



DOWN BY THE STATION

*I was down by the station the other day
when I thought I heard a whistle blow
and a clickety-clack from the railway track
echoing times long ago
you don't know half the story
these sounds all seemed to say
none of this town would even have been built
if it wasn't for the old railway
so hail George Stevenson
the man who paved the way
hail George Stevenson
where is your spirit today?*

Back at the Metro I half expected the old busker to be there, still plaintively warbling between coughs, splutters and asthmatic gasps.

- Had he been real or a quirk of my imagination?
- Just a sad case I'd mistaken for Arthur and who, thinking it might be worth a few bob, had taken me for a ride?
- It was treatment day after all. Maybe my perceptions were off, the hospital having slipped me a Mickey?
- But he was real enough once - many years ago - wasn't he?
- Only one way to find out - check the number.
- But did I really want to call - and maybe discover the truth? Could I handle it?
- Open up what might - what most certainly would - be a can of unholy worms?

Clutching my reassuringly familiar bag of groceries, I got on the train, sat down and looked around. The carriage was nearly empty now the morning rush was over and even the sun had made a lukewarm appearance. Determined to enjoy the suburban scenery - the back yards and gardens which tell us so much more about people's lives than the carefully manicured facades out front - I peered out the window, refusing to even touch my mobile. As mentioned, I seldom travel by bus or train, despite constant nagging from the new puritans; those climate-change doom mongers who'd drag us all back to the horse-drawn dark ages if they could. Instead, I like to glide along in my own air-conditioned bubble, listening to nothing but personally chosen sounds, not hassled by ticket collectors, drunks, gobby layabouts, bellowing phone users, pan handlers and all the other riff-raff that seem to see me coming whenever I board public transport. Selfish maybe but, having had to make do with decrepit rust buckets, wobbly bicycles or frequently shanks' pony for most of my life, now I reckoned I deserved better - and why not? ⁽¹⁾

Actually, despite this rather reactionary attitude and, provided a train isn't too sardine-like, lacking in decent facilities, dirty, late, freezing, over-heated, or reeking of late night celebrations, once sat comfortably aboard I quite enjoy the luxury of not having to worry about driving. You can relax and feel free to move about, read or listen to music, maybe even have a bite and socialize, or simply to stop and stare, knowing there's nothing better to do. Peace of mind, in other words - provided you can manage to forget the exorbitant fare you've had to fork out.

On this occasion, however, I just couldn't settle and though my eyes veered across assorted walls and fences searching for signs of interest - amusing graffiti, scurrying wild life, unsocial or even criminal behaviour if I was lucky, my heart wasn't really in it. Here was a mini soap opera emerging in my own back yard, so why was I pretending it wasn't? All I had to do was punch in a few numbers to find out what was going on, to catch up with the latest plot development so to speak. It may lead to nothing, or... well, how bad could it be? What harm could an old git from so long-ago do me now? I mean, like being accosted by an unwelcome salesman or bigoted evangelist, it was easy enough to say no - wasn't it? What's the worst that could happen? He comes out with some pathetic sob story and hits you for a handout, a little more subtle than a subway bummer perhaps, but the angle's the same. You say, 'Shove off!' Politely maybe - but then move on. Big deal. Before I know it the phone's in my hand and I'm dialling quickly, eager now to get it over and done with.

'Hi, is Arthur there.'

'Uh-huh.' I recognise his creaky voice before a word has been uttered. Then immediately feel bad about the way we parted. I'm sure he meant no harm. Maybe I'd jumped to conclusions - not let him explain properly. Not given him, or myself, time? There was only one way to find out.

'Yeah, look Arthur. You know... I err...'

'S'okay man. Tell you what - I was out of order too.'

'Call it quits eh? Start again and all that?'

'Right. So? Meet for a drink?'

'Actually,' said Arthur, 'I was going to suggest somewhere - you might know the place. It's near you.'

'Yeah?'

'The Railway Tavern - on the Byker road?'

As it happened I did know, not from visiting - though I'd often passed leery looking crowds hanging about outside - but from a flyer I'd seen recently in a shop window for open mic nights. Then it occurred to me, how'd Arthur know where I live?

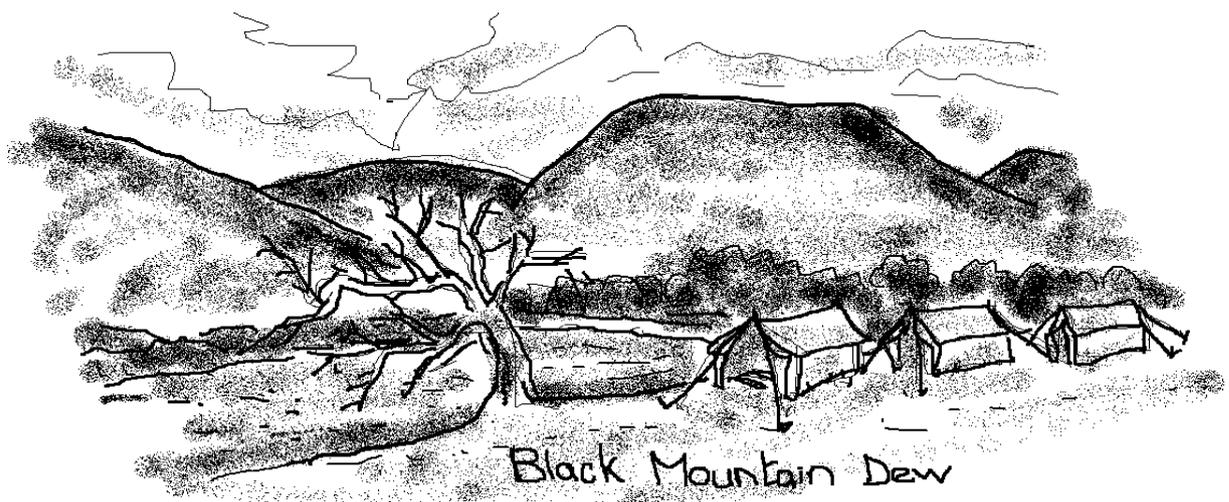
'Right,' I say. 'About eight?'

'Sure. Oh, and don't forget your box. What is it now? Still got your rusty old three ply jobbie?' He cackled a while, then wheezed out a barely audible, 'Sorry mate.'

I nearly cut him off at this point, but before I could he said, 'Oh by the way - you never finished your bread pudding. Want me to bring it along? In a napkin, of course.'

It was so stupid I just laughed along with him. Then he said something that really did knock me sideways. 'Don't know what you're missing man. Then again, maybe you do. Black Mountain dew and all that?'

I didn't reply, just said I had to go. The previous bad feelings were all gone, but the bread pudding remark had hit me hard - the belly-aching way it could when undercooked. My mind was whirling again, so much so I nearly missed my stop.



It was the late Fifties - I was eleven years old - in the shadow of those forbidding Welsh hills. We were camped in a field alongside a swift flowing river, our green canvas ridge tents pitched in an uneven line with makeshift kitchens roped off nearby - an idyllic spot for outdoor activities; football and other team games; swimming, canoeing, rafting, trekking; or building rope bridges and other improbable structures. Our Scout troop, the Ditton Donuts, ran excellent camps to far flung locations which, for many of us, were the main motivation for sticking the weekly meetings. Although some people make snide comments about the Scout movement, its quasi militarism, quaint dib-dobbing customs and the suspect motivations of grown men spending unpaid time in the company of boys, for me it was simply another chance to escape ⁽²⁾ - something I was always up for.

It gave us many exciting opportunities, not only to visit wild and unfamiliar places with like-minded mates but also the confidence, skills and knowledge to confront testing challenges. Many of those experiences were not only fun but actually life changing, encouraging self-reliance and widening our horizons - however naff that sounds. Those were the days before anyone bothered with health and safety regulations, potential insurance claims and so on, when there was little but common sense to go by. Cuts and bruises, even broken bones, were par for the course and boys in particular weren't expected to make a fuss about a little discomfort. In fact, returning home with a few scabs or scars, or at least torn and muddied gear, was the sign of a good camp. Some of the 'wide games' we played, roaming the mountains and forests in all weathers, day or night, attempting to avoid capture from a crazed 'enemy' (mad old blokes in makeshift disguises banging pots and pans and screaming like banshees) weren't too far off commando training exercises. What's more, holidays away from home for kids from poorer families then were a rarity, so roughing it was not complained about.

Despite all this, after a few days in Wales I wanted out. It wasn't home-sickness but some flu-like bug. My head spinning and unable to eat, I even brought up any liquids Skip persuaded me to try. After three days I was all for throwing in the towel and accepting the offer of a lift home when Arthur, then leader of Badger patrol, offered me some of his Auntie's bread pudding. Having been a Boy Scout is something he may not want made public, but there we go - many other great men and women were also in Baden Powell's gang ⁽³⁾. Even Keith Richards, in his recent autobiography, says, 'One of the best things that happened to me at that time, believe it or not, was joining the Boy Scouts.' He recalls it was just before he really got into guitar playing (about thirteen or fourteen), and partly because he '...wanted to know how to survive.' Adding that, 'It was a kind of miniature SAS training.' ⁽⁴⁾

But Arthur's pud was just about the last thing I wanted back then. Even one swift look at that big brown fruity chunk, served up in an ancient biscuit tin, was enough to have me reaching for a bucket. But Arthur was not deterred. Breaking off a piece and bringing it closer, I began to smell a whiff of something strangely exotic - a little sweet, spicy, and... well, not that bad. A few moments later I braced myself; tried one morsel, then another. Within minutes I had eaten the whole enormous slice. After twenty-four hours I was running around again, climbing ropes and batting balls, leaping into the freezing river and chorus singing around the campfire beneath the stars. Ging-gang-gooley-gooley, indeed. ⁽⁵⁾

- Had there been more than nutmeg and cinnamon in that pudding?
- Or maybe it was the elicited bottle of cider we shared later after lights out?
- And what else did Arthur recall of those days, I wondered?
- Lulu? Did he remember her too?

Her name was another slightly bizarre thing to come up during that camp. Every night after lights out we all messed about and joked as late as possible, not wishing to miss anything, till we fell asleep with exhaustion. One evening, after everyone except me and Arthur had nodded off, he asked what school I was going to in September, just a few weeks away. When I told him, to the nearby Comp down Claypit Lane, he said, 'Then you'll probably meet Lulu.'

I said, 'Who?'

'Lulu Wilde,' he grinned.

'Yeah, but why? I mean, what's so special about her?'

'You'll find out.'

'Find out what?'

'I don't want to spoil it for you mate.'

'Come on.'

It went on like this for some time but the only additional details I managed to elicit was that Lulu had long black hair, sultry good looks and a reputation. Eventually we both collapsed in dirty giggles and were soon sound asleep. Nothing more was said about the mysterious teaser but then, whose name should I hear read out on the register upon entering Class 1C? What's more, I fell madly in love with the delightfully demure twelve year old there and then. And don't think it was anything to do with Arthur, the passion I felt and which consumed me for months to come was purely between Lulu and me – well, myself and I anyway. In fact I'd probably be trailing after her to this day if her folks had not selfishly decided to up sticks and move to Gravesend – a fitting destination for this and many other teen dreams. Oddly enough, now I come to think about it, she looked a lot like the girl I ended up marrying many years later, so maybe my dreams did eventually come true.

Following the Welsh camp, I lost contact with Arthur for a while. He drifted off and joined the Merchant Navy - or so the rumour went - and I, despite initial enthusiasm, got bored with the Donuts. I didn't return for three or four years when, enticed by the promise of an Easter ghost-busting expedition to the Cotswolds, met the illusive wanderer again. This time, as a volunteer leader, he turned up on a shrieking little BSA motorbike with a guitar strapped across his back. Though clearly not appreciated by the older Scouters, and only accepted on the trip as they were short-handed, he seemed unperturbed. With a relaxed disregard for official dress code in black polo neck sweater and Levis (a rarity then) it was nevertheless the smartest I'd seen him, before or since. To top it off, he also sported a blonde James Dean hairstyle and wispy sideburns. It goes without saying he was immediately popular with us lads; not only for his attitude but, as we soon discovered, like a prophet descending from the mountain bearing holy testament, he offered us a passable rendition of 'Great Balls of Fire' on his cherry red flat top. Other numbers by artists such as Buddy Holly, Ricky Nelson, Chuck Berry, The Everly Brothers and, of course, Elvis Presley were also knocked out, as well as versions of tunes I'd not heard before from country blues artists such as Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller and, best of all, Gus Cannon of the Memphis Jug Band ⁽⁶⁾.

Never mind cheery campfire ditties, we were older now and wanted meaner, earthier sounds - American stuff mostly - which was only recently beginning to filter through the airwaves bringing hints of interesting changes, even revolution. Although Bill Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock' a few years earlier heralded the first shock waves of this revolt, especially the accompanying film during which many UK cinemas were wrecked when over-enthusiastic teenage fans went on the rampage, by the late Fifties pop news was still scarce in the media. In fact rock and roll was considered nothing but a passing fad by most adults. Though Elvis and his many imitators were often in the charts, it was the smooth operators like Pat Boone, Andy Williams, Guy Mitchell and their ilk who dominated the mainstream.

I heard Keith Richards recently, referring to life in the Fifties, saying, 'it was a grey time man' ⁽⁷⁾. In his book he elaborates on the post-war atmosphere I also remember well describing England as, 'often under fog, but there was a fog of words that settled between people too. One didn't show emotions.' He continues later, 'It was a residue of the Victorians and all brilliantly portrayed in those black-and-white movies of the early '60s – 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' or 'This Sporting Life'. And life was black-and-white; the Technicolor was just around the corner, but it wasn't there yet in 1959.' ⁽⁸⁾ He and many others of my generation, despite their mainly English middle-class backgrounds, were searching for that colour in more rootsy sounds, like those found on rare blues recordings.

Even folk music was often thought radical then which, considering the far left leanings of many singers, was not so surprising. Pete Seeger, for example, though once playing in chart topping group The Weavers, was an ex-communist and committed anti-war and civil rights activist - along with fellow band members and many of his contemporaries. Ewan MacCall, a Salford born singer (also writer, actor and political activist) came from a socialist family and joined the Young Communist League in the 1930s. In the Fifties he was a pivotal supporter of the folk revival, not only helping popularise the old ballads but also composing many haunting songs such as 'Dirty Old Town', 'Freeborn Man' and 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face'. These people, and others like them, in turn had a huge influence on future artists, right up to the present day, who have led campaigns against racism, poverty and other injustices as well as supporting disaster appeal funds, etc. Band Aid and its many off-shoots have followed in their wake but certainly didn't originate conscience led fund-raising events - they just brought them up to date with mass-media techniques possible through new technology.

Maybe wartime experiences led many adults towards easy listening as an antidote to so much death and destruction, but young people, as always, wanted to make their own choices and try new things - a cultural revolution even, to match the many recent social changes. What's more, for probably the first time in history, youth was beginning to get the time and opportunity to make those choices.

Hard to imagine now, it seems so long ago, but youth were expected to conform to a dismal stereotype; dark homogeneous clothes, short back and side haircuts, an early-to-bed-early-to-rise attitude at home (few TVs then) and an authoritarian regime at school and work. Teenagers, in other words, hadn't been invented - so we rose up, like mayflies emerging from a dank pond, and created them. I attended one of the new, supposedly more enlightened, Comprehensive schools on a huge rambling campus but questioning of our 'elders and betters', even friendly conversation, was still positively discouraged. Never mind the good old days, education for most of us then was boringly repetitive, impersonal and still stuck in a bygone era – not really so far from Tom Brown's. Pupils were only known by their surnames (we might as well of had numbers since the aim was depersonalization, as in the Forces) and staff could use corporal punishment with impunity. I was hit around the head, shoulders, legs and hands on more occasions than I can remember and usually for petty misdemeanours or simply no reason at all other than the teacher was in a bad mood. Ronald Searle's book, 'Down With Skool' ⁽⁸⁾ which included ludicrous forms of punishment, was actually seen by some teachers as a manual of good practice, though our school was fairly mild in its methods compared to many in the private sector. I've no doubt, however, that these hangovers from the Victorian age inadvertently helped fire the emerging upheaval, going by songs like 'My Generation' (The Who) or 'Another Brick In The Wall' (Pink Floyd) ⁽⁸⁾.

At the time, of course, we knew nothing else and so treated the regime like a cat and mouse game; dodging lumps of chalk and other missiles hurled by teachers as a kind of sport, regaling mates with gruesome tales from the Head's study, a big hulking ape of a man. He was the only adult who could officially use a cane on our backsides, though that didn't stop

other weapons being deployed. Burly PE staff, for example, thrashed us with gym shoes on any available bare flesh, which actually hurt much more than the cane, especially emerging blarily from the showers. Once, in a chemistry lesson when Bunsen burners were in use, some joker set light to a dish cloth and stuffed it into a cupboard; after a few minutes smoke began billowing out into the room, much to everyone's amusement. The teacher didn't find it funny however and trooped us all down to the Old Gorilla's lair and, having not managed to elicit a confession from anyone, got us all to bend over for a good whacking - barely pausing in his stride to give one kid a few extra strokes for having matches and fags in his pocket.

However, we had the whiff of something better than boiled cabbage and spam fritters in our nostrils - and that something was coming mainly from the USA. My favourite at the time was the 1958 hit, 'Summertime Blues', by Eddie Cochran - a record introduced to me by Andy Hart, a close mate who always seemed to have his finger on the pulse. This bashful kid, who had a striking resemblance to Billy Fury and the same attraction to local talent, was something of an intellectual in my eyes having a penchant for serious foreign authors such as Joyce, Proust, Dostoyevsky, Gide, Mann and his favourite, Ezra Pound. He even listened to classical music of his own free will (as opposed to the torturous sessions we endured in school) and loved nothing better than a good old philosophical debate, yet he also had an uncanny sense of what was going down on the street. The same guy incidentally who, a few years later whilst hitching in Italy, I was almost to come to blows with when hopelessly lost on a hot and dusty mountain road - you can take philosophy too far.

Sadly, I discovered later what enabled him to have his nose so close to the gutter when it transpired he'd secretly been hanging around Piccadilly to score heroin. Despite this, Andy took a keen interest in politics, especially the anti-nuclear debate and was to get arrested on several occasions protesting outside the American Embassy and in Trafalgar Square. He persuaded me to attend CND marches, such as the annual one from Aldermaston (home of the UK Atomic Weapons Establishment) to Hyde Park and, though my motives for attending were dubious (it was a mass rally of mostly young people, half of whom were female and all well away from parental control) I learned a lot and was introduced to many new ideas. Primarily, that being a long haired alternative type wasn't so strange - there were thousands of us out there trying to buck the system, or simply not fitting into it very well, and often feeling isolated in conventional homes, offices and schools. Though the press reported these rallies as politically motivated, an understandable impression given the disproportionate number of socialist, communist, anarchist and trades union banners on display, the impression I got was more party than party political.

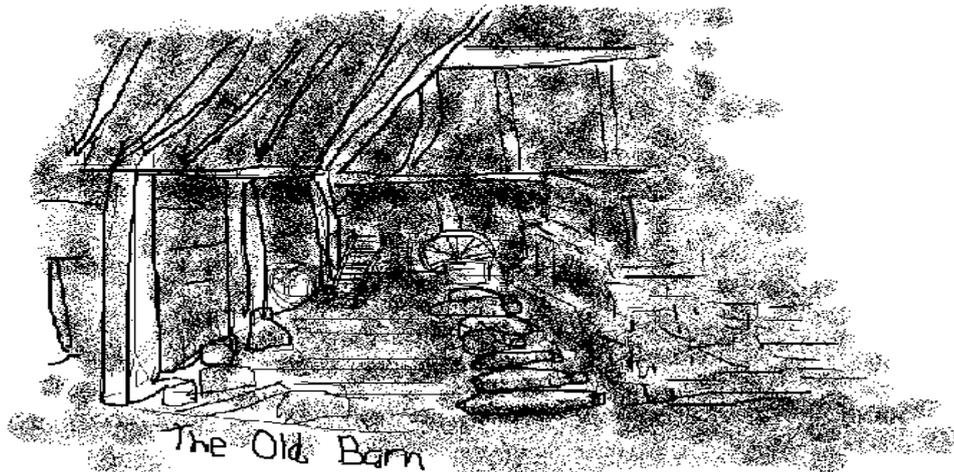
Now we are completely familiar with mass gatherings of young people at music festivals and the like, but then it was an unknown phenomenon outside of the military. If there was a uniform at CND gatherings it was unkempt hair, a good few beards, drab working clothes and boots (and yes, a lot of sandals) plus a healthy selection of weirdly clad exhibitionists who seemed to fit in perfectly well amongst this rattle-taggle army. It's doubtful if all the protesting and arresting over the years made a jot of difference to the nuclear policy of this or any other country, but maybe these events were more important as social rallying points, helping to liberate youth and promote more alternative attitudes generally.

A few people carried guitars and sang peace songs, some of which were also taken up by protesters against the Vietnam War and other conflicts a few years later. I also recall Andy and I meeting up with Arthur in the early Sixties on one of these rallies when, late in the afternoon, we rested on a low roadside wall along with other weary travellers. One guy started singing something like 'Crow on the Cradle' ⁽⁹⁾ or 'Family of Man' ⁽¹⁰⁾, but dried up after a few feeble lines and no one seemed keen to help him out.

Then some skinny youth in an oversized parka reached for the instrument and, pulling back his hood to reveal a carefully back-combed bouffant, began a raspy but moving version of 'Man of Constant Sorrow' ⁽¹¹⁾.

When he'd finished, having gathered a sizable crowd, I asked him if this was the Dylan version but he just laughed condescendingly saying, 'Nah! The Stanley Brothers, man. Yer bleedin' original.' As if I should've known that! Later, alone with Andy and Arthur, we all agreed this fellow was talented. It was obvious he was also popular with the opposite sex, judging by the way a dumb blond clung to his arm. 'He could do well,' said Arthur. 'Not only has he a tunefully crap voice, he's also self-centred, arrogant and vain. Excellent credentials for any aspiring rock and roll star.' The next time I saw Rod Stewart, alias Rod the Mod, was on stage at The Eel Pie Island Hotel, Twickenham, taking the breaks for Long John Baldry backed by the Cyril Davis Rhythm and Blues Allstars. I believe Arthur had had words with him, but I may be wrong. At any rate, Stewart included the Stanley Brothers' number on his debut solo album in 1969.

Just as an aside, and I don't speak as any great fan, his song 'Maggie May' ⁽¹²⁾ has pleasant connotations for me as it always seemed to be playing in the Union bar when I belatedly went to college in the Seventies. I think it hit a nerve among male students with its ambiguous take on rookie sex with an older woman – though by then I was married with kids and such experiences were long behind me.



Back at the Cotswolds in 1960, Andy was as taken with Arthur's guitar talents as we all were. His playing style, more skilful than it appeared, had a raw and infectious edge which I was desperate to learn. Unfortunately I'd never picked up an instrument then, nor had a scrap of musical knowledge. Eventually, after he saw me enviously attending to his finger style technique rather than, as the others were, his reedy singing, he let me have a bash. Showing me a couple of simple chords I immediately seemed to get the hang. Though I couldn't replicate that authentic 'Summertime Blues' opening strum - something I find hard to this day - what came out still felt miraculous. Despite the fumbled chords, my playing wasn't bad for a beginner, even a little syncopated. Almost as soon as I'd handed back the instrument, I began dreaming of ways to acquire a guitar for myself.

We were staying in an ancient barn, framed with massive oak timbers laden with centuries old dust and festooned with cobwebs. Nestling in chilly windswept hills, it was a forbidding place without electricity or heating, the only natural light in our hayloft sleeping quarters appearing as random glints through cracked roof tiles and one tiny blackened window. Basic cooking, mostly soups and fry-ups, was conducted over a primus stove on draughty flagstones in the yard below. Every evening after the day's activities exploring the

countryside, an area known for its many ancient burial mounds and with a reputation for witchcraft and other supernatural goings on, we would climb the ladder to our dingy garret to relax, spin yarns or sing, and finally crash out. I had also brought along a sketch pad and charcoals, an excellent medium for rendering the shadowy and mysterious locations we hoped to visit, and at nights relaxed drawing our timber framed surroundings. Unfortunately none of these attempts survive, but I still recall them vaguely like negatives filed in an old drawer at the back of my mind - lost but not quite forgotten, though still seeming a little creepy.

Sometimes I would wake in the pitch dark needing a pee and flick on my torch to locate the bucket standing in a corner. Usually it would take a few minutes to pluck up courage, not only to brave the cold but also convince myself there were no malevolent creatures - mortal or otherwise - hiding in the gloom. One night I awoke from a disturbing dream and lay staring into the void trying to figure it out. I was standing on a stage, teenage girls screaming hysterically and reaching out to me with open arms like I was some kind of god. But despite the buzz, the almost overwhelming urge to jump off the stage and be swallowed up, I knew somehow it was all phoney. Eventually I was pulled away and escorted outside to awaiting cars. I tried to get in one, the vehicle I'd arrived in, but the driver said no, it was full up. There was little time to argue because the crowd was streaming towards us, but I kept yelling, 'Johnny, Johnny, take me with you!' Even in the dream I didn't know why I was getting so upset because there were other cars available with room enough. When I woke up I was soaked in sweat, still crying 'No Johnny, no!' And what was weird was that I didn't know anyone by that name, not personally.

Towards the end of the week Skip gave us permission to visit the local town but, as it was nearly ten miles away and there wasn't a bus service, we'd have to walk or miss out. There was no doubt in anyone's mind about going, of course, as we were all desperate to squander our shillings and, since none of our gallant leaders volunteered (maybe they'd planned their own liquid festivity?) it was also a chance for a little freedom. Arthur put on a show of reluctance when asked to join the party but soon relented – it being obvious whose side he was really on

There were two ways to get into town; the first led out the farm track and along rural roads - a fairly direct route - whilst the other took a more circuitous path including woods and fields. My little group, half a dozen or so plus our tame escort, decided on the former route since we'd all just about had enough of country life. In just under three hours we were gazing down a steep escarpment onto the historic little market town of Stroud, years later described by the London Evening Standard as 'Notting Hill with wellies', not that we would have cared about any such pretensions then.

All went well at first, swaggering down the High Street like gunslingers in search of a saloon, though swooping instead on the nearest cake and sweet shops, then to Woolworths for gifts to take home. After a while we all wandered off in twos and threes to explore the narrow lanes, agreeing to meet up later at the Roxy, one of the few cinemas I've been to that truly deserved the epithet 'flea pit'. Stuffing our faces with popcorn, peanuts and ice-cream, we hooted and giggled throughout 'Samson and Delilah', a Cecil B De Mille epic starring Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr, particularly relishing the apocalyptic temple scene when we eagerly looked for blood and gore amidst the tumbling pillars. The film may have been based on the biblical story, included portentous speeches and incredible scenes involving a cast of thousands, but the reels we viewed of this 1949 classic were erratic and grainy – a surreal experience and hard to take seriously. But maybe we should have – heeded the message of impending doom that is – because what followed on our way home nearly became a real life disaster.

It was later than we intended when we finally set off, Arthur having kindly purchased bottles of cider and cigarettes for the gang (with our money), not really paying much attention to where we were going. It had been agreed we would return via the scenic route and set off in high spirits (drunk) with only a cursory glance at the map.

‘Are we camped near Bath?’ enquired Andy, after a couple of miles. ‘Only that seems to be where we’re heading.’ He indicated a signpost and we all stopped to consider the matter. Our knowledge around these parts was scant as we’d mostly been hiking well away from main roads but, after a while, realised we were indeed going south when we should’ve been heading west. Unlike Seasick Steve ⁽¹³⁾ who sang, ‘Never ever go west when you know you should be heading south.’

Striking out in the direction of the setting sun we ambled down a tree lined lane, passing a walled estate with a little sign outside saying ‘Convent of the Poor Clare’s’, till we had left all habitation behind. However, we seemed again to be turning southwards and would have to find another road soon but, as none materialised, we climbed over a wall and crossed fields till we came to some woodland, arriving eventually on a footpath that appeared to be going in the right direction. This led us downhill into a dismal valley and along a stream which eventually widened out into a long lake. Progressing uncertainly through the valley we went past three more lakes, each darker and more forbidding than the last. The light was fading and we found it increasingly difficult to read the map, not having brought a torch. Someone had the bright idea of trying to climb the steep valley sides, hoping there might be a road up there, but it was impossible to get through the tangled web of brambles, stinging nettles and thick undergrowth.

It was almost pitch dark when we saw the outline of a large gothic mansion ⁽¹⁴⁾ silhouetted against the trees. Hopefully, we thought, there might be someone there who could offer a little comfort in this chilling place or, at the very least, direct us onto the right track. Arthur swore he saw the figure of a woman in a white gown watching us from a window, but no one else could confirm this and when we got up close it became obvious the old place was uninhabited. Not only that, it could have come straight out of a Hammer horror movie with big studded doors and narrow leaded windows, high pointed roof, clock tower and menacing gargoyles glaring down. At this point, as we stood before the imposing ruins, eyeing the surrounding forest with impending fear, Andy gave a cry. ‘Look! What’s that?’ We all turned to see a giant dog or scrawny donkey, ambling towards us from the misty lakeside. I didn’t know what it was but the animal seemed unreal and quietly threatening, an impression we obviously all shared.

‘Let’s get out of here,’ someone cried eventually, but we needed no more prompting and all turned and fled. Though there was little sign of a proper path as we headed uphill towards the trees and into an almost impenetrable tunnel of undergrowth, we kept pushing onwards in terror. Even Arthur lost his good humour for a while until, feeling our way slowly through the woody darkness, he suggested we start whistling. It was a well known fact, he suggested in a daft school-masterly fashion that, in the absence of drugs or alcohol, blowing air through pursed lips was the most effective way to relieve anxiety. Was he thinking about that ‘King and I’ song I thought? How whistling fooled others into thinking you weren’t scared and then had the effect of fooling yourself? Oscar Hammerstein may have believed this nonsense, but he was no psychiatrist and Arthur even less so. Nevertheless we followed his advice and before long were pretending to laugh so hard we almost did forget we were scared – though little in the way of a tune emerged. Thankfully, this natural remedy wasn’t needed for long because after about ten minutes we saw a light through the trees and headed as fast as we could towards it.

You’d think a bunch of breathless teenagers banging on an isolated farmhouse door in the middle of the night wouldn’t receive much of a welcome, but both the farmer and his wife

couldn't have been nicer – as if this sort of thing were an everyday occurrence. After hot drinks around a cosy log fire, our host offered to run us back to the camp in his mud caked Land Rover. On the way, driving slowly through what was in places now thick fog, he regaled us with tales of the haunted valley, making our hair stand on end when mentioning the postman who, taking a short cut home one afternoon, had stopped to share his sandwiches with a large dog by the lake. So shocked was he as the huge animal approached when, instead of taking the food the creature had carried on walking straight through his outstretched arm, that the poor fellow had fallen backwards into the chilly water. Among other tales he also recalled how a previous farmer's wife had woken her husband late one night in a very distressed state saying there was a nun drowning in the lake. In a vivid dream she'd seen a boat tip up and the unfortunate woman splash into the water. After some time the man agreed to go with her to check the story, but alas they were too late and found the nun's body floating beside an upturned dinghy. Whether this was the white lady often seen by others in the valley he could not tell us – or it may have been the spirit of a young girl murdered here by a builder's labourer in the mid 1800s, our host speculated.

In recent years, especially since an appearance on the TV show 'Most Haunted Live' in 2003, Woodchester Mansion has become a favourite location for ghost hunters as well as a backdrop for Goth band videos and scary movies. At the time we knew no more than what the farmer told us and, of course, our own experiences. One last question we asked was why the house had remained empty for so long. He told us this was due to a curse placed on the family by a disgruntled lover, possibly also a witch, of Sir Robert Ducie who bought the estate in 1631. According to the legend, seven generations were destined to live there, each heir dying tragically. Although the current house replaced the original one in the mid 1800s, the curse was said to continue as it occupied the same site – and as a matter of fact the house has never been fully occupied nor building work completed.

We were dropped off at the end of the barn lane and piled out into chilly darkness, tired and longing for our bed rolls but already speculating whether Skip would allow us a return visit to the haunted house, maybe even spend a night there armed with lanterns. We thought our scares were over for one day, but no sooner had the farmer roared off than another vehicle came hurtling from the opposite direction and nearly ran us down. The driver slammed on his brakes and swerved, only just avoiding us. Then, backing up, he wound down his window and leaned out.

'Hey! Is this right for the London road?' We all stared blankly at him, not a clue between us.

Then Arthur went over and said, 'No man. You need to turn around – it's about ten miles over there.' He pointed vaguely and then said, 'But I don't fancy your chances tonight.' He indicated the swirling mist and then offered the car's occupants a bed of straw for the night. 'And only a few rats for company,' he grinned, indicating us.

Both laughed; then the man thanked Arthur for his offer saying his passengers had planes to catch and couldn't stop. After the car sped off I wondered aloud how Arthur could be so sure about his directions. 'I'm not,' he admitted. 'But what difference will it make?' It was an enigmatic remark, the kind I hate, but pointless to argue with.

Talk of spooks and spectres went on well after lights out but eventually I fell asleep, glad to be tucked up safely in my sleeping bag rather than, as it could well have been, on the damp grass down in the mysterious valley just a few miles and several hundred light years away.

I awoke to the familiar tones of a BBC broadcaster intoning the news in that flat but strangely ominous manner resonant of the Forties and Fifties. I couldn't at first work out if I was still dreaming or not, nor where the sound was coming from, but gradually realised it must be the yard below. Now I remembered; Arthur had one of the new transistor radios,

bought, he said, in America. Alongside the monotonous voice was the hiss of a primus stove and the sweet smell of frying bacon, accompanied by farmyard manure, percolating up through the floorboards. It was a reassuringly snug situation, made even better by our being allowed an extra half hour's lie in. I wasn't really listening to the radio, just catching occasional words, so I thought at first I must be mistaken when I heard my hero's name. But when it was repeated, along with 'rock and roll', 'tragic accident' and 'death' I pressed my ear to the old timbers to glean more details.

Within seconds, however, Arthur came stomping up the ladder to inform us that Eddie Cochran was dead - killed late last night. 'Not fifteen miles from this very spot. What's more,' he went on dramatically. 'It was my fault.'

'Uhh?' We all stared at him, dumbfounded. Everyone knew Arthur's stories were often to be taken with a large dose of salt, but this claim was simply ludicrous.

'Yeah. That car last night, you know, the Ford Consul? When I went over I saw them - Eddie, Gene Vincent and some chick. I never said anything at the time because I knew you wouldn't believe me, but it was him - really. Come on guys, it's true.'

'So,' I said eventually, 'what was Eddie Cochran doing riding around this God-forsaken neck of English woods in the middle of the night?' Everyone nodded smugly at this because, though we all found Arthur entertaining and even amusing at times, many of us were secretly feeling it was about time his feathers were clipped, or at least badly singed. His claim to know celebrities, especially just about anyone who was anyone in the music business, was becoming a drag, if not absurd. I was also annoyed that he'd tried to trump our ghost valley experience with an even bigger tale of his own. Last night was special. It was ours. The kind of thing you could tell your mates back at school and exaggerate wildly; confidently knowing none could denounce or correct you because they weren't there. But Arthur had gone one better, as usual, and we all hated him for it.

'Okay then,' said Arthur. 'Don't believe me, but Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent and Johnny Gentle were on tour in the UK. They were on their way back to London last night from Bristol and got lost. Eventually they found their way back onto the A4 and crashed into a lamppost. I just heard it.'

'So why was it your bloody fault?' asked someone.

'Because I gave them directions.'

'Anyone could've done that,' said Andy.

'But I did,' said Arthur. 'Despite...'

'Despite what?'

'Oh, nothing. You know... just a feeling I had?'

'Nickers!'

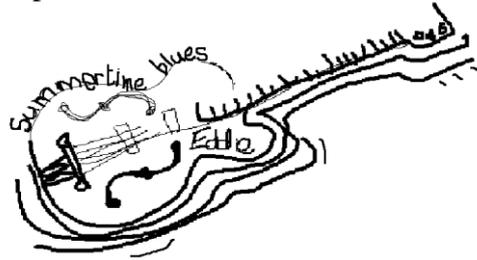
The bickering carried on but I dropped out, wondering what happened to Johnny.

- Had he also been in the car that killed Eddie?
- Was this the Johnny in my dream?
- Also, was the car we saw the same one that crashed?
- Despite his stupid declaration, was Arthur actually right?
- Most importantly - how come such a fantastic talent should die so young and in such tragic circumstances? ⁽¹⁵⁾

To complete the strangeness of this event, 'Three Steps to Heaven' was released posthumously (May, 1960), hitting the number one spot in June of that year. I have later discovered other coincidences. For example, items from the car impounded by local police included Cochran's Gretsch guitar and at the time David Harman, better known as Dave Dee of the band 'Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich' (which had several top ten hits in the

Sixties), was a police cadet at the station. He taught himself to play guitar on Eddie's instrument. Earlier in the tour, the same guitar had been carried to the car by a young fan named Mark Feld, later to become famous as Marc Bolan of T.Rex, who was also killed as a passenger in a single-car accident (following a very successful pop career). Though I never touched his guitar myself, in fact hadn't even seen pictures of it at the time, the first one I bought a few months later was almost identical – though black rather than red (got for looks rather than practicality - I always found it a bitch to handle).

Another posthumous release by Eddie Cochran ⁽¹⁶⁾ was 'Three Stars', a tribute to The Big Bopper, Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens, who had all died together in a plane crash just one year earlier. This song was originally written and recorded by Tommy Dee just hours after the deaths were officially reported, and Cochran recorded his version the next day.



Back home in Newcastle, following the hospital appointment, I made a pot of tea and flopped into my usual armchair with a sigh of relief. So much had occurred over the years; globe trotting travels, relationships, marriage, kids, grandkids, divorce, re-marriage, many career changes, not to mention more house moves than I could recall. Arthur's world felt like a distant planet to me - a time and place I'd left so far back I wondered if I was ever really there. What could this emaciated spectre be bothering me for now? And why was I concerned anyway?

Then I suddenly remembered I'd agreed to meet him - and with my guitar. Practical questions began flooding my mind.

- Where was the damned instrument anyway?
- Were the strings rusty or would it need new ones?
- Could I still recall sufficient lyrics to get through a whole song?
- How would audiences today react to my stuff – it was so long since I'd performed to an adult audience?
- Would a PA system be used? My guitar had no pickup.
- Most importantly - was this a wind up of Arthur's?

As I reflected another strange, or maybe just coincidental, thing struck me - his choice of venue. The Railway Tavern was significant in a number of ways. Firstly, because it was also the name of a dive in Battersea, South London, I often visited in the Sixties. I not only played there regularly, but saw many great folk musicians including Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, John Martyn, Martin Carthy, Roy Harper and many other legends. There was also this bloke there called Fred Potts who played uke in a jug band and one night asked me for the lyrics of a song I'd written called 'Fantasy Fred'. It was a daft little number I only sang after too many drinks and when I remembered to bring a kazoo (for musical interludes, but also a handy spliff holder). It went something like:

*Fantasy Fred was married in bed
at least a hundred times a week
to Sexy Sue from Chessington Zoo
she was a woman no man could keep* ⁽¹⁷⁾

Not exactly Shakespeare. Though, as it transpired, writing childish nonsense wasn't necessarily a bad move on my part. Some years later, together with a musician friend, Stefan Freedman⁽¹⁸⁾, we set up a band performing children's music. The name was Sunshine Express and the logo used was taken from an image of 'The Rocket', the pioneering locomotive built by George Stevenson (who also just happens to have lived and worked down the road from where I'm now sitting in Newcastle). Trains, and children's music, seem to have been a recurrent theme throughout my life, albeit usually unbidden.

It was also the Railway Hotel in Windsor - just a stones throw from the famous castle - where I was first persuaded to get on a stage and sing, gradually overcoming pant-wetting stage fright. The club itself was run in an upstairs room by an old skiffle band mate, Phil Hiprose. He got me a job where he was working at the time as a sound engineer at AP Films in Slough. The Railway club was a convenient stopping off place en-route for home in Kingston, but that didn't mean he didn't take it seriously. He'd always been something of a budding entrepreneur with aspirations to be a film director or, if that didn't work out, to run night clubs, hotels, or any other likely business - and often booked good folk acts. On one occasion he got Diz Dizley, an amazing jazz guitar player who's appeared with many top musicians over the years including Dave Swarbrick, Nigel Kennedy and Stephane Grappelli. At the time I had this cheap, but expensive looking, twelve-string which he noticed and asked to have a bash on. It wasn't the easiest instrument to play and I was pretty useless, but his fingers danced unbelievably over the frets. After his demonstration of astounding virtuosity, never again could I use the lame excuse about how hard the thing was to play. If, as they say, a bad workman blames his tools, then I was that workman.

Another time Phil booked Paul Simon, for the top whack of £20 I believe - this was just a shabby room over a pub, nothing special. The only thing that sticks in my mind about him is he seemed to epitomise the lyrics of his own hauntingly lonesome songs.

*every stranger's face I see
reminds me that I long to be
homeward bound*

During the beer break he stood alone, a lost little man, looking like this really was the last place on earth he wanted to be. He made no attempt to chat with anyone, and whether the wall was erected as a self-fulfilling prophesy or not, people were intimidated by his celebrity (unlikely since he was barely known then beyond folk circles) or he just didn't have anything much to say, I cannot know.

*I've built walls
a fortress deep and mighty
that none may penetrate
I have no need of friendship
friendship causes pain
it's laughter and it's loving I disdain
I am a rock
I am an island⁽¹⁹⁾*

His singing and playing were precise, just like on record - which is what you want I guess. As for his lack of sociability, maybe he was just thinking, 'What am I doing here? I deserve better than this.' Which of course he did.

Or, as a dedicated singer-songwriter, he might have been mulling over-heard snippets of conversation, observing the social behaviour of British pub drinkers - gathering material

for 'Homeward Bound' or 'A Most Peculiar Man'. On the other hand he could've just been day-dreaming, his mind a nice hazy blank. There's this idea that just because you're reasonably intelligent, especially if also a public figure, you have to be thinking great thoughts all the time. I often can't dredge up anything meaningful to think or say, especially in company, not because I'm being stand-offish - though some might get that impression - but just haven't anything on my mind at the time and small talk is so boring. It's why I dislike reality TV; the assumption that celebrities have witty and interesting conversations all day when in fact the only half clever things are scripted and rehearsed. It's no criticism of them; they're just like the rest of us, ordinary mostly, and certainly not worth wasting time putting on film.

While on the subject of Paul Simon, he came up with possibly the best train song lyrics I know ⁽²⁰⁾.

*everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance
everybody thinks it's true*

The song is really a love story. Not just the longing, loving and leaving bits, as in most popular songs, but a true sounding narrative with snippets of information about meals and marriage contracts. The train phrase repeats mysteriously throughout the song, then at the end you finally realise why.

*what is the point of this story?
what information pertains?
the thought that life could be better
is woven indelibly
into our hearts
and our brains*



Later, as I set off down the road carrying my guitar case like it held a bomb, nerves exacerbated many wild thoughts. But this was it, I concluded; despite many shit things having happened in my life, some beyond my control but many of my own stupid making, I wasn't a cynic. I'd half expected Arthur to lay one on me, but knew I would've been partly to blame. If bad things happen but you can see a sort of natural justice working there - some kind of logic - even if you're the one getting hammered, then it's not so bad. You may squeal, complain, say 'not guilty', but in your heart you know this is how it has to be. Something in me knew that Arthur's appearance was going to be painful, but that maybe I deserved it. It wasn't that I'd done anything wrong - just not done all that was right - and he was here to

make me do something about that. Not as a prophet descending on a cloud with tablets of mystical wisdom, more like a voodoo man chanting gibberish and doling out foul tasting medicine. And he probably wouldn't even realise what he was doing.

FOOTNOTE - Chapter 5

(1) Just to put any of those new puritan's minds at rest (not that it's any of their business) I've spent many years as a commuter on public transport. I've also walked or gone by bike when possible on numerous occasions. However, it's my opinion that we should use all available technology, transport included, that humans have sweated hard to develop over hundreds of years and not feel guilty about it. Cars are great inventions, and getting better by the day – let's make them more environmentally friendly by all means, but not ditch one of the greatest inventions ever (this goes for all other modern transport by the way). Horse transport in cities, by the way (should any romantics want an alternative to the car), so it was reported in a recent documentary (I forget which), accounted for more fatal accidents per capita than modern transport and was also for less healthy as the dung and other waste products lay around the streets harbouring diseases of all kinds. Noise pollution was considered a huge problem too with clattering hooves and cartwheels thundering along cobbled streets. Horses were also frequently mistreated and left to die lingering deaths when old or sick. Present day transport, by comparison, is relatively clean and efficient – and improving steadily - especially given the huge increase in numbers using it.

(2) The Times (19.4.2010) reports (that, despite its image problem, the Scouts has changed dramatically in recent years and is growing more quickly now than for generations. Total membership in Britain rose last year by 16,500 to nearly 500,000. To make the Scouts more appealing, especially for inner city teenagers, more challenging and exciting activities have been introduced and some more traditional ones updated or discarded. Bear Grylls, the new Chief Scout, said, 'Scouting is empowering, wild and fun, and offers so many adventure based activities for young people and adults alike.' The World Scouting Association is the world's biggest youth organisation, with over 28 million members in 216 countries. Scouting For Boys, by Lord Baden Powell, is the fourth best selling book in the world, after the Bible, the Koran and Mao's Little Red Book.

(3) Some famous ex-Scouts or Guides - in no particular order:

USA: Buzz Aldrin, Barbara Bush, George W. Bush, Walter Conkrite, Gerald Ford, Bill Gates, Richard Gere, John F. Kennedy, Kathy Mattea, Jim Morrison, Eddie Rabbitt, Steven Spielberg, Mark Spitz, James Stewart.

UK: Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret, Princess Anne, Cherie Booth, Glenda Jackson, Lorraine Kelly, Mo Mowlam, Anita Roddick, Tanni Grey-Thompson, Natasha Kaplinski, David Attenborough, David Beckham, Tony Benn, Gyles Brandreth, Richard Branson, Trevor Brooking, John Craven, Jim Davidson, Ken Dodd, Richard Hammond, Mike Harding, Ainsley Harriot, Neil Kinnock, John Major, Paul McCartney, Denis Norden, Jamie Oliver, Michael Owen, Michael Parkinson, Jeremy Paxman, Cliff Richard, Bobby Robson, Chris Tarrant, Harold Wilson.

(4) Keith Richards autobiography 'Life' published by Orion Books, 2010.

(5) 'Ging Gang Gooley' Robert Baden-Powell composed this song for the World Scout Jamboree in 1920, intending the nonsense words to be acceptable to kids of many different

cultural and language backgrounds. However, due to questions over his sexual orientation, some people have speculated about dubious references in the lyrics. The word "goli" means "ball" in Hindi, which is sometimes used as slang for "testicle". The words "goolie watcha" were therefore interpreted as vulgar by some. Also the Indian name Ganguly (as in cricketer Sourav Ganguly) could also be a source. Some Indians, so it has been suggested, might feel offended at the ridiculing of a well known Indian name. Personally, I think all these insinuations are nonsense.

*ging gang goolie goolie goolie goolie watcha
ging gang goo, ging gang goo
ging gang goolie goolie goolie goolie watcha
ging gang goo, ging gang goo
hayla oh hayla shayla hayla shayla shayla oh-ho
hayla oh hayla shayla hayla shayla shayla oh
shally wally shally wally shally wally shally wally
oompah oompah oompah oompah*

(6) Gus Cannon was born on a plantation at Red Banks. He taught himself to play using a banjo made from a frying pan and raccoon skin. He ran away from home at the age of fifteen and began his career entertaining at sawmills, levee and railroad camps in the Mississippi Delta around the turn of the Century. While in Clarksdale, Cannon was influenced by local musicians Jim Turner and Alex Lee. Turner's fiddle playing in W. C. Handy's band so impressed Cannon that he decided to learn the fiddle himself. Lee, a guitarist, taught Cannon his first folk blues, "Po' Boy, Long Ways from Home", and showed him how to use a knife blade as a slide, a technique that Cannon adapted to his banjo playing. Cannon left Clarksdale around 1907. He soon settled near Memphis and played in a jug band led by Jim Guffin. He began playing in Memphis with Jim Jackson. He met harmonica player Noah Lewis, who introduced him to a young guitar player named Ashley Thompson. Both Lewis and Thompson would eventually become members of Cannon's Jug Stompers. The three of them formed a band to play parties and dances. In 1914 Cannon began touring in medicine shows. He supported his family through a variety of jobs, including sharecropping, ditch digging, and yard work, but supplemented his income with music. Cannon began recording, as "Banjo Joe", for Paramount Records in 1927. At that session he was backed up by Blind Blake. After the success of the Memphis Jug Band's first records, he quickly assembled a jug band featuring Noah Lewis and Ashley Thompson (later replaced by Elijah Avery). Cannon's Jug Stompers first recorded at the Memphis Auditorium for the Victor label in January 1928. Hosea Woods joined the Jug Stompers in the late 1920s, playing guitar, banjo and kazoo, and also providing some vocals. Although their last recordings were made in 1930, Cannon's Jug Stompers were one of Beale Street's most popular jug bands through the 1930s. He returned in 1956 to make a few recordings for Folkways Records. In the "blues revival" of the 1960s, he made some college and coffee house appearances with Furry Lewis and Bukka White. He also recorded an album for Stax Records in 1963, following the chart success of "Walk Right In", with his fellow Memphis musician, Will Shade, the former leader of the Memphis Jug Band.

(7) 'Blues Britannia: Can Blue Men Sing The Whites?' 2009, directed by Chris Rodley. As an aside, it's noted in the film that a disproportionate number of blues musicians emerged from the South London area at that time; maybe this was as much to do with the lack of an indigenous culture of the mainly white middle class musicians (more outlying regions often

had strong cultures based on mining, farming, manufacturing, etc) rather than as a reaction against the greyness of suburban life in the 1950s?

(8) 'Down With Skool' published in 1953 with illustrations by Ronald Searle and text by Geoffrey Willans. Now available by Modern Penguin Classics.

(9) Keith Richards, *ibid.*

(10) Roger Waters (Pink Floyd) said: 'The education I went through at a boy's grammar school in the late Fifties was very controlling and demanded rebellion.' Mojo, 2009.

(11) 'Crow On The Cradle' by Sydney Carter, 1962. Adapted from an English lullaby this great song has been recorded by many artists over the years including Judy Collins, Jackson Browne, Show of Hands, etc.

(12) 'Family Of Man' by Fred 'Karl' Dallas, 1956. Not sung much now outside of churches but quite a favourite on peace marches in the '60s.

(13) The origins of this song are a little mysterious but probably date back to 1913, written by the blind musician, Richard Burnett. Asked, near the end of his life by Charles Wolfe, 'What about this "Farewell Song – I am a man of constant sorrow", did you write it?' Burnett replied, 'No, I think I got the ballad from somebody – I dunno. It may be my song.' According to Country Music Annual, Burnett, 'probably tailored a pre-existing song to fit his blindness.' Charles Wolfe argues that Burnett based his melody on an old Baptist hymn called 'Wandering Boy'. Cecil Sharp collected the song in 1918 and published it as 'In Old Virginny'. In 2009 on the Diane Rehm Show, Dr Ralph Stanley, of The Stanley Brothers, said the song was, '...probably two or three hundred years old. But the first time I heard it was as a small boy – my father – he had some of the words to it, and I heard him sing it. We, my brother and me, we put a few more words to it and brought it back into existence. I guess if it hadn't been for that it'd have been gone forever.'

(14) 'Maggie May' was written by Rod Stewart and Martin Quittenton and recorded by Stewart in 1971 for his album 'Every Picture Tells A Story'. In January, 2007, in Q magazine, he recalled, 'Maggie May was more or less a true story, about the first woman I ever had sex with, at the Beaulieu Jazz Festival.' It was initially released in the UK as the B-side of the single 'Reason to Believe', but DJs preferred it, despite being over five minutes long, and became the hit in both the UK and USA. The song was Stewart's first big hit and remains a popular number at live shows, though he was amused at the song's success, saying, 'I still can't see how the single is such a hit. It has no melody. Plenty of character and nice chords, but no melody.' The lengthy but distinctive mandolin playing, by the way, was done by Ray Jackson of Lindisfarne.

(15) Steven Gene Wold, commonly known as Seasick Steve, is an American blues musician, born in 1941. He plays cheap old beaten up guitars, highly personalised and often held together with duck tape, usually played in open tuning, bottle neck style. He wears working clothes including dungarees and John Deere cap and his songs are mostly autobiographical reflections on his rambling early life. He was born in Oakland, California, and around fourteen, following abuse from his stepfather, left home to live rough on the road in Tennessee, Mississippi, and elsewhere. He travelled as a hobo on freight trains, looking for work as a farm labourer or other seasonal jobs. In the Sixties he started performing with

fellow musicians and knew Janis Joplin, Joni Mitchell, among others. In the late 1980s he worked as a session musician and studio engineer with many indie label artists including Kurt Cobain. He moved to Europe and, living in Paris, sometimes worked as a busker. Moving to Norway in 2001 he released his first album entitled 'Cheap' recorded with The Level Devils. His debut solo album, 'Dog House Blues', was released in 2006. His breakthrough came with an appearance on Jools Holland's Hootenanny BBC TV show on New Year's Eve 2006. Since then he has performed at Glastonbury and many other festivals and venues across the UK, Europe and beyond. His music, despite its unapologetic retro style, continues to gain fans across the ages – indeed, his most enthusiastic supporters are young (under forty say).

(16) Woodchester Mansion, near Stroud, replaced a Georgian country house called Spring Park built at the beginning of the 17th Century and named after the many springs in the valley. William Leigh, a devout Roman Catholic, bought the estate in 1845 for £100,000, moving from his home in Staffordshire. The old house was demolished and Leigh approached Augustus Pugin, co-architect of the Palace of Westminster, to design a new house in the fashionable French Gothic style. When Pugin dropped out Leigh employed Charles Hansom of Bristol, brother of the designer of the hansom cab. By 1859 the designs were mostly being produced by Hansom's assistant, Benjamin Bucknall, who was local to the Stroud area. Bucknall was only 21 when he began but had great enthusiasm for the purest forms of the French Gothic style. William Leigh died in 1873, by which time the building had still not been completed, but his son, also called William, took advice on what to do with his father's house but little was done except the Drawing Room for a visit by Cardinal Vaughan in 1894. The estate remained in the Leigh family till 1938; Vincent Leigh, Squire Leigh's son, living in part of the mansion at the turn of the century whilst his sisters Blanch and Beatrice lived at Scar Hill, the lodge near the main gate. The house was sold to the Barnwood Trust who intended it as a mental home but the Second World War intervened and the house was left undisturbed. During the war American and Canadian troops used it as a base and constructed pontoon bridges over the lakes in preparation for the D-Day landings. In the 1950s the mansion became a field study centre but was not altered. After further changes in ownership Stroud District Council bought the house, now a Grade 1 listed building, to save it from ruin and English Heritage provided 75% of the money for repairs. In 1988 the Woodchester Mansion Conservation Group was formed and signed a 99 year lease on the house and is 23 acres. The trust is currently still repairing the house which had fallen into a sorry state, preserving it and enabling public access. There are many legends associated with Woodchester Park, most of the stories have not been recorded in detail but some documented hauntings include; a Roman centurion who patrols the gate on the south road, a ragged dwarf, a headless horseman, a floating coffin, a black dog which portends death, as well as a large black cat seen in the area. Most of the sightings have been associated with the lakes, where numerous tragedies are rumoured to have occurred resulting in over twenty deaths. From: www.woodchestermansion.org – 2010

(17) 'Eddie Cochran had arrived in the UK in January 1960 to join a tour with Gene Vincent who had already been on the road since before Christmas (he'd actually appeared in Kingston where I'd caught the tour at the Granada cinema). It was promoted by Larry Parnes and the support acts and musicians were all young rock'n'rollers that Parnes had under contract. These included at various times along the tour – Billy Fury, Joe Brown, Georgie Fame, Vince Eager and Johnny Gentle. It was a long tour with a punishing schedule and the British winter was not something that California resident Cochran was used to. So by the time they rolled up at the Bristol Hippodrome on Monday 11th April for a week long residency, Eddie and his girlfriend, Sharon Sheeley, were looking forward to returning to the USA immediately

afterwards. After the final show on Saturday 16th April, Eddie wanted a lift back to London with Johnny Gentle who had driven himself to Bristol, but the car was full. There were no more trains at that time of night, so a taxi was called. Sometime after 11.00pm, a Ford Consul driven by George Martin (not of Beatles), with Eddie, Gene, Sharon and tour manager Pat Tompkins, set off for London. These were pre-M4 days and Martin set off on the A4, but went off road looking for a short cut. It appears that as the car sped out of Chippenham trying to get back on the right route, Martin lost control on the bend at Rowden Hill (then a notorious accident black-spot) and spun backwards into a concrete lamppost. The impact sent Eddie up into the roof and forced the rear door open, throwing him out onto the road. After the car had come to a halt, Martin and Tompkins were able to walk away from the wreckage uninjured, but Gene and Sharon, along with Eddie, were lying on the grass verge. Gene had broken his collarbone, but fortunately for Sharon, she only suffered shock and bruising. However, Eddie's injuries would prove fatal.' Geoff Barker

(18) Eddie Cochran was an innovative and highly influential artist with his material covered by many including; The Clash, The Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, Van Halen, Tom Petty, Rod Stewart, Motorhead, Humble Pie, UFO, T.Rex, The Stray Cats, Brian Setzer, Cliff Richard, The Who, The Beach Boys, The Beatles, Blue Cheer, Led Zeppelin, The White Stripes, The Sex Pistols, Rush, Buck Owens, Tiger Army, Dion, Simple Minds, Guitar Wolf, Paul McCartney, Alan Jackson, Rory Gallagher and Jimi Hendrix, etc.
www.eddiecochran.info

(19) Fantasy Fred – lyrics

*Fantasy Fred was married in bed at least a hundred times a week
to Sexy Sue from Chessington Zoo - she was a woman no man could keep*

*he got so carried away - knew it wouldn't pay
so he collected cash to blow - then grabbing a pin he threw it blindly in
to a wall map of the globe*

*as the plane was leaving Freddy was grieving
he'd had a change of heart - but he'd paid the fare and was in the air
and Australia was the name of the cart*

*now Fantasy Fred was married in bed at least a hundred times a week
to Eskimo Nell - she was a Queensland belle
so he swam in a crocodile creek*

(20) Stefan Freedman is a musician and author who, together with his wife Bethan, runs workshops in music, singing, dance and personal development skills.
Highly recommended (MB). <http://www.worlddance.org/danceliveyourvision.php>

(21) 'I Am A Rock' by Paul Simon – 1965. From the album: 'The Paul Simon Songbook', released by Columbia Records.

(22) 'Train In The Distance' by Paul Simon – 1983. In a Playboy interview (1984) Simon says: 'I have a song on this new album called "Train in the Distance". It's very factual about my life. What I discovered in writing recently is that facts, stated without color, are just potential energy. You don't know where they're going to go until you give them a direction.'

The song starts, "She was beautiful as Southern skies / The night he met her. She was married to someone." That's about Peggy, my first wife. And it's all true. Then it goes, "He was doggedly determined that he would get her/ He was old, he was young." That's me. I was, you know, pretending I was sophisticated. I wasn't. "From time to time, he'd tip his heart / But each time she withdrew." True, all true. All those are just facts. Then I add what is, I think, the artist's job : "Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance / Everybody thinks it's true." That's not fact anymore. That's comment. I told a story, and then I used the metaphor. And then I thought, I don't think people are going to understand what I mean when I say, "Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance / Everybody thinks it's true." And I don't want to be enigmatic. So I added : "What is the point of this story? What information pertains? / The thought that life could be better is woven indelibly into our hearts and our brains." And what was my writer's point of view. That's we've survived by believing our life is going to get better. And I happened to use the train metaphor because I was sitting in a friend's house near a railway station, and I heard a train. And I said, "Oooh, that's nice." There's something about the sound of a train that's very romantic and nostalgic and hopeful. Anyway, I guess my point is that facts can be turned into art if one is artful enough. <http://www.paul-simon.info/> (Outstanding artist's website by the way).