

A Picture of the Age: 1849-1999

Written by Graham Citrine to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Christ Church

Chapter Six: 1974 - 1999

... We now come to the last of this short series, bringing us to the present day. Again, the same problems confront us - what is important, what can be safely omitted? As I write, we have heard of the death of King Hussein of Jordan - will this be a significant historical event in the history of the Near East (why do people persist in calling the area the 'Middle East', which logically is the Indian sub-continent and Pakistan?), or will it be a mere footnote of history? An argument is raging concerning Genetically Modified foods - will they prove to be a blessing or a scourge for mankind? I am not a scientist and therefore can give no opinion on the matter, but more worrying is the fact that the scientists themselves do not know the answers, though this has not stopped them from voicing opinions as facts, and being supported by some political leaders who themselves know nothing, but who must take the ultimate responsibility. Thomas Jefferson said of political leaders, 'When a man assumes a public trust, he should assume himself as public property' - no political leader has the right to ignore the wishes of the people who have given him power, and at the moment, in general, with the memory of the BSE Scandal (more of this later) fresh in their minds, the people want more concrete evidence that GM foods are safe. No minister, no matter how strong his popularity, has the right to ignore the wishes of the people - this is the essence of democracy. It will be the task of another chronicler in 2049 or 2099 to evaluate these events - I can only record them. Similar fears are raised by the possibility of gene manipulation - it is as if mankind is saying that it can improve on God's creation: alternatively, it may be that God has given us knowledge and skills which can benefit mankind - again, I cannot know the answers but I do feel that extreme caution is needed.

There are other events in our period which give cause for concern - how easily we forget what was headline news only a short time ago! In 1974, an explosion at the chemical complex at Flixborough killed 28 and injured several hundred as clouds of poisonous gases escaped into the atmosphere; a similar explosion took place at Seveso in Italy in 1976, and another in Switzerland in 1986, poisoning the River Rhine and the surrounding area. In 1984, at Bhopal in India, more than 2,000 died and close to 200,000 suffered major breathing problems when a chemical factory exploded in the night. How many more similar time-bombs are waiting to explode? Add to these the disaster at Three-Mile Island in the USA, when there was a potential nuclear meltdown, threatening the lives of many. Fortunately the USA is relatively efficient in handling potential disasters and there was no loss of life. Not so Russia, where the Chernobyl meltdown contaminated much of Northern Europe and caused an unknown number of deaths: we are unsure of the final consequences of this incident in 1986. We hear of frequent leaks from our own Sellafield reactor and their effects on the Irish Sea. We know that many Nuclear Plants, seen as the brave new future when they were built in the 1950's and 1960's, are now potential hazards for centuries in the future. We also know that the bankrupt Soviet Union has neither the skill nor the finances to deal with their ageing reactors and nuclear submarines. This is our legacy for future generations, requiring huge sums of money to put right, but for which few politicians of any party will accept the responsibility for swift and immediate action - the threat of higher taxes with no immediate political benefit does not win votes at elections.

Not surprisingly, there is a general distrust of politicians and this perhaps was reflected in the years 1974 - 1979 by the young people, who seemed to embrace anarchy and to revolt

against all authority and government. This was the period of 'Punk' music and dress - I use the word 'music' in a very broad sense, for here was no rhythm or melody, it was anarchic sound, literally spitting defiance at good taste, at authority. The gap between young and old became most marked in the dress. The older generations (those over 25) dressed fairly soberly, but the young indulged in the most bizarre fashion imaginable. Denim jeans had long been the uniform of the young, but now it was adopted by their elders, making it less acceptable to their children. I remember a friendly discussion with some of my 6th Formers who criticized my conventional sports coat and flannels, or subfusc suit always worn with shirt and tie, which they saw as far too conventional. They were very upset when I pointed out that they too were the essence of convention, even more than I was, for they had to wear their uniforms of denim jeans with long hair if they were to be accepted by their fellows. When older people tried to copy them - and how ridiculous some looked with their greying balding heads with wispy hair reaching to their shoulders and a growing middle-age paunch in tight flared trousers - the young went a step further, wearing jeans which were deliberately ripped at the knee or across the seat, shaving their heads, bald apart from a spiky arrangement in weird colours - green, orange, purple, blue, red, and stiffened with some form of glue. Add to this body piercing using studs, rings and even safety pins, chalk-white faces, black-framed eyes and very often chains linking their bodies to their clothes, and we have perhaps the strangest fashions the western world has ever seen - though what might scandalise us in the future I have no idea, but am sure it will happen for the young will always try to shock their elders, it is a part of growing up. It is a mistake on the part of the elders to try to 'understand' and to copy them to show how 'with it' they are: the whole point of being young is to disagree with one's elders. How frustrating it must be to find the 'enemy' joining with them in their revolt, the only answer is to go even further, to achieve a distinct difference between the generations, one which the elders dare not copy!

In 1974, Harold Wilson's Labour Government won office and held it in a second election in the Autumn. The problems were those of the past years - notably Ireland. Sadly, the frequent bombings in that unhappy country no longer made headline news - it was the 'Irish problem', nobody had a solution, therefore it was enough simply to contain it - it was something which happened 'over there'. This attitude was rudely shattered in 1974 when bombs exploded on the English Mainland - at Guildford and at Birmingham. The 'Guildford 4' and the 'Birmingham 6' were arrested and duly imprisoned for long periods. In the 1990's we were both horrified and alarmed to discover that these convictions were unsafe, there seemed evidence of police malpractice, a distorting of the evidence in order to obtain a conviction. In 1975, Edward Heath, having lost two elections was replaced by Margaret Thatcher as Conservative Leader, the first woman in the western world to lead a political party (if one ignores Golda Meir of Israel). Perhaps the major event of that year was the first Referendum ever held in the United Kingdom, to decide whether we should remain a member of the European Community. Because this was a unique occasion (though now referenda seem to be rapidly replacing Parliamentary Government - a worrying trend in a democracy) I kept the leaflets issued for our guidance. They make interesting reading now after almost a quarter of a century. The 'No' leaflet says that the fundamental question is whether we remain free to rule ourselves in our own way; the fear would be the merging of Britain into a single state with France, Germany, etc., we would lose the right to decide policies on food, fishing rights, trade, employment; we would be ruled by un-elected commissioners appointed by governments. The chief fear, among others, was that Britain would be a mere province of a united Europe. The 'Yes' leaflet asserts that our traditions are safe, our Law Courts will remain unaffected; Community Law will apply only to commercial and industrial matters, we would also have secure food at fair prices. The Government recommended that we should stay a member - its leaflet declares that the threat of Economic and Monetary union which would force us to accept fixed exchange

rates for the pound and put jobs at risk had been removed; VAT on foodstuffs would not be imposed; there was no fear of having to obey laws passed by un-elected 'faceless bureaucrats' in Brussels. The result was an overwhelming vote in favour of remaining in Europe. One wonders whether the vote would be equally overwhelming if taken today, and whether the arguments would have changed.

In that same year the Khmer Rouge was slaughtering the people of Cambodia, there was a terrible famine in Ethiopia and General Franco died in Spain - the last European dictator, generally condemned as a friend of Hitler and Mussolini, had kept Spain out of the war, had made the country both peaceful and prosperous by encouraging holiday makers and investment in industry, and at his death arranged the transition to a stable parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy based on the British pattern. The Olympic Games in Montreal pointed the way for the future - their growing cost was so horrendous that no city could stage them without massive support from Big Business, which of course would require to make a profit on its outlay. On a lighter note, the phenomenon of 'streaking' appeared at sporting fixtures - few, I feel, were shocked; most laughed and anything which cheers people up is to be welcomed so long as it is not taken to extremes or becomes stale with repetition.

In 1976, Harold Wilson suddenly announced his retirement - the cause was almost certainly the onset of Alzheimer's Disease which was eventually to cause his death. He was succeeded by James Callaghan, one of the few men to have held each of the great offices of state - he had been Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor, and now Prime Minister. Unfortunately his period in office coincided with continuing decline in British industry, strikes, high inflation.

The year saw the break-up of the marriage of Princess Margaret and the Earl of Snowdon - the first royal divorce since Henry VIII, unfortunately not to be the last. In 1977 the Queen celebrated her Silver Jubilee to widespread rejoicing: the monarchy still held a very special place in the hearts of the people.

While the Queen was receiving overwhelming love from her subjects, the 'King' died at 'Gracelands',. Elvis Presley, the Icon of the young, had degenerated into a bloated, drug-addicted wreck, and died at the early age of 42. The legend began - sales of his songs continue to earn a fortune for some, and the belief among some of his worshippers that he was not dead has led to the continuing joke that he had been spotted in the most unlikely venues - stacking shelves at Tesco being the most bizarre I can recall. 1978 is remembered as the year of the three Popes - Paul VI, John Paul I, followed very swiftly by John Paul II, the first non-Italian Pope since the Middle Ages. It also saw the 'Winter of Discontent', with widespread strikes in public services, so that in 1979 the Labour Government was turned out of office and Margaret Thatcher became the first woman Prime Minister of this country.

The new Prime Minister quickly made her mark on the country: in one of her early speeches she used the words, "There Is No Alternative", giving her the soubriquet 'TINA'. She also averred in reply to criticism of her policies, "You turn if you want to, but the lady's not for turning". Margaret Thatcher was admired rather than loved, for most people realised that the country needed strong leadership; Britain had become the 'Sick Man of Europe' and strong, often unpleasant, medicine was needed for the cure. Unemployment rose inexorably as businesses which could not survive were allowed to crumble; there was no government help forthcoming. Inflation was slowly brought under control, falling from more than 20% to single figures; Unions which over the past few years had expected to be consulted over the economy were now side-lined; the Government governed. There were strikes, but few of them were successful. New legislation meant that Unions now had to ballot their members before a strike could be called, and generally the members, at a time

of rising unemployment, preferred to avoid confrontation where their jobs might be at risk. Perhaps the confrontation which more than any other gives a picture of these years is the Miners' Strike of 1984-5. In 1973, the Miners had won considerable public support when they had forced a three-day week on the Heath government. In the subsequent election, Edward Heath had failed to win a majority and Arthur Scargill, the newly elected leader of the miners, had declared that he (Heath) had been beaten by NUM. This was a nonsense; it was the British electorate who had defeated Heath, not the miners. Nevertheless, Scargill continued to declare his victory until he began to believe in its truth. In 1984, with proposals to close uneconomic pits, he called his union out on strike without calling the necessary ballot. His action split the union - the moderate Midland pits, which were till relatively economically viable, continued to work. The older pit areas in Scotland, Durham, Yorkshire and south Wales came out, though many, particularly in Lancashire, were reluctant. The strike began in March 1984 with the approach of Summer and with massive coal stocks at the power stations. The rail unions and the transport workers did not support the strike so coal stocks continued to move, the summer was warm and the winter which followed, and on which Scargill had pinned his hopes, was one of the mildest on record. There was no short-time working, no power cuts: there was violence, intimidation, even deaths, but at the end the strikers failed completely. The NUM, once the powerhouse of British Trade Unionism, was emasculated, no Union would ever challenge the Government in that way again. Even the Labour Party, under its new leader Neil Kinnock, a South Wales M.P., had failed to give support. The message was clear - the heady days of Union power and influence in government were over; there is little sign that they will return. This is not to say that Unions are wrong or outdated, they are a vital link between workers and management, but their primary task must be to protect and to advance the welfare of their members - that is what they were originally intended to do; they have no part in the day-to-day government of the country; they must eschew politics and be ready to work with whatever party is elected. Hopefully, most modern management sees the need to co-operate with its workforce rather than risk confrontation - but it has to be added that there are still old-style bosses as well as old-style Union leaders - all the faults are certainly not on the Union side.

Mrs Thatcher was given the nickname 'Iron Lady' by the Russians and by her colleagues in Europe. Stories were told of her 'handbagging' any of her Cabinet who disagreed with her. Her government seemed to be composed of old 'one'nation' Tories, known as the 'Wets', and a new, harsher breed, supporting Mrs Thatcher devotedly, known obviously as the 'Dry's'. She had a close and friendly working relationship with the kindly, though occasionally confused, President of the U.S.A., Ronald Reagan, and was both feared and respected by her European colleagues. In 1982, she was perhaps at the height of her powers. In that year, at Easter, news began to filter in of Argentine movement towards South Georgia in the Antarctic. This was followed by an invasion of the Falkland Islands - long claimed by Argentina. A debate on the situation on the Saturday showed the House Of Commons at its best - its Members listening quietly, speeches were considered and not party-biased. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, resigned, having accepted full responsibility for the situation - possibly the last Minister to offer voluntary resignation without having to be forced out of office. There were many who believed that Britain should surrender the Islands; others believed that it should be dealt with totally by the United Nations; there were doubts that Britain could effectively fight a war 12,000 miles away. Mrs Thatcher, knowing that she had the support of the U.S.A., which gave its full co-operation with its satellite surveillance, and the general support of many countries in South America, offered to talk to Argentina only on condition that they pull out from the Islands - she refused to talk as long as they persisted in what she deemed an illegal act of aggression. It is interesting to note that our companions in Europe took the Argentinian side against Britain - Spain, Italy and France in particular condemning British action. A task force of

ships, planes and soldiers was assembled and sailed for the South Atlantic. Many will remember the feeling of despair as news came of the losses of British ships, but I can remember also a feeling of some pity for the Argentinian soldiers - mere conscripts - facing the hardened professionals of the Marines and the Guards. Once the task force was in position, the result was seldom in doubt. A new word entered the language - 'yomping' - to describe the advance across the Island to Port Stanley. Within two months of the conflict's starting it was all over, with the total surrender of the occupying army. It was a strange war in many ways - there was a BBC reporter and a sizeable British populace living freely and reporting from Argentina. In Britain, Ossie Ardiles, an Argentine footballer, was allowed to play for Tottenham with no apparent ill-will shown - the war did seem to be detached from normal everyday life, it did not impinge on us in any way. The victory and its completeness gave Britain an enormous restoration of pride, and a winning of real respect in the world. One of the effects was that in the 1983 Election the 'Falkland Factor' played a great part in Mrs Thatcher's second Election victory. She was to win again in 1987, the first Prime Minister in history to win three consecutive terms of office.

Her final years in office were marred by struggles within her party for the best way forward - tight monetary controls, or a slackening of the reins; closer ties with Europe or a holding back and 'trying to go it alone'; join the increasing drive to monetary union with Europe, or keep control of our finances? In 1989 she made one of her real mistakes as a politician when she introduced the 'Poll Tax' - the first attempt to impose a uniform tax on all, regardless of income or wealth, since the reign of Richard II in the 14th Century. Then, it had led to the Peasant's Revolt and the virtual end of the Feudal System. This time it led to widespread Poll Tax riots, the worst coming in 1990 when London was invaded by thousands of demonstrators fighting pitched battles with the police. At the same time, there was some unease at Mrs Thatcher's determination to privatise state-owned industries: British Telecom, Water, Gas, Electricity, British Rail - what the aged ex-PM Harold Macmillan called 'the family jewels' - were sold on the Stock Exchange at what many thought were far below their true value. By the end of 1990, with former ministerial colleagues like Nigel Lawson and Geoffrey Howe in open opposition to her, with her former strong allies Norman Tebbit and Cecil Parkinson in semi-retirement, she appeared isolated. At the end of the year, Michael Heseltine opposed her for the leadership. She won on the first ballot, but without the overwhelming majority needed. She was warned that she would probably lose the second ballot and therefore, with her own Cabinet colleagues distancing themselves, she resigned as leader in November 1990, the most remarkable premiership of this century had ended. The Leader of one of the newspapers supporting her summed her up in these words: "She led this country out of the slough of despond. She shook up a nation in decline. She nagged and bullied and inspired its recovery . . . Margaret Thatcher kicked the sick man of Europe out of bed and made him walk." She was succeeded by John Major, the youngest Prime Minister, at the age of 47, this century. His rise had been meteoric - elected in 1979, with no family connections within the Conservative Party, he had become Senior Whip in 1985, Minister of State at the Department of Health and Social Security in 1986, Foreign Secretary in 1989 and Chancellor in October of that year - just over one year before becoming Prime Minister. His task was to unite the party after the major splits and differences of the past years. This was not to be - for a brief time there was unity during the 'honeymoon' period and particularly during the Gulf War which came in 1991 when Britain and the USA fought to drive Iraq out of Kuwait, but the attempt to tie Britain's currency to a fixed rate with the German Mark as a step towards possible common currency led to a run on sterling and the near collapse of the pound. Britain's economy was able to withstand the pressure, but was forced to leave the European Monetary System. Immediately the party splits re-emerged as the pro- and anti-Europeans waged bitter battles. Despite these setbacks, Major led the Conservatives to a record 4th Election victory in 1993 - no Party had ever won four elections in

succession since the 18th Century, when voting was very different.

Troubles now came thick and fast - a new word enters the language; 'sleaze'. MPs, including Ministers, were involved in inappropriate dealings with extra-marital affairs, 'cash-for-questions', Parliamentary lobbying for favours, each marked by a refusal to accept the guilt of their actions and refusing to resign until forced by public opinion. In 1997, the conservatives, after 18 years in power, were swept from office by the greatest Labour landslide this century, the greatest Tory defeat for almost two centuries. Major resigned, to be succeeded by William Hague, who had been a boy at school when the Tories were last in opposition and whose inexperience was to be obvious to all - the old leaders of the party were either out of Parliament, or too old or unwilling to serve with him. At the present time, there seems little organised opposition to a revived Labour Party, whose leader Tony Blair now holds the record as the youngest Prime Minister since William Pitt the Younger.

The Royal Family was also too often in the news during these years. Following the triumph of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, the spotlight turned on her children. Princess Anne had married in 1973, her husband, Captain Mark Phillips, refusing to take a title. In 1981, Prince Charles became engaged to Lady Diana Spencer and the marriage took place in July of that year to universal rejoicing. It seemed that everybody fell in love with the beautiful Princess who became a crowd favourite wherever she went because of her obvious enjoyment at being close to people. I can remember some of my 6th Formers being hopelessly in love with her, to the disadvantage of her husband who seemed a gloomy crank in the background. In 1982 their son, William, was born, followed in 1983 by a second son, Harry: in theory, their happiness should have been complete. Unhappily all was not well: what we had were two very kind and caring people who were totally unsuited to each other. Charles had been brought up in a stiff and formalised court, he loved the countryside, he played the cello, he enjoyed the solitary hobby of painting. Diana was a young girl who had grown up in a more relaxed family, fond of pop music, one who loved children and people and who enjoyed a 'hands-on' approach. There should be no condemnation of either, instead we should sympathise with their obvious unhappiness as the relationship deteriorated. The marriage of Andrew, Duke of York, to Sarah Ferguson was not seen as something serious - the two were so obviously children living for the moment. The very fact that the Duchess was almost always referred to as 'Fergie' showed that there was little real respect for her. The birth of two daughters did not strengthen the marriage. By the end of the decade it was obvious to all that both marriages were in trouble. Princess Anne had already separated from her husband and divorced, now both of the Queen's sons went through the same sad process. Unfortunately, it was a most hurtful and undignified time for both. 'Friends' persisted in leaking the most damaging and embarrassing information about both marriages - particularly that of Charles and Diana, and both made the supreme mistake of talking to reporters on television. The end, when it came, was sad and dispiriting - Diana was stripped of her title of 'Royal Highness', but continued to claim her position of 'Queen of Hearts'. Prince Charles who had done more for the poor and disadvantaged than she had, but in a much less public way, was cast as the heartless villain, which he most certainly was not. The only redeeming feature was that the old hurts and anger were fading and I am sure that in time a mutual friendship would have returned between the two, for both adored their children. This was not to be - at the end of August 1997 Diana was killed in a car crash - to the utter horror of the British people, who had lost an icon. The public hysteria over her death took all by surprise. What I found more upsetting was the demand by the tabloid press for the Royal Family to appear in public to show its grief. The dignity and composure of the two young princes with their father when they came to meet the people, forced by a rabid press to appear in public when their hearts must have been breaking, and their conduct at the funeral itself, when

they had to walk for over a mile behind their mother's coffin through the streets, augers well for their future and for the future of the Royal Family - they both seem to have a well-balanced strength of character to help them through difficult times. The divorce of the Yorks does not concern us in the same way - it seemed an irrelevant marriage, and as the two continue to share the same house, an irrelevant divorce – redeemed again by their love for their children.

The conduct of the Press, of the 'Papparazi', and their hounding of the younger members of the Royal Family, reveals a worrying trend in 20th Century life - what might be called 'yobbishness' on the part of society generally. Language which might have been commonplace in the barrack-room is now featured regularly in BBC and ITV drama and in the headlines of newspapers, so that swearing and insulting gestures have now become an everyday factor for the younger element, even young children still at school. How often do we see the public standing in silence when a funeral cortege passes? People view me with surprise when I hold a swing door of a shop open for others - it seldom lasts for more than 5 seconds and I can afford that amount of time for others, and the reward is generally a smile of thanks, particularly from older people who remember it as the custom in the past. The same bad attitude is seen in the behaviour of 'lager-louts', usually young men who cannot hold their drink, determined to be as offensive as possible in language and behaviour in order to be considered 'tough'. This was seen very clearly in the behaviour of football crowds in the 1970's and 1980's. I have my own theory of this – those who have to prove their 'toughness' are those who are not sure in their own minds that they have that manly quality; a truly strong person never needs to prove it, he knows it already !

As England's domination of world football faltered so that we struggled even to qualify for world tournaments (we did not expect to win them), so the behaviour of the fans deteriorated. Home games were frequently disrupted by armies of 'fans' invading a pitch to fight battles with the police and their opponents. Match days between major teams were times of terror for local shopkeepers as armies of police tried to keep the two armies apart. In general, if a team was winning, the fans behaved; if there was a possibility of losing, then trouble could begin. We had the humiliating sight of football pitches fenced off, as if the crowds were wild animals - as in fact many were. The nadir for English football came on 29th May 1985 when a Liverpool crowd attacked their Italian opponents at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels, causing the death of nearly 50 people and injuring hundreds. England was banned from competition, English clubs were kept out of Europe. To this day, there is still apprehension when it is known that an English team is due to play, and all police leave is stopped. In 1989, there came the tragedy of Hillsborough, when almost 100 fans were crushed behind the protective fencing at Sheffield. The police have received most of the blame for lack of control or understanding, but again, there was the element of drinking by fans before the match, and then forcing their way into an overcrowded ground.

In cricket, where once there was good sportsmanship, the clapping of a good stroke, no matter who made it, now there is a continuous cacophony of shouting, jeering, horns blowing, whistling - the pleasure of enjoyment of sport for its own sake has gone, even worse, is the practice of 'sledging' when players openly verbally abuse their opponents. In the 1940's, Denis Compton could play against Keith Miller and Ray Lindwall and go out with them at night to celebrate as best of friends. In 1953, when it was obvious that England were about to regain the 'Ashes', the Australian captain, Lindsay Hassett put himself on to bowl so that the winning runs were scored from a boundary off his bowling – and afterwards he led the applause for England's victory. Ian Botham seems to have been the last player to enjoy his cricket, playing with a swashbuckling style and able afterwards to share friendship with his Australian opponents, but walking out of a bar in protest when some Australians began to insult the Queen. Rugby Union has become a professional game with the top players selling themselves to the highest bidder, and we see a growing

number of dirty tricks on the field as a result - it has become more important to win than to play well in the true spirit of the game. The Olympic Games, started by Baron de Coubertin for the 'glory of sport', have now become corrupted by the buying of the Olympic Committee, those appointed to watch over the purity of the Games - expensive bribes are not only offered but expected by those who make the final choice. Britain's representative, Princess Anne, who refuses to accept any gift, is almost a lone voice in her condemnation of the practice; for the rest, it is the richest country the one with the greatest commercial backing, which will win the Games - so that the U.S.A. has staged them twice in the past few years, and their commercial sponsors have insisted on the events taking place when the greatest TV advertising coverage is available - and as world or Olympic records draw greater viewers and earn athletes greater rewards, so the use of drugs has become more prevalent - those caught not now being banned for life as in the past, but simply for one or two years, after which they can resume their careers as before. It is reaching the stage where the only valid, corruption-free competition is the BBC's 'One Man and his Dog' - and even that is now being taken off our screens while the pseudo-violence of the 'Gladiators' continues - sport has lost its innocence.

I spoke earlier of the lack of trust in our leaders, which is a phenomenon which did not apply in the days of Gladstone, Disraeli, Lord Salisbury, Asquith, Churchill, Atlee. One of the drives of the 1980's was the getting of wealth - self-interest was seen as the great driving force to pull the country out of its slump. Undoubtedly, to some degree it did work, but we must remember that everything has its price: people were encouraged to invest in the market, a new breed of finance trader appeared where massive fortunes could be made and lost in hours. Those successful became millionaires, often whilst still in their twenties - the secret seemed not to be knowledge and experience but the ability to gamble. There was a setback in 1987 when over-speculation in the stock market caused it to crash, but it has since risen again. We read of young men who have lost billions (in my youth a billion was hardly ever mentioned, now it is in every day use) and this is almost accepted as justifiable risk - he has been 'unlucky'. In the 1990's the National Lottery began, promising to make people into millionaires. The success (if that is the right word) has been phenomenal: the Pools, once seen as the possible if remote road to riches, are now unpopular, offering prizes of only £1,000,000. I heard to my horror, after a number of winners shared the weekly prize, "Oh, they've only won about £900,00 each". A man earning a salary of £20,000 a year would take 45 years to earn that sum - a lifetime of work. Many win several millions and as the majority have never had more than a few hundreds to spend they have no idea what to do with it. Once the house and the car have been bought, their millions increase faster than they can possibly spend it, but few are prepared to share their good fortune with those in real need..

When people become more affluent, they spend their money on luxury goods, they seldom spend more on food. So how could the farmer tap into this new-found affluence? The answer seemed to be to produce more food at lower prices. In the 1980's this led to the feeding of animal proteins to cattle - no longer would the cattle feed on grass and hay. The appearance of 'mad cow disease' began to alarm experts - it seemed so similar to the disease 'scrapie' which had infected sheep for centuries. It was revealed that the cattle were in fact being fed with the chemically treated, laboratory-produced protein from animals. "Diseases cannot jump species" claimed the experts, "there is no danger to human life", they said....., and the Government supported the claims. When people began to die of a human form of the disease, then proper inspection and tests were made. British beef, once the choice of the world, was banned from sale; the farmers who had gladly welcomed the new feed stuffs now screamed for compensation. The true tragedy was for those farmers who had foresworn profits and had continued to raise beef in the traditional way, using grass and hay. Needless to say, nobody accepted responsibility or offered their

resignation. Trust in our leaders fell to a new low. It is for this reason that most people are wary of new ideas, particularly if they are endorsed by experts - who seem invariably always to be wrong in their forecasts. Fears and doubts occur also in medicine - there is unease at the high incidence of abortion, which has become simply another form of birth-control; the widespread use of antibiotics by farmers to produce bigger animals has led to resistant strains of infections once routinely cured by these wonder drugs; the demand by people that happiness is a right has led to the creation of drugs to enhance well-being - Valium, Prozac and others, all of which may have unfortunate side-effects not understood when they were first prescribed; the onset of AIDS seen in the 1980's as a world scourge threatening the lives of everybody is now viewed in a less hysterical light, being largely confined to those whose life-styles are rather more extreme than the majority of the population, but the danger is still there., and it will remain a danger so long as people refuse to change their life style. Current ideas concerning the possible cloning of human life raises new fears that man's knowledge may be growing beyond what is morally acceptable. We have also, unfortunately, begun to copy the American practice of seeking compensation whenever events clash with our wishes: nobody needs to take responsibility for his or her mistake, nobody should experience anything but sweetness and light - the result is that we have soldiers who object if they are required to fight; we have ladies who having been warned that pregnancy is incompatible with service in the armed forces demand and receive thousands when they are required to resign. In 1966, at Aberfan, the local police led the heart-breaking task of searching for the broken children's bodies buried in the mud slide, they saw it as their duty, it was why they had become policemen; following the Hillsborough disaster of 1989, for which it was agreed that the police were partly responsible, millions have been paid in compensation to the police who had to deal with the casualties. The difference in attitudes in such a short time is both startling and worrying.

Values that we older people accepted are now questioned, but are those values so outdated ? Has the use of the contraceptive pill increased the happiness and freedom of the female when we see the widespread ignoring of what were basic moral values ? Is a 12 year old mother happier than a child skipping with her friends and giggling over their own private secrets ? Today, some young girls seem to have no secrets to share - they have become young women before they have enjoyed childhood. When men now expect women to surrender their bodies where once we were content merely to hold hands and perhaps daringly plant a chaste kiss, the 'fun' has gone out of courtship . So many now live together before marriage it has almost become the norm - yet these 'trial marriages' have not produced settled happy homes, instead, the divorce rate has risen to frightening figures - the number of single-parent families is now a major factor for social concern. As a teacher of adolescent boys, I know of the importance of a male figure to give direction and stability to these youngsters - they need a man to set standards, even if often they try to reject those standards. I do worry that so many children do not have that 'father figure' - a person of some authority who will be respected, to be both admired and as a standard of rectitude to rebel against when an adolescent, but to return to as one's friend, guardian and rock of stability later in life: those young men who abandon their children lose so much pleasure in life - their children lose so much more

Another area where I feel some concern is in the apparent decline in educational standards of many boys, in comparison with the girls who now regularly top the exam league tables, so many boys seem to have given up. My own theory for this is the growth of co-educational schools - when boys competed against each other, they did have a real competitiveness and it was no disgrace to be overtaken by another boy. However, no matter what sociologists may say, boys do not welcome competition with girls - to be beaten by a girl is the depth of failure; how much easier then for a boy to say, 'I didn't

really try, if I had done so I would have won'. Also, again obvious to my old-fashioned views, teen-age boys and girls by their nature are trying to attract the opposite sex, and for a boy this involves a sort of 'macho' image; he puts on an air of indifference to the opinions of others, he is the 'tough loner'; the boy who tries to work with the system is derided as a 'crawler', a 'swot'. I do notice that where there is a boys' only school the results, generally, are better than for mixed schools. It is significant, I feel, that what are sometimes decreed as 'primitive' societies (i.e. they do not conform to our ways) make it a practice that when boys reach adolescence, it is the custom to separate them from their mothers, from other children, and certainly from the young girls, and they are instructed into the responsibilities of manhood by tribal elders, ready to take their place as future leaders; I find it both arrogant and insulting on the part of our 'experts' that they feel they can dismiss centuries of practical experience which has served people well, to replace it with a new idea of very doubtful provenance. This is my theory, but to prove its truth must mean that those who decreed the changes must accept that they might have made a mistake and this is an almost impossible admission for any person to make.

I began this series with a picture of Britain in a gentler age, when people seemed more certain that progress could only be good. It moved on to where Britain became the centre of a world empire with a strength and wealth unequalled in history. At the beginning of the 20th Century, though there were some fears about our European partners, there was still real confidence and some pride in Britain and people did feel hopeful for the future. Two World Wars destroyed our world dominance, and this, coupled with a hesitant and unsure leadership from both politicians and industrialists who seem to have lost that self-confidence which was such a factor in Victorian Britain, has led to our becoming a small off-shore island, dependent on others for our industrial base - it would seem that the only British car firm now is the Robin Reliant - the rest are owned by Germany, Japan, or U.S.A. Major changes have taken place - women have achieved a freedom undreamed of 150 years ago; life-expectancy has increased; we are generally healthier, though too often, now, our ailments are those of affluence (heart disease, obesity, etc.) rather than poverty. It is so easy to see only the negative aspects of our lives, taking the good things for granted, but there are still more good and happy people in the world than villains, our young people are still as idealistic and have both the courage and the initiative to see what needs changing and to set about doing it

There is a tendency, when getting older, to see the past through rose-tinted spectacles, as if everything in the old days was part of a golden age which can never return. Nostalgia is one of the great pleasures of increasing years - we all long to return to that age when we were fitter, when worries and problems seemed so much less important than now. This is understandable, one of the saving graces of memory is that we remember the good, we forget the bad. Throughout our 150 years there have always been criminals, crime may have increased slightly but the incidence of attacks on people has not significantly increased since Victorian times - indeed the number of murders has remained fairly constant - the difference now being that whereas in the past the criminal was almost certainly a local man with limited opportunities to escape unseen, now a criminal in a car can target an area far away from his home and be several hundred miles away before the police are alerted. There was disease in the past, when I was at University, I would work at the local hospital in the long vacation: the biggest ward, always full, was the tuberculosis ward - by the time that I left University, that ward had been closed along with so many of the huge sanatoriums which dotted the country to minister to those with the disease; not for nothing was TB known as the 'captain of death'. As a young lad, when approaching St. James' Hospital - the 'Fever Hospital' - I would take a deep breath 20 yards from the gate and sprint past, not drawing breath until I was 20 yards past the gate, rather than breathe polluted air. How many children, or for that matter, their parents, know the fears of Scarlet

Fever or Diphtheria ? Diseases such as Polio, or Infantile Paralysis as we knew it has been eliminated; small pox is no longer a scourge – all of these were fears and worries for our parents, they are worries no longer. There was unemployment in the past and for the poor it was a time of real hardship – I was fortunate, my father was never unemployed, but I knew many who were – those mothers who bought the cheapest vegetables at the market before closing time on the Saturday evening – for a few coppers, a large bag of cabbage leaves, old carrots, onions etc. which would not keep until Monday, were sold to the needy; at the butchers they would buy ‘six pennorth’ of scrag end – usually the scraps of meat and fat trimmed from the choicer cuts. At home all of this would be put into the pot to boil into a thick, rich stew – ‘Scouse’ – each day after the first rich helping, the pot would be filled with water so that the stew became progressively thinner, until by the end of the week, it would be mere greasy water, called soup eaten with large thick slices of bread, until the ‘dole’ money enabled the process to start again. These children never knew a Summer holiday which I took for granted. One of the wealthiest doctors in the town in the 1890’s was the ‘Twopenny Doctor ‘ who had his rooms in Grange Road, where Beatties now has its huge store – he was the poor people’s doctor, every patient was charged 2d, plus extra for any medicine which he concocted himself – he had more patients than all the more fashionable doctors combined. Other doctors charged 5/- for a consultation, 7/6 for a home visit. The school dentist was the one who won the contract to treat children at the lowest possible price – and his treatment reflected this. School milk cost a halfpenny in the 1930’s and I can remember teachers buying several bottles for those children they knew had come to school without breakfast – there was no food in the house. We accepted soot floating down onto clean clothes, limited bathing facilities, cold houses with a covering of ice on the bedroom window in the winter, even the rich did not have central heating. "Ah, we were hardier in those days", it is often said. Undoubtedly the strong did survive, but so many of the weak succumbed,; today, they live. Perhaps today is the ‘Golden Age’ – certainly it will be seen to be so by our own children and grandchildren. I am an optimist by nature, and believe that in general the future will be better than today, but I have to say also that I regret the passing of so much I held dear.

It is no bad thing to be ready to question those who claim they know best, to be suspicious of ‘experts’ in whom you might have guessed I have little faith. We still have a Parliament which has the power to question our leaders, rather than have them expounding policy on the ‘Richard and Judy Show’ - though I do fear the possible loss of power to a European system which tends not to question bureaucrats. I cannot know what the future holds, certainly, I am not a good example for progress - had I lived in the Stone Age, we would not have advanced from using stone axes – ‘If it was good enough for my father, it’s good enough for me’ – I am too conservative (with a small ‘c’). Progress comes from those who are dissatisfied, those who believe that things can be better so I must believe that the future it will be good - I shall close with this advice from Francis Bacon: "Men must pursue things which are just in present, and leave the future to the Divine Providence".

My apologies for the many omissions, but this has not been a history - it has simply been an attempt to give a picture - the general trends -of the past 150 years. I have enjoyed writing it - I hope you have enjoyed reading it.