. Anna Lindh was assassinated on the second anniversary of [9/11](#) at the age of 46. Her real killers have not been brought to justice...nor have [Petra Kelly's](#).

18. Swedish Memories

This story has a coda. In October 2006 I discovered that a gentleman by the name of Derek Evans had added the following comment to this blog post about Alan: 'This brought back memories. I once had a driving holiday from the UK and spent several days in Stockholm and visited Radiohuset and was interviewed by Alan. It was even played on the radio and any recording I may have had has gone to dust. I have wondered what has happened to Alan as he is no longer on the list of contributors.'

19. Underground Adventures

Nowadays my son Nicholas lives in a villa in Gothenburg, Sweden. But for several years, before getting his foot on the property ladder by persuading a bank to pay a property developer for an apartment on the shores of the Stockholm archipelago in Västerås, he had an apartment in Sundbyberg at the other end of the archipelago north of Stockholm. I look after my son's flowers at every opportunity and in 2006 in the midst of writing a column a day for

my [literary blog project](#), he disappeared for the summer to Argentina...coordinating it, as is his wont, with the attendance of his partner Andrea at a conference on public health in Vancouver.

One of my daily blogs had this to say. 'At 0952 every day this week I have walked to *Sundbyberg Library* for use of their printer and scanner. You have doubtless noticed my skills at gluing images together with *Adobe Photoshop*. My one-hour session ends at eleven...but normally I do not arrive home until four in the afternoon. I go out around town gallivanting on my free travel pass. Nicholas and Mischa used to do this when they were nine so my regression back to childhood is beginning. The two things about the Boston subway that appealed to the boys were the escalators and the fares.'

20. Concrete Evidence

On Thursday 3rd August 2006 I took an excursion by train into the Stockholm suburbs. This is what I had to say for myself. 'Today on my way to check out the new Science City at Kista I hopped off at Hallonbergen...one stop before...and took a quick 20-minute tour to see how the place was looking 35 years after I built it.

There were trees for a start...which makes a big difference...and the feeling of a mature urban environment. So much so that I was not sure I had the right place. Perhaps my memory had failed me? So I took the lift down a few floors to my little bit of the action. Everything was fine...just as I had left it. So I took a few photos on my mobile phone to convince myself.

My last job as a Civil Engineer in Sweden was all Panic & Crisis. It was 1970. New suburbs were shooting up all over Stockholm as the Swedish Construction Industry moved their cranes from site to site. I caught the tail-end of Tensta and Rinkeby and the full brunt of the southward expansion towards Södertälje. I was working for the Stockholm office of A-Betong with head office in Växjö Småland. The firm had started life selling concrete railway sleepers to the Swedish Railways and then diversified into apartment building.

My boss Roger Everett...a Cambridge man...persuaded the Swedish Government that I was essential to the National Economy as we were agents for some black gooey stuff called Synthaprufe produced by the British Coal Board and used to waterproof concrete floors. Stockholm sits on granite so the way construction works is that Alfred Nobel goes in first and blows the building site to smithereens. This takes some blasting. Next comes the contractor who puts in the foundations and the pipe work. Then it's our turn.

Our closest factory was an hour away in Strängnäs. From here 30-metre long reinforced concrete floor sections...state of the art...were sent on low loaders to the building site for craning into position. Our job was to put up a sturdy concrete box for the five-story apartment building to sit on...and for cars to be stored in later. Our main rival in prefabricated housing was Strängbetong...although in situ construction often gave us a run for our money. But it was boom time and the era of Keynesian Special Investment Funds so factories were working flat out.

Production problems at the factory were always a nightmare. They happen because concrete is more art than science and because we were always on tight schedules to get on site, crane the concrete into place, bolt the slabs together, clean up and get away before the next gang of contractors came on site. Winter construction in Sweden is an art-form. Then two things happened.

A-System...A-Betong's Stockholm Sales Office...took home a contract they expected Strängbetong to get. I think they shared contracts out over lunch but don't quote me. It was tight but with an extra production line and some juggling of shifts it could be done. The job was between Solna and Sundbyberg on a green field site called Hallonbergen...Berry Hill...which it was until we poured concrete over all the blueberries. So far so good.

But on the back burner was a massive project in the centre of Stockholm to give the *Swedish Riksdag* a new home. This project was big enough to exhaust Sweden's reinforced concrete factory capacity requiring low loaders coming in from Denmark. Moreover it was a political hot potato. The members wanted more space but they also liked it where they were. The debate looked set to run and run.

But then suddenly the MPs decided to go for a completely new building...and of course they wanted it up and running yesterday. A-Betong and Strängbetong were encouraged to make their collusion official. So they did...and came up with a plan. It quickly got the go-ahead. Murphy had been watching all this from the sidelines with some amusement. He timed his run well. With Hallonbergen at Peak Delivery and with First Deliveries in place for the Parliament Building several consignments of floor sections from Strängbetong's factory failed their Strength Tests.

You can't re-melt concrete and re-cycle it. It is only good for hardcore. We got very little sleep that week. The plan we came up with meant stripping units from Hallonbergen, sending them to Sergels Torg and reworking them on site to fit a completely different set of blueprints. Both contracts were completed on schedule...though we were scrambling.

But the irony is that the new parliament building was never used. The Riksdag stayed put...and built another floor instead. My building became Stockholm's equivalent of The London Dome...before Anna Lindh and Elisabet Spens had it re-branded as Kulturhuset.

21. Murder Most Foul

The following day I went in search of the murderer of Anna Lindh. The results of my investigations are online at <http://www.cesc.net/adobeweb/circleweb/annalindh.pdf>. This is what I had to say in my blog: 'Yesterday was my last full day in Stockholm...perhaps for a while...and I had a few errands left to do so I took the Orient Express to Kungsträdgården...the scene of one of the world's first Green Protests in the late sixties over an old gnarled oak tree that the authorities planned to pull down to make way for a subway exit.

Sverige used to be the place to go for Things Swedish...like Carl Larsson's books *My Home, My Family* and *My Farm*. My *Swedish Monarchy* book also sold well from the best bookshop in Sweden for Scandinavian Literature in Foreign Languages.

Carl Larsson was on my list once again. But topping the list this time round was a DVD of Ingmar Bergman's production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* which is well-nigh impossible to get in England. Somewhat miffed by the disappearance of *Sweden House* I crossed over the road to *Nordiska Kompaniet*. The last time I was here with intent was for a Jan Guillou Book Launch in 1980. I bought his book and gave him a free copy of *The Rise & Fall of the Swedish Green Party (1982-1997)* which he probably threw away when he got home...assuming he kept it that long.

In *NK's Music Department* on the top floor an assistant found me a US edition...and format...by *The Criterion Collection* for 399 kronor (£30). This was progress of a sort but I noticed that the copyright was with *Sveriges Radio* 1975 which gave me another avenue of investigation. So I noted the reference and left it at that. Once upon a time back in the Days of Vinyl I had a rather nice presentation pack but must have given it away...and of course there is *Google*. But it was turning out to be a frustrating morning so I switched to my Research Mode.

Anna Lindh had been knifed to death a few floors below me so I wandered around among the lady's lingerie to get myself on camera. *Nordiska Kompaniet* on Stockholm's Kungsgatan is the most elegant department store in Sweden. And Ladieswear on the first floor is where you go to rub shoulders with B-List Celebs and admire Sweden's Rich & Famous. Magdalena's mother Dagmar was Chief Buyer here after her husband died and in 1960s Sweden this would have been one of the top jobs in the business. So we are talking *Tiffany's* of New York or *Harvey Nicholls* of Oxford Street.

In the normal course of events *NK* is not the place a lone assassin goes to knife to death Sweden's Foreign Minister. Three other things struck me. Firstly baseball caps are not de rigour at *NK*. I saw just one in the whole time I was there...on the head of an American Tourist who had either wandered in by accident or was hanging about waiting for his wife.

Secondly there were almost no surveillance cameras in evidence on the first floor...just one at the top of the escalator and a couple to prevent shoplifting pointing at the clothes racks. Perhaps they are hidden? The public was told that the baseball-cap photos that got Per-Olof Svensson arrested produced two days after the stabbing came from surveillance cameras above the first floor. This would mean the attack taking place fairly close to the central atrium. Based on floor space and lay-out the chances of that were about 1 in 15...and I failed to spot any cameras anyway.

Thirdly...and perhaps I am being naïve expecting this of a business...but I thought I would find some mark of respect or some recognition of the events of the day before Nine Eleven...a plaque or a display collecting for the *Anna Lindh Memorial Fund*. But there is nothing there at all. *NK* seems to have airbrushed out the incident from their corporate psyche. I was tempted to interview a shop assistant but it was Ladieswear and I was unsure just how my morbid curiosity would be received so discretion won the day. But it was surreal. And I left the store bewildered.

22. Escalators & Greasy Poles

Michael Dukakis ran against George Bush for the US Presidency in 1988 and lost. Before this he was *Governor of Massachusetts* so he did the honours when the Porter Square MBTA Station opened. It was just two minutes walk from Forest Street so I went along. Dukakis was a short man but like many famous Short People...Robert Redford, Tom Cruise, Pierre Trudeau, Dolly Parton...above the waist he was the size of a bigger man so he looked OK on TV. The Dukakis dedication went like this. 'I hereby declare this station open...and hope to hell you have enough maintenance engineers for the escalators.' This showed great foresight. 20 years later the Open Guide to Boston website would say: 'Porter Square is one of the deeper stations in the MBTA subway system. To exit one must ride either 2 or 3 escalators and typically at least one is out of order being repaired or worked on.' The fare was a Franklin Half Dollar...so once the boys were through the turnstiles they stayed.

23. Tank Tales

When I was very young I discovered our loft. Mother was at the shops. It was raining. And I was bored. In the corner was the biggest tank I had ever seen. Every English house has one of these and the bigger the house the bigger the tank.

Somewhere in Cambridge, England there must be a mansion of such enormous dimensions as to boggle the Western Imagination. The tank was removed from its loft and bolted onto a concrete floor floated onto the Cambridge Fens. As time went by a building grew up around the tank. High above where once there had been sky and clouds a delicate lattice of steel held aloft a roof. One summer men arrived and by the autumn a road was rushing by.

Then people started arriving. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Never the same faces from one year to the next. They were young. All of them. And there was not a woman among them. They all came to pay homage to the tank. They filled her up with water, pulled out her plug and then sat there quietly while her waters washed away back down into the Cambridge Fens. She wondered at their strange ways. But she kept her own counsel...and gurgled when it suited her. To look into the great tank you climbed up a little step ladder.

Chris Singleton was my Laboratory Partner. Chris and I devoted three days of our life to climbing up and down the step ladder. We got to know the Great Tank. And she got to know us. On the second day we introduced her to our bicycles. They rested contentedly against the cold cast iron sides of the Great Tank throughout the afternoon and well on into the evening.

Meanwhile we altered the rates of flow in and out of the Great Tank, attaching strange conical contraptions to the inlet and outlet, rigging up water heaters, wind generators and electric motors. We heated and cooled the water, cast storms upon the mighty lake, created whirlpools in its midst, battered its cliffs with waves, drove fast flowing rivers beneath its placid surface and swirled the waters away into the Cambridge Fens...first with this contraption in place and then with that channel replaced.

Never had so much attention been showered upon the Great Tank. On the afternoon of the third day the peace and serenity of the Cambridge Fens were shattered by the sound of angry voices. The uproar was coming from the Great Tank. A crowd had gathered round. In the middle stood a little man with glasses, a white coat and a clip-board, waving his arms, gesticulating wildly and yelling in an extremely agitated manner. 'You will do it all again. The whole experiment. And you will get the right result.' 'We will not', said Chris quietly. 'Those are our results. We have spent three days collecting them. And you will pass us on this course'.

With that, Chris turned away from the red-faced little man with the glasses, the white coat and the clip-board, gathered up his pencils and his notebooks and wheeled his bicycle out of the *Cambridge Engineering Laboratories*. My bike and I walked off into the sunset with him. This is one hard dude I said to myself. It was the start of a beautiful friendship. But it was a sad end to another. We never saw the Great Tank again...and never got to say goodbye.

In the Northern Hemisphere water runs out through a plughole anti-clockwise. In the Southern Hemisphere the opposite is the case. There is a theory to explain this. You need to do lots of trials and you need statistics to make a convincing case. But these have theories too. Eventually everybody finds this to be true. And eventually everybody passes the course and goes on to learn about Thermionic Valves and all the other things we can always use.

Our problem was that it wasn't true. We tried this height and that height. We even controlled the speed at which we pulled out the plug. We burnt a lot of midnight oil on the top floor of 67 Barton Road on the second night. 'It's no good,' I said to Chris. 'It's random. There's no pattern to it. We'll wake Garnett up and tell him he's coming to the labs with us at eight.' Robin had got the right result. 'Show us how you did it,' we said. He did. We thanked him...and sent him back to bed while we went across the road for some breakfast.

'That's what they're all doing,' I said. Chris nodded. 'Yeah. They don't realise they're doing it. They're fiddling the results. Did you notice how Garnett always had a good explanation for what he'd done wrong when the water went the wrong way, but accepted the result when it went the right way.' 'Well I know one thing. If this course is about experimental method then we've learnt a thing or two. So OK. But I've got a party in Kensington tonight. I promised Johnny Watson. I've had enough of this tank. So what are we going to do? Fiddle the figures like everybody else?'

I had got use to that look by now. 'No way,' Chris said. 'You start writing up...you're good at that. I want to try those early trials again...the ones where everything is perfectly still. It should be quiet for an hour or so. But, yeah, I agree. We've done enough. That racing car constructor's course starts at *Bromley Tech* on Tuesday and we're not missing that. You're back Sunday night aren't you?'

We were given a 'pass' on *Experimental Design*...our lab books approved without comment. One day Economists will talk to Engineers. But such paradigm shifts take time. Old professors must die off or get discredited. Meanwhile a new kind of Systems Economics must be established and a very different kind of Economics Education developed.

Younger economists are deeply disappointed in a field where abstract mathematics is considered more important than knowledge of the Real Economy. But only the most daring will break with their past. Meanwhile I do what I can. I am currently posting Evolutionary Economics onto the web and over the past month I have had five hundred pageviews a month on my Usury website. Perhaps one day my almer mater will give me academic refuge to research the application of engineering principles to social systems.

24. Fertility

On Thursday 26th January 2006 as I was getting into the swing of my alter ego as the *Mad Blogger of Carmarthen* from my hideaway near Cardigan in Wales I penned this piece: 'Last Saturday I wrote that 'at the end of the nineteenth century the population of England was five million'. I thought about it during the week and decided this was wrong. I read quite a bit of R.H.Tawney last year and his figure of five million had stuck in my head...but Tawney's period was the sixteenth century.

So today I went rummaging around in *Google* for the right figures and corrected my web posting by doubling the population. The sentence now reads that 'at the beginning of the nineteenth century the population of England & Wales was ten million'. You deserve the benefit of my research...free at the point of use.

Since the Middle Ages the population of England and Wales stayed around five million. It went up and down with events like the *Black Death* wiping out a third of the population. But five million is a good number to keep in your head. The big picture is then of numbers starting to increase in the eighteenth century, shifting into overdrive in the nineteenth century and then slowing down last century.

A good place to start is 1700 when England and Wales had a population of about six million. The first doubling took 120 years. The population reached 12 million in 1820 just as the gas lights were going on in towns and cities all over the country. The next doubling took just sixty years. By 1880 England and Wales had a population of 24 million. The third doubling to 48 million in 1970 took 90 years and since then the pill has kept the quantity down...but the jury is still out on what the pill has done for the quality of the nation. Current estimates put the population of England at 50 million, Wales at 3m and Scotland at 5m.

25. Mortality

It seems that a third of us Fifty Somethings are destined to catch cancer...another third will die from heart problems...with Bird Flu taking the rest. Susan phoned me last night and we chatted for an hour or so. She has been driving back and forth to Portland Maine for thirty hours of radiation treatment, scans at hundreds of dollars a time...and a few altercations with the Health Professionals. Susan wrote off 2006 as her own personal *annus horribilis* but was back on her feet by 2007 even managing a brisk walk around the *Dartington Estate* with me.

As far back as the 1950s the *World Health Organisation (WHO)* estimated that 80 to 90 percent of cancers could be environmentally caused and fifty years on the *WHO* states that enough is known 'to prevent at least one-third of cancers'. Yet the *WHO* also talks of ten million cases worldwide increasing to 15 million by 2020. This may sound a lot but works out at less than a tenth of one percent so something doesn't add up.

Back in 1971 President Richard Nixon declared a *War on Cancer*. Since then US federal spending on cancer has gone from a quarter of a billion dollars a year to three billion...with many times this being spent by private corporations and foundations in the *Cancer Industry*. Yet in The West the cancer death rate continues to rise steadily...and has done so since the mid seventies. Indeed the rate has been increasing since the beginning of the industrial age.

Previously cancer was very rare and in some areas non-existent. But a researcher working for Edward Goldsmith at *The Ecologist* in 1973 showed on the basis of *WHO* statistics that between 1967 and 1968 the cancer rate in different countries...Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Portugal and the USA...was almost directly proportionate to GNP.

In a special 1998 issue of *The Ecologist* magazine Ross Hume Hall and Dr Samuel Epstein argued that there is a *Cancer Establishment*...organisations like the *National Cancer Institute & America Cancer Society* in the USA and the *Imperial Cancer Research Fund* in the UK...set on discouraging research into how industrial pollutants cause cancer.

Two articles on Edward Goldsmith's website go further and insist that the main causes of cancer are (1) exposure to carcinogenic chemicals in the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe and (2) ionising radiation...from medical X-rays, nuclear tests and radioactive emissions from nuclear installations.

The Chemical, Pharmaceutical and Nuclear Industries that fund nearly all the research on the causes of cancer will not admit to anything like this. They make sure that cancer is attributed to anything except exposure to chemicals and radioactivity. So the official viewpoint blames minor factors like faulty genes, viruses, eating fatty foods, drinking alcohol and smoking...important in the case of lung cancer but nothing like as important as it is made out to be.

How long before the public realise that cancer is largely preventable and that if more of us are succumbing to the disease it is because our health is being systematically subordinated to the sordid financial interests of the chemical and the nuclear industries...a fact that bent government scientists are finding increasingly difficult to hide from us?