



Kenneth O. Morgan
my histories

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My Histories



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In memory of my beloved parents,
DAVID JAMES MORGAN (1894–1978) and
MARGARET MORGAN, *née* OWEN (1902–1989).

Diolch o galon!

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Foreword

‘EVERY HISTORIAN SHOULD WRITE an autobiography.’ So wrote my old mentor Alan Taylor in the foreword to his own. He argued that it would be educative in showing the fallibility of all historical sources, especially one’s own memory. It is, therefore, a salutary experience for the author even if he or she gives thanks that the vast bulk of historians have not followed Alan’s advice. I had for long tended to resist the suggestion of my family and some friends that I should try to compose my memoirs. It seemed at best a routine exercise to provide grist for the mill of possible obituarists, at worst the product of self-indulgence or vanity. I have, however, changed my mind. It seemed to me of wider interest to learn how a working, writing historian went about his task at a time of sweeping historical change. In this endeavour, I have followed the guidance offered in his *Memoirs* from the greatest of all historians, Edward Gibbon, that ‘I must be conscious that no one is so well qualified as myself to describe the series of my thoughts and actions’, and that one should aim at ‘Truth, naked, unblushing truth’. Only the author himself can truthfully convey the intellectual, emotional and psychological factors that lay behind his efforts, the importance of the varied forms of evidence he chose to use, the fascinating people he met and the influence of the family, friends, colleagues and lovers he encountered along the way. In my case, I felt it was important also to spell out the ambiguities, mixed identities and divided consciousness from which I approached historical issues, a division resulting from a sense of being both Welsh and British, a commitment to radical change alongside an attachment to order and a life of peace. Like all historians, I am a hybrid within whom a variety of often conflicting impulses contend. I hope that this has given me the more sympathy as a human being in examining the characters and contexts about which I have written. At the end, I remain totally convinced that the issues on which I have worked as a teacher and a writer are of fundamental value for

society, even if my judgements on them, like those of all my profession, are necessarily transient, interim statements due to be corrected in the light of subsequent knowledge. But it has given me a rich and full life, which has always been hugely enjoyable. I can only offer heartfelt thanks to those who made it so, my wonderfully loyal friends and colleagues, my wider family on both sides of Offa's Dyke and of the Channel, my extraordinary children, David and Katherine, my lovely grandchildren and my two brilliant and beautiful wives. They gave me comfort and warmth in the middle and later passages of a long life. But every story needs a strong beginning, and my awareness here is recorded in my dedication. To the generations of Morgans and Owens in my life story, I owe the greatest debt of all.

My daughter Katherine has read through my text to my very great advantage. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Sarah, Dafydd, Siân, Catrin and their colleagues at the University of Wales Press for their help with this book. At the third time of asking, Alan Taylor wrote that he ended up with 'the almost perfect wife'. After fifty-two years with our national university press, I know I am with the almost perfect publishers.

Long Hanborough, West Oxon.

16 May 2015

K.O.M.

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Chapter One

A Divided Consciousness

EVERYBODY HAS A PAST, everybody has a memory. My past is the product of a divided consciousness, divided between the London of my origin and the Wales of my memory, between essentially north Wales Aberdyfi and south Wales Dolybont (just three miles away as the Welsh crow flies across the Dyfi estuary), between my sense of being an Owen and the fact of my being a Morgan. It is this ambiguity, my schizoid view of myself, that is an explanation of the way I have approached the study and writing of history, with all its multiple identities, these sixty years and more.

My historical past began in North London, in a middle-class suburb called Alexandra Park in the borough of Wood Green. I was born in a nursing home in Pellatt Grove near the tube station in Wood Green on 16 May 1934. My family lived in a small semi-detached house, number 219 Alexandra Park Road. I gather that we had a tranquil time in those pre-war years. Both my parents were state school-teachers, very modestly paid but in a profession which, in Wales, enjoyed high public esteem and which had proved an escape for many working-class Welsh people in the bleak years. In the 1930s my father, David James Morgan, who had known some unemployment in the period after the First World War, had a secure job as a school teacher in a secondary school in a working-class area of Islington. My mother Margaret Morgan, *née* Owen, had been a teacher in an infants' school who cruelly lost her job after 1931 when the National government, incredibly as it now seems, decided that married women who taught in schools should be removed from the payroll. She did not return to work of any kind until opportunities arose as a supply teacher during the war when, indeed, she occasionally taught me in Aberdyfi school. My father, as a teacher and a fine one, evidently placed much emphasis on my being able to spell and read English – though not necessarily Welsh. I have vague recollections of being on the beach in Aberdyfi – it must have been during the

Munich crisis – showing some grown-ups that at the age of four I could spell ‘Czechoslovakia’. In the spring of 1939, I went to Rhodes Avenue school in Alexandra Park (the avenue so named because Cecil Rhodes had once lived there), where the headmistress, Miss Lorraine, decided that since I was so far ahead in my reading ability I should be placed in a solitary class of my own. It was not a good idea for a very shy and only child, and this decision did apparently greatly upset me. After a brief and distressing period, I was restored to the normal school class, which is what I had wanted. And that appears to have been the only crisis of my earliest years in Alexandra Park, of which otherwise I know and remember nothing.

It was Wales, not London, that shaped my memory. We were a Welsh-speaking family, my father the son of a Cardiganshire village blacksmith, the eldest of eight children, and my mother the daughter of a sailor/boatman, one of three children, of whom a younger brother had died at a very young age. Both were very devoted to their respective families in mid-Wales, and we went to visit often, usually to my mother’s home of Aberdyfi with its beach and other delights for a young child. I was christened in Y Babel, the little Methodist chapel at the top of the hill in my father’s home of Dolybont, in August 1934, reportedly taking exception to the event at the time. I was given the Christian names Kenneth and Owen – Owen being my mother’s maiden name, which I treasure. I was an only child, but I did not mind that. To a considerable degree, my many cousins on my father’s side – Gwilym, Margaret and Leri, Anne and her younger brother, David, all lovely people – made up for what, if any, sense of deprivation I felt. We and their spouses have always been very close.

My parents had met in Liverpool in the 1920s where my father had his first significant job teaching in the Bluecoat School, and where my mother had gone to visit her brother, Arthur, another teacher in Liverpool at that time. My father later took my mother to see the West End musical ‘No, No Nanette’, and I know that its famous song, ‘Tea for Two’, was always tinged with romance for my mother throughout the rest of her life. After a prolonged engagement that allowed them to accumulate some savings (not unusual in those days), they were married in a Calvinistic Methodist chapel in Maengwyn Street, Machynlleth, in the western tip of Montgomeryshire, a short distance from the Dyfi estuary. Aberdyfi is to the north and facing the estuary, whereas Dolybont is a small inland village about a mile from Borth to the south of the Dyfi. This wedding location sounds like a tactful compromise between my parents’ two homes, but they were apparently married there because the Aberdyfi Methodist minister was away on holiday. The date and location of the marriage are not without interest. Their marriage date was 21 August 1930, the day on which the Queen’s younger sister, Princess Margaret, was born. In those respectful royalist days, her friends excitedly told my mother that this was indeed a lucky

omen which promised a long and happy marriage – and so it did, since my parents lived serenely together until my father's death forty-eight years later. The location of my parents' wedding (now an art gallery) is directly across the road from an ancient battered building, which is claimed to have been Owain Glyn Dŵr's putative Welsh parliament in 1406. It has always given me pleasure to have this link, however uncertain, with Wales's Braveheart and with this major episode in Welsh history.

My parents were quite different in personality, for all the similarity of their background. Much of this difference can be related to their respective home communities. Aberdyfi, then a straggling village with a population of around 2,500 had been a popular and quite fashionable watering place from the early nineteenth century. This was especially the case when the golf links were opened as an 18-hole course in 1892. They were much popularised by the celebrated newspaper correspondent Bernard Darwin, a grandson of the famous scientist, who sang the praises of their very varied holes. Notable among these was the short third hole, the legendary 'Cader', where a player drove into the void since the green was invisible. One of my pleasures when caddying for my uncle was looking through a rustic periscope to see if the green ahead was clear. The golf, and the convenient mid-Wales railway line, brought many more affluent visitors to Aberdyfi, most notably public schoolmaster golfers. There was quite a smart hotel, the Trefeddiann, along the road towards Towyn (during the war it housed girls from a Swiss boarding school, the Chatelard), while many boarding houses on the front had a steady stream of visitors. One of them was owned by Nain, my grandmother, a happy, kindly soul with a good sense of humour. She developed a close relationship with many of these visitors who loved her and came time and again, even during the war years.

With its bathing, its swimming, its little putting course and tennis courts, and lovely walks in the hills beyond the village to such legendary Arthurian sites as Bearded Lake, Aberdyfi was a cheerful, outward looking place and great fun for children. I used to love sitting in an upstairs room in the early evening watching the changing colours of the Cardiganshire hills across the water. Another joy was walking on the beach along the shore, listening for the bells of Aberdyfi ringing out as a legacy of the legendary Cantre'r Gwaelod, the land submerged in Cardigan Bay as a result of the reputed negligence of Seithennin, a local chieftain. Seithennin, it is said, was a drunkard, a fact that led to the defences against the sea being fatally neglected and Cantre'r Gwaelod being drowned and lost for ever – a useful temperance message. I was always certain that I could hear the ringing drowned bells of Cantre'r Gwaelod from the sands in front of our house. Over the intervening years, Aberdyfi has become more affluent; British Railways provided an attractive jetty, and there are now smart restaurants, coffee bars and women's fashion shops along the sea front.

Affluence, however, has also meant anglicisation. When I last stayed in Aberdyfi with my wife Elizabeth during a holiday in 2012, I could not find a single person who spoke Welsh – everybody, it seemed, had come from Wolverhampton. Aberdyfi had gone global.

By contrast, my father's home, Dolybont (or Penybont as it was commonly called), very picturesque, was a more inward-looking place, with an atmosphere redolent of the religious revivals that had once erupted nearby. Dolybont was tiny, with a population of barely a hundred, which had to take the bus to Borth or, more ambitiously, to Aberystwyth to buy food and other necessities. It was truly a Welsh version of *la France profonde*: the postbox on the wall of my aunt's house, Tanyrallt, bore the letters VR for Victoria Regina. The village's central feature was a steep bridge that crossed the river Leri. It was next to it that my grandparents lived in Yr Efail, the forge where my blacksmith of a grandfather, Tadcu, plied his trade. He was a quiet countryman, who sadly died when I was eight after a hard life of labour. I recall him with great affection letting me use some old bellows to stoke up the fires in the forge before putting the horseshoes in for treatment. He loved to pile all his very young grandchildren into bed with him while he told some simple Welsh stories, some of which I re-told to amuse my own children decades later. I suspect that Tadcu was a man of profound intelligence for all his lack of education. Some years after his death, I found great piles of Welsh periodicals in Yr Efail, *Y Traethodydd* and *Y Genhinen*, sober monthly publications containing learned articles on literature, theology, history and much else. He would have had time to read them because his day's strenuous work as a blacksmith came to an end at around eleven in the morning. In a fairer world, Tadcu would not have remained a blacksmith for all his life. My grandmother, Mamgu, was a dignified, lovely lady always dressed in black. Mamgu and Tadcu were my main ties with Dolybont, rather than my numerous and mostly jolly uncles and aunts. Otherwise, there was much less entertainment for a boy than in Aberdyfi – indeed, on Sundays, life seemed to stop altogether. But always in my childhood, one of the great joys in life was going to sleep in Yr Efail with the comforting ripple of the Leri in my ears.

My mother, just like Nain, reflected the gentleness of Aberdyfi. A quiet modest woman of endless loyalty to friends and family, she spoke the soft north Wales Welsh of Merioneth. Where my father's Cardiganshire Welsh, used the words *gyda* or *mas* to signify 'with' and 'out', my mother would say *efo* or *allan*, as I do now. When I became a grandfather, I faced the acute dilemma of whether my new grandchildren should call me *Taid* or *Tadcu* – it is, I think, indicative of my outlook and personality that the north Wales *Taid* won out. It is an easier word for young children anyway. The vowel sounds were very different – *fō* for 'him' in Aberdyfi, *fē* in Cardiganshire. I am a *fō* man. I used to say

that I grew up trilingual: English, north Wales Welsh, and south Wales Welsh. My mother, a keen pianist, had trained as a teacher in Bangor Normal College, as had my father a few years before her. She would recall the ferocious college rules to prevent the young ladies speaking to young men anywhere, redolent of the regime of the Taliban. She was rebuked, for instance, for speaking to her brother in the street at the time of the death of their younger brother, Huw. She was endlessly patient and kind, which may be a reason why she was so successful in teaching small children how to read. She spoke with great sympathy of the children of canal people that she had taught in London and of their pathetic enthusiasm for education, born of the fact that they were endlessly on the move and had no continuous time at school. She was particularly good at teaching immigrant children later on, perhaps because, like them, English was not her first language either. In the 1950s, she had remarkable success in teaching Greek Cypriot children to read, whose delighted parents showered her with little Greek trinkets as a reward. My mother's father, Owen Owen, was evidently a shy, delightful man, who sadly died before I was born in 1932 – I deeply regret that I never knew him. Among other joys, he would have taken me out on his boat into Cardigan Bay and made me less of the landlubber that I am.

My mother's family comprised unremarkable country people, with one exception: Evan Evans, my maternal great-great-grandfather. Born in Barmouth in 1779 he had been working in the field on the Ynysmaengwyn estate near Towyn to the north of Aberdyfi around 1800, when he was press-ganged into the navy. He saw fierce and active service, and fought at Trafalgar serving on HMS *Minotaur*, a ship that fought literally alongside Nelson's HMS *Victory*. Evan Evans had a tough time at Trafalgar, where three of his mates were killed, and he himself was injured in the face. He was known locally thereafter as *Boch Mawr* ('big cheek'). I still have the large musket he used at Trafalgar, and also his pension form of 1813 which states that he was to receive £10 a year for life (no negligible sum) and that anyone trying to impersonate him would be punishable by death. However, he seemed to flourish after his naval service, and is recorded in the 1851 census, which means he must have lived on into his seventies, perhaps more affluent through prize money than he would have been had he remained undisturbed in the fields of Merioneth.

My father was a more forceful personality than my mother by far. He was evidently a clever boy at Ardwyn grammar school in Aberystwyth. He liked to tell me, in his modest way, of when his sixth form class was asked by the famous schools inspector, Sir Owen Edwards (the only Merioneth man other than me who has been a history tutor at Oxford), 'Can you give me an example of perfect English style?' My father piped up, 'Cardinal Newman, sir!', which somewhat took Sir Owen aback, and was indeed a remarkable answer from a young

boy, especially a Protestant. My father also went to Bangor Normal College before service in the First World War in 1916–18 following the introduction of conscription. He entered the Royal Field Artillery, in the A (Cardiganshire) Battery, and was dispatched to Egypt. So a young Cardiganshire man, who had probably never been to London, found himself gazing at the pyramids and the Sphinx. His war began at the battle of Gaza, and he ended up in Damascus at the end of 1918. He used to talk about some cultural aspects of his war years in the desert fighting the Turks, of his good relations with the Gurkhas, of his low opinion of the Egyptians (many of whom, he said, were thieving), and how he (as a virtual non-swimmer) swam across the Suez Canal. He knew a few words of Egyptian, notably ‘talaheena bint’ (‘Come here, woman’), and I used to wonder what use he may have made of this phrase. He spoke with pride of having met General Allenby, the one military general for whom he ever had a good word. Like many old soldiers, he never mentioned any of the horrible scenes that he must have witnessed in Palestine, such as at the battles of Gaza or Megiddo, but he retained a memento of his war service in a small white circle on his left hand where a Turkish bullet had passed clean through while he was laying down telegraph wires ahead of army lines. A close friend was the Revd Jack Stephens, later both an Anglican clergyman and famous rugby back-row forward who played for both Llanelli and Wales. I recall Dad mentioning the death of his especially great friend and relative Ivor Morgan, on 19 September 1918, in the very last weeks of the war. He described this to me some forty years after the war had ended, and then burst uncontrollably into tears – it was almost the only time I ever saw this old soldier cry. I have Ivor’s memorial card next to me as I write. He looks a nice, kind man too.

After the war, my father ended up teaching for some years in Liverpool, which was where and when he both met my mother and played, in 1923, in a simultaneous chess match (inevitably unsuccessfully) with the Russian world champion Alexander Alekhine. He then moved on to teach in a state school in Islington, North London. His subjects included both mathematics and science, and also English and literature. He was a quiet scholarly person of extraordinarily broad culture. Indeed, I think he was probably the ablest man I have ever known, and I was truly fortunate to have him as a father. He could occasionally be aggressive in manner, but never to me. Obviously, he was a superb teacher, much used by our neighbours to give extra-mural tuition to their children. He could seemingly do everything. He was skilled at woodwork, he could draw clever sketches, he knew all about gardening. And perhaps for that reason, I was useless at most of these – though I shared some of his talent for drawing. One of the things he made in his woodwork was a table-tennis table, and the games we played in a room off a small cellar beneath the hallway gave us endless pleasure throughout my school days. The narrow confines of our cellar

meant that I always played 'ping-pong' close to the table – and so I do now, playing against my eldest grandson Joseph.

Although my father's ideas on day-to-day moral issues tended to be cautious and conservative, his opinions on many public subjects were robust. His political views appear to have moved sharply to the left during the First World War. He was thus sympathetic to Russia and hostile towards Winston Churchill, a daring viewpoint during the war years to say the least. Our house reflected some of his unorthodox interests – Marxist tracts by the Communist Palme Dutt; Union of Democratic Control material attacking lies in wartime; pamphlets from the society claiming that Bacon had written Shakespeare's plays; and, especially, papers on the putative world language Esperanto. He seems to have been naturally minority-minded. He was anti-religious but much enjoyed Welsh chapel services, where he could focus on the sermon and perhaps discuss famous Welsh preachers with the minister afterwards. His abiding interest was chess – both problems and games – which gave scope both for his mathematical gifts and his abilities as a crisp writer. He wrote a famous monthly column 'Quotes and Queries' for the *British Chess Magazine* right down to the month of his death in 1978. I was delighted in Aberystwyth, in 1995, when we appointed a History Professor who told me he had read my father's column avidly. For him, I was just the son of the famous D. J. Morgan and I was overjoyed to know it. But he combined all this with a cheerful zest for life, including a love of football and cricket which he had played as a young man and of which I also became an enthusiast. Overall, as a devoted (perhaps over-devoted) father, he had an enormous influence on me. He had no particular wish for me to make money, but he did want me to develop my mind – that in due course I became a university teacher gave him unbridled delight. I owe him almost everything. He was also devoted to his seven brothers and sisters and had an intense attachment to family, which must have been difficult for my mother and the other spouses. Several of his siblings followed the traditional Cardiganshire route of becoming milkmen in London. But my father was the only academic, and the greatest brain, within it. For him, the Morgans were a mighty tribe of biblical eminence, and he was its unchallenged elder. I do not feel that I have wanted to inherit that particular role.

As for everyone else, the tranquil tenor of our lives was totally disrupted when world war broke out in September 1939. My father had to stay with his school in Islington, later evacuated to Hertfordshire. But he insisted that my mother and I go down immediately to Aberdyfi to stay with my Nain, and I then went to the local school, Aberdyfi Council School as it was known, complete with my compulsory gasmask. I missed my father terribly during the war years – he could only come down fleetingly during school holidays. But in every other way it was a happy transition. I loved Nain and her large house,

and always found Aberdyfi immensely enjoyable. When I entered the Lords, I had no hesitation in telling an initially doubtful Garter King of Arms that I wished to be 'Morgan of Aberdyfi'. The little seaport still bore many traces of its maritime past, when brigs and schooners had made it the busiest port in Cardigan Bay with much trade – coastal trade locally, and also further afield to places like Norway and Spain. My mother's father had been a part of that past before the First World War, serving on vessels that took slate from the Corris and Abergynolwyn quarries to places like Scandinavia, and returned with timber or perhaps minerals. When I lived in Aberdyfi, a notable landmark was the 'boatman's seat' on the harbour front, a haven for elderly ex-sailors, all purportedly captains, reminiscent of Dylan Thomas's Captain Cat. One prominent figure was a blind sailor who shouted at us boys as we raced along the jetty. I was told years later by my Swansea colleague, Professor Alun Davies, who gave an extra-mural class on international history in Aberdyfi, that this old man would terrorise him with loud (and unanswerable) demands for the latitude and longitude of places mentioned. The traditions of the sea were plentiful in Aberdyfi – in house names like 'Maglona' and 'Mimosa', and in monuments in the local cemetery which testified to losses through shipwrecks or other disasters. Its maritime location persuaded Kurt Hahn, with his link with Gordonstoun school, to set up the Outward Bound school there during the war in 1941, and it is still going strong. A remarkable old chap lived two doors away from us in 9 Bodfor Terrace, 'Pomona', whose owner Zoe was a great friend of my mother; he was Zoe's father, Captain Williams, a man in possession of a fine late-Victorian moustache and a colourful ship's parrot with even more colourful language. He had evidently sailed to several remote places, and held me spellbound with tales of the storms in the Bay of Biscay and of the even greater terrors of sailing 'Round the Horn', which he had done more than once. His house had ample mementoes of life at sea, including tangles of rope and lifebelts – as had our own house too, souvenirs of my grandfather's career as a man of the sea.

There were other local personalities in Aberdyfi. One was Ellis Williams, the genial ferryman who would spend his afternoons having tea in his living room looking out at the Dyfi estuary, spying through a telescope for customers in Ynyslas on the other side of the river. They would wave their scarves for him to sail over and pick them up, which he always did. The deacons in our chapels, all shopkeepers, were much-respected big personalities – chemists, drapers, grocers and the like – with our chapel, Tabernacl, having greater prestige because the Calvinistic Methodists were the most numerous nonconformist community. I was never really a believer, though I enjoyed the Sunday School trips into the countryside. A remarkable local figure of a quite different kind was Berta Ruck, the daughter of a former chief constable of Caernarfonshire,

who lived on the top floor in 'Pomona'. She was a highly successful popular novelist, who wrote scores of romantic novels which brought her to the attention of Barbara Cartland amongst others. She had the air of a *grande dame* of the late Hapsburg empire, but she was a popular figure locally. I knew her as Mrs Oliver since she was married to Oliver Onions, also a writer, who had apparently changed his surname to protect his sons. She remained black-haired and was physically remarkably energetic. Every morning when I woke up, I would look out upon the beach and see Mrs Oliver, even at seven in the morning, whatever the time of the year, doing her exercises on the shore before plunging into the chilly waters. Perhaps for that reason she lived on until 1978, dying at the age of one hundred. Down the road from us, in a huge white house called 'Craig-y-Don', was a great man I never met, Lord Atkin of Aberdovey – popularly known as 'Judgatkin'. I never went to Craig y Don – he had grandchildren whom my mother fatally dismissed as being 'stuck up' – but Atkin himself became one of my great heroes later on. His judgement in the *Liversidge vs Anderson* case, when he quoted the old Roman tag that in times of war the laws were not silent, was a great blow for civil liberties which I would refer to in the Lords when discussing the Labour Party's Counter-Terrorism Acts. I recall his funeral cortège in the village in 1944. I wish I had met his grandchildren, and certainly him.

Aberdyfi was very far from the battle zones and we felt totally secure there. I read the papers avidly and extended the knowledge of geography I had built up from my childhood passion for postage-stamps. Probably under my father's influence, I took a particular interest in the Russian front and had large maps on the floor illustrating its course; I readily absorbed, with my abiding interest in geography, names like Nivjy Novgorod and Veliki Luki. We read with alarm of the horrors of the blitz of English cities like Plymouth and Coventry and, of course, of London. I saw the latter at first-hand in 1942 when my father took me around central London – my strongest memories are of people sleeping on bunks in tube stations, and of seemingly miles of devastated rubble surrounding St Paul's Cathedral. But the war did impinge more directly, even in Aberdyfi. I faithfully carried my gasmask with me to the local school. In my Nain's home, I tried to obey the government's economy warning that we should wash ourselves in no more than six inches of bathwater; I took my school ruler with me to Nain's large Victorian bath to ensure conformity. There was stringent food rationing, of course (perhaps less severe in a country village with its own local produce), and the hazards of dark nights if you were out because of black-out material cutting out light from windows. We used to be terrified when my very aged and totally deaf Auntie Mary Jane came down the unlit village from Chapel Square to play me at tiddly-winks, which she much enjoyed. One important wartime novelty was the fact that considerable numbers of evacuees

from Merseyside were brought to the town. They were taught at the separate 'National' school, and I have no recollection of any kind of conflict with them. On the contrary, more boys meant more people to play football with, while several of them learnt Welsh and added strength to the choirs of the local chapels. We had a dark-haired young girl, Phyllis from Birkenhead, a few years older than me, billeted on us. I liked talking to Phyllis in her room upstairs. My mother seemed to disapprove, believing perhaps with some justice that she was unduly 'advanced' in her social or sexual attitudes. But we did nothing more daring than discuss her girls' magazines.

More directly military, we had commandoes also billeted on us. We had two wonderful young men – Andrew, an English public-school boy, and Leslie, an immigrant I suspect, perhaps German-Jewish. They were exceptionally kind to me, allowing me to dress up in their uniforms and play with their rifles – on my ninth birthday, they kindly bought me a book about the navy in the Mediterranean, *East of Malta, West of Suez*, which I greatly enjoyed. They were, of course, among the shock troops trained to invade the Normandy beach heads, and I often wonder whether they survived, even for a week, after that bloodbath. In 1943, a most exciting development came which brought the war home even more directly. I looked out one morning and saw the beach covered with soldiers and amphibious landing craft – Ducks, Terrapins and the like. For many months, the beach between Aberdyfi and Towyn was the training area for the Normandy landing on D-Day. For small boys, this meant even more fun since the kindly men driving their Ducks would give us trips into Cardigan Bay. I reflect on this now when I often see aged wartime Ducks carrying tourists along the Thames beyond the terrace of the House of Lords. In Aberdyfi, all that survives of that particular episode are rough concrete pill-boxes scattered along the long beach towards Towyn, to ward off the alleged German threat – back in that day, my friends and I used them as bizarre and somewhat unsanitary play areas.

The small community of Aberdyfi, therefore, expanded rapidly with the evacuees and the soldiers and yet more soldiers in the nearby base at Tonfanau. The expansion happened without apparent trauma. There were dark rumours that abounded that some of the soldiers were becoming too integrated and that some of the younger local wives, whose husbands were far away on military service, were taking civilian-military harmony rather too far. My mother said they were 'a bit flighty'. A legendary figure was a dark-haired handsome officer called Captain Barnes who was socially much in demand. A frisson of excitement was caused when he took part in a local drama production and played the romantic lead. Whatever the facts, it was certainly the case that some of the servicemen took to the natural appeal of Aberdyfi – and perhaps its female residents – and settled there after the war, running sweet shops and the like.

It was, then, a safe and in many ways enjoyable war in Aberdyfi for a young child. But then, in early 1944, it all changed. My father, whose school was now back in Islington since the Luftwaffe air raids had long ceased, was anxious that we should all be back together again in Alexandra Park. My mother was very apprehensive, but my father assured us that a second front was very near and that the war would then soon be over. The first prophecy proved to be correct, but not the second. So we returned, to my great joy, to our home in Alexandra Park Road, which had hitherto survived the wartime trials. I scarcely recalled our London home at all and greatly missed the sea and my Nain, but it was good to be in the family home and have a life closer to normality. Soon afterwards, my education was fixed. I was interviewed for entry to the junior school of University College School in Hampstead. I was seen here by a genial old eccentric, Dr 'Bunny' Lake, the head of the junior school. He rambled on amiably but then asked me a solitary question: namely, the name of the stretch of water that separated Asia from Europe. With my geographical knowledge from postage stamps, that was easy and I confidently replied, 'The Bosphorus, sir.' On that sole evidence, he pronounced me to be highly intelligent and to UCS I went, with experiences that I shall describe in the next chapter.

In the meantime, the war was still very much on, and the pleasantness of our return was sharply interrupted. The belief that German air raids were a thing of the past was shattered in early June with the totally unexpected launching of V1 flying bombs or 'doodlebugs'. I still recall the terror of being at home with my mother when a V1 seemed to cut off immediately overhead, which meant that a terrifying explosion would follow in around five seconds. Miraculously it landed in the nearby Alexandra Park racecourse and there were no casualties or damage. A few weeks later, in mid-September, we were not so lucky. My parents and I were woken up during the night (we slept downstairs, under the dining room table as the government recommended) by a colossal noise. We looked into the hallway to find that, along with broken windows, our front door had been blown clean off its hinges by the blast. Remarkably, the door was not itself damaged, and its leaded glass was intact. The V1 had landed at the top of The Avenue, a mile or so away, killing several dozen people. It was a major calamity. The burnt-out shell of the rocket remained there for some years afterwards, as a grim memorial. I seem to recall that, by breakfast time, the ARP were repairing it, and that by teatime (I went to school that day!) our house seemed reasonably intact, save for boarded-up windows. But it was an anxious period. As a wartime 'scholarship boy', I took long journeys to school on the number 102 bus to Golders Green, sometimes during V1 raids. When I got there, we often had our lessons in a changing room in the school basement. Films at the Wood Green Gaumont were sometimes interrupted by air-raid sirens. I recall my mother delaying buying us a new piano, believing that

our house should remain as empty as possible in case it was struck again, this time by a V2. Another hazard of this difficult time was the horrendous London fogs or 'smogs', commonplace before the Clean Air Acts, which could reduce London's road traffic to near immobility. I found them more frightening than the 'doodlebugs'.

Yet, in spite of all this, wartime in Alexandra Park had its pleasures. The neighbourliness induced by dangers from the air made people, so it seemed to my mind, friendly and cooperative. To me, whatever critical historians now conclude, this was broadly the People's War of popular legend. There was entertainment even in wartime. There were three good cinemas – the Muswell Hill Odeon being a famous instance of 'art deco' architecture – and old-fashioned music hall at the Wood Green or Finsbury Park Empires. Soon after the war ended, we had Tom Arnold's circus at Harringay (so spelt then) with the Schuman Lippizaner horses, which my father, as the son of a blacksmith, much enjoyed. There was also a cornucopia of sport, especially watching Arsenal, whom I came to support (probably my father's influence again) and who played at the Tottenham ground at White Hart Lane since the Highbury stadium had been damaged by German firebombing. The football teams of 1944–5 were a bit of a mixture – almost any eleven players who could be herded together – but the Arsenal side did include famous pre-war stars like Drake, Bastin and Male. There were also pilgrimages with my father to Lords cricket ground, which became my own particular Mecca after the war.

Even the war itself became almost enjoyable as it neared its end. VE Day was greeted with massive local celebration and a children's street party where we ate jellies and danced the hokey-cokey. Later, there were fireworks in Alexandra Park. On 8 May 1945, there was a huge show of flags in Alexandra Park Road. As a Welsh family, we could not produce a Union Jack but only a Welsh Red Dragon, which my father put up on our roof to the bemusement of some of our neighbours (one of whom asked whether the flag was in fact that of China). During the previous night, there had been a huge thunderstorm and the local vicar told my sceptical father that this was a sign from God. So my war, as a young boy, was over. It was tense, even terrifying at the time but, in retrospect, I am glad that I lived through it. It was an extraordinary phase in our history and the trauma of it a valuable corrective for a historian brought up in comfortable circumstances for most of his life, unused to reflecting on the devastating human impact of terror and tragedy.

The post-war years were for me a period of almost unbroken pleasure. This, of course, was enhanced by the surrender of Japan in July, which finally brought conflict to an end. The implications of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki took me – and, I suspect, most people – much time to absorb. At the time they seemed to be just one more appalling weapon in

an atrocious war, not something that transformed the very meaning of war itself. The joys of life were much enhanced for my parents by the Labour landslide in the 1945 General Election. It was the first political event in which I took a relatively informed interest. I noted how, in Wood Green and elsewhere, Conservative Party posters featured not the local candidate but photos of Winston Churchill, with the injunction 'Vote National'. I could not understand how Labour, whose leaders had all served in the wartime coalition, should not be considered 'national' also, rather than sectarian and perhaps unpatriotic. I was with my father when we heard Churchill's first election broadcast with its amazing suggestion that Labour might introduce some kind of Gestapo in Britain. My father angrily responded in robust language. It was the only time that I heard him swear, albeit in Welsh. For the next six years, my parents' allegiance to 'their' government was unshakeable. My mother was not really political, but she disliked the 'stuck-up' Tories on class grounds. Her favourite was, as she called him, 'Mr Attlee' or sometimes 'Major Attlee'; her least favourite minister was her fellow-countryman, Aneurin Bevan, whom she considered too much of a class warrior. When Labour finally was defeated in 1951, my father was sure that this was the result of the malign influence of Tory press lords, Lord Beaverbrook in particular..

These years have been christened 'the age of austerity' but, for all its shortages and rationing and other private trials, for me it was a time of enjoyment about which many subsequent historians have been far too gloomy. After all, my recollection was of the war years only, and life was obviously a huge improvement on that. No-one would try to destroy our house any more. My cousin, the author Susan Cooper, has written in *The Age of Austerity* of how the years after 1945 were for our generation a revelation: 'We saw not only the first pineapples and bananas of our lives but the first washing machine, the first fountain, the first television set.' That was exactly my feeling as well. My parents were now back teaching at state schools, my mother liberated by being able to teach again after being banned in the 1930s. Our domestic routine was conventional but reassuring. We read the Liberal newspaper *The News Chronicle*, along with the evening paper *The Star*. On Saturdays, I would go and watch Arsenal or, more reluctantly, Spurs with my father or my friend Jeremy from next-door. On Sundays, as my mother cooked a large Welsh dinner, my father and I would walk down to Wood Green to buy our Sunday newspapers, *The Observer* and, for my father, the left-wing *Reynolds News*. (I never liked *Reynolds News* much because it always seemed hostile to Arsenal, which it regarded as a right-wing capitalist club owned by money-bags.) Our house had a strip of garden at the back where my father (like all our neighbours) spent many happy hours growing a variety of fruit and vegetables, and enjoyed lengthy garden-fence discussions on local and national issues with the man next-door. We also had a little

verandah at the back with a good view towards Palmers Green. During the war, it had offered us a grandstand view of a V2 landing there with much loss of life.

Half a mile down the road was the most exciting local landmark – Alexandra Park, a magical, romantic territory for the young. It was dominated by the huge mysterious glass-domed bulk of Alexandra Palace with a 200-foot television mast, whose light I would always gaze at before going to bed. The Palace still survives after various disastrous fires, but it has been a spectacularly unsuccessful financial venture over the past century. Attempts to create a north London version of the Crystal Palace to the south all failed because of its distance from public transport (even though a small local railway line took passengers alongside the Palace itself). Before the war, it had been a venue for concerts, with a fine Willis organ, but most of it now lay unoccupied and unused. I never recall going inside. The Park, however, had many attractions for the young, good views of St Paul's Cathedral on a clear day, a boating lake and a football ground just below it on which the local football team, Alexandra Park, scored numerous victories and often in very muddy conditions, which perhaps gave them an advantage. One memorable winter in the Park was that of 1946–7 when massive continuous snowfalls made the snowy slopes and frozen lake of Alexandra Park an alpine delight.

Various people called round at our house, including several eccentrics drawn to us by my father's wide-ranging interests. A white-haired Russian man called by to discuss the prospects for the world-language Esperanto; a neighbour endeavoured to persuade my father of the historical and geometrical validity of freemasonry (he always failed since my father taught geometry among other subjects); some remarkable individuals came by because of my father's devotion to chess and the chess library he built up – one of them, Paul Keres, turned out to be the second-ranking player in the world and I recall his being impressed because, through my passion for stamp-collecting, I had heard of his native Estonia and could identify Tallin as its capital city.

My own interests were increasingly restricted by the pressure of homework and various school exams. I did not go to school locally and became more distant from the local community. I kept up my piano playing, going to a nice lady called Miss Helliwell for lessons and taking various exams up to Grade VI, after which I gave up. But I remained in touch with local boys (never girls in that inhibited period) via the Scout group in the Congregational Church down the road, informal football in the local 'Rec' alongside Albert Road, and playing, with modest success, for the local Alexandra Park cricket team, whose ground was located within the local racecourse, the 'Ally Pally'. As cricketers, we played such rivals as North London and North Middlesex, and also affluent Southgate three miles to the north. In the last case, there was a mild hint of class war since we humbler folk from Wood Green were particularly keen not to lose, and I

do not recall our ever doing so. One of my treasured childhood memories as a 16-year-old is of playing a defensive innings beneath the stately Victorian spire of Christ Church in Waterfall Road to deny the home team victory. At the other end, we had a fine left-handed batsman called Brian Hannah, and my role was simply to stay in and do nothing else. That was my speciality as a batsman. Always, in cricket as in life, I have enjoyed playing a supporting role. The star personality at Alexandra Park, and captain of its first team, was a remarkable sexagenarian called Len Newman who had scored an immense number of centuries and once played against Don Bradman's Australians. Newman was still a pugnacious performer as an opening bat specialising, like Bradman himself, in the hook and cut shots off the back foot.

Socially, the post-war years were a transitional phase, not very different, I imagine, from pre-war. We had no television (nobody did), washing-machine or even a telephone, and had to use the phone of our endlessly tolerant next-door neighbour, Mrs Fisher, a widow – or else use a public telephone several hundred yards away. All food and clothing was strictly rationed, which could lead to disputes if the paltry quantities of meat that we received for our 'points' was deemed by my parents to be sub-standard. People also grew vegetables and fruit in abundance in their gardens, while every vacant plot of land had its allotments – a strong survivor of wartime. Many aspects of a simpler past survived. Milk was delivered by an Express Dairy van from the Muswell Hill depot drawn by an aged horse which staggered up the steep hills of Alexandra Park Road. People unquestioningly left money for the milkman beside or on their empty bottles on the doorstep: I never heard of any theft, any more than I saw violence at Highbury stadium where my friend Jeremy and I used to stand at the Laundry End (entry half-price for schoolboys – six old pence), and where order was maintained by just two policemen, one per 30,000 spectators. The sense of civil responsibility and honesty of the war years still ran strongly. We had a highly individual chimney-sweep who, as he swayed along on his bicycle, with grimy face and large brushes over his shoulder, would sing evangelical hymns loudly and greet passers-by with cries of 'Hallelujah' and 'Glory be to God'. My dear Auntie Richards, a sweet old lady, a relative of my mother who lived two doors away, opined that our chimney-sweep was 'eleven pence ha'penny short of a shilling', a characteristic phrase.

Few people had cars then. Almost everybody used public transport that never broke down (other than in 'smog'), which led to Arcadian treats such as Sunday afternoons in Epping Forest at the very end of the 102 bus route. Other local transport included trams and trolley-buses in High Road, Wood Green – the lines of the former survived for years afterwards as a hazard for cyclists. Incidentally, acquiring a Raleigh 'bike' was a huge breakthrough for me not least since I could forsake the bus, and cycle to school in Hampstead.

It was a journey of about five miles through Fortis Green and East Finchley, culminating in the glories of Hampstead Heath where the sun seemed always to be shining. I returned, wind assisted, along Bishop's Avenue (known then as millionaires and today as billionaires avenue), down Duke's Avenue in Muswell Hill, in time to listen to *Mrs Dale's Diary* on the wireless at 4.15 pm, a long-running saga of an utterly middle class doctor's wife, whose unforgettably famous line was, 'I'm very worried about Jim.' Public amenities for local citizens included the excellent central library in Wood Green, of which I was an enthusiastic user. It was a treasure-house for a bookish boy, and when I became a doctoral student at Oxford I found it had an excellent reference library as well. In 1958, before taking up my first job at Swansea, I took out manuals which taught me to touch-type, an unusual skill at that time. Wood Green Library was one of many monuments to the public-service ethos that prevailed in the post-war era.

Growing up in Britain at that period, one could not fail to be aware of the brute force of social class. After going to UCS and associating with the sons of bankers and businessmen, with far larger houses and gardens than we had in Alexandra Park, I felt we were clearly stereotyped as 'lower middle class' with my parents' profession as schoolteachers, even if in state schools, giving us a mild social bonus. My class background was revealed to the other boys in my enthusiasm for football rather than 'rugger'. I was once rebuked by a teacher at UCS for appealing to the referee for a decision and even calling him 'ref': that was 'soccer tactics', the behaviour of the proletariat we sometimes met in buses. In the class divide, Alexandra Park was a kind of no-man's land. It was far less affluent than the late-Victorian conservation area of Muswell Hill, which towered above us in more senses than one, with its Queen-Anne style, 'sweetness and light' Queen's Parade shopping centre (too expensive in my mother's view), and where even the wartime British Restaurant conveyed a sense of dignity and style. On the other hand, our neighbours also felt instinctively demarcated from traditional working-class Wood Green.

There was a distinct social boundary at the junction of Alexandra Park Road and Palace Gates Road, just alongside the high gates to the Park with their various lions and sphinxes carved on the walls alongside. That marked the class divide. Palace Gates houses were somewhat poorer, the atmosphere seemed a little 'rougher' and more hostile. In the general elections of 1950 and 1951, every house in Palace Gates displayed large Labour posters. By contrast Alexandra Park Road had a huge Conservative preponderance. I only recall two houses in our road which displayed Labour posters and, significantly, both were occupied by Welsh people – us, and a nice man across the road, the Revd Llewelyn Williams, minister of King's Cross Independent Welsh chapel, who later on became Labour MP for Abertillery. An instructive political change

came in 1950 when Alexandra Park, previously part of the Wood Green/South constituency, in which Sir Beverley Baxter, a Canadian theatre critic, sat on a large Conservative majority, was yoked with Tottenham after redistribution to become an equally solid Labour and Co-op seat for many decades to come. It was one of the very few constituencies in which Labour gained from redistribution. Generally, redistribution cost Labour at least sixty seats and was a major reason why the Labour majority compared with 1945 fell from over 150 in 1945 to a mere six.

The social dynamics of the Alexandra Park neighbourhood were quite complex. The subtle social nuances were reflected in the way properties and family cultures varied between and within blocks the nearer you got to central Wood Green. There were few prefabs in Alexandra Park but they were quite numerous in Wood Green, down the road and down the social scale. But it was also a tranquil, peaceful area. Traditional hierarchies prevailed. The authority of the policeman, the schoolteacher, the football referee or the vicar survived without question, founded on custom, convention and tradition. It was also, of course, an entirely white community, solely English in speech, with exceptions such as a few Jewish immigrants (not wholly welcome even after the tragedies of wartime) and Welsh-speaking pockets such as ours, invariably schoolteachers. Local excitements were not numerous. They derived largely from institutions within Alexandra Park. There was the famous 'Ally Pally' racecourse, which brought in a miscellaneous influx of picaresque visitors on racing days. I still recall my mother's embarrassment (the product of shyness not of racism) when the flamboyant Prince Monolulu (of 'I've gotta 'orse' fame) engaged her in conversation on the bus up from Wood Green. There were also the television studios, the first in the world. They saw famous newsreaders like McDonald Hobley or Sylvia Peters catching the single-decker bus, the 211, to the Palace in the early 1950s, to the fascination of ordinary citizens, who nevertheless left them in peace. I recall my mother's excitement when she sat near McDonald Hobley on the bus and noticed that he still had make-up on his face, before departing for a journey on the tube.

Our world and our daily lives, then, were pretty self-contained and localised in those post-war years. It was still the collectivised world of wartime with a strong sense of 'pulling through together' alongside much private grumbling and patriotic prejudice. Our departures from it were invariably to Wales, especially Aberdyfi where I still had many good friends from my school days, and where I could caddy for my kindly Uncle Arthur, my mother's gentle bachelor brother, on the golf links, and where the physical delights were as appealing as ever. I had a good friend in Aberdyfi, Islwyn, the son of the coal merchant on the jetty. He was highly intelligent and well-read, but he would tell me sadly that his parents insisted that he should stay in Aberdyfi to run the family

business rather than go away to study or work. I still recall the tears on his grimy cheeks as he told me this – I was happy at UCS, with strong parental backing, whereas Islwyn, an equally able boy, was condemned to a limited parochial existence. Only three times do I remember going anywhere other than Aberdyfi. In 1949, 1950 and 1951 my parents decided to go on holiday in England. It was impossible to go abroad then with countries such as France still in the early stages of post-war recovery, so we had three successive holidays in St Ives in Cornwall, Ryde on the Isle of Wight, and Folkestone in Kent. I found all of them immensely enjoyable – the thrilling coastline of Cornwall and especially Kynance Cove, Farringford Downs (including Tennyson’s fascinating home) on the Isle of Wight, and the castles of Kent. An exciting feature of the last was that we somehow shared a swimming pool with the swimmers training for the annual international cross-Channel race. I recall having my photo taken with a huge Egyptian, who indeed went on to win the race; it must have been easy for him because he used to practice with 80-mile swims down the Nile. It is a slightly melancholy thought that I have hardly taken a single summer holiday in England since, and feel I know the regions of England less well than I know France. As a Welsh-speaking Welshman, I have always found England ever so slightly foreign.

More exciting still was my first trip beyond the shores of these islands in 1951, my last summer holiday as a schoolboy when I sailed from Weymouth to the island of Jersey with my elder cousin, Gwilym, and his brother-in-law. Gwilym, whom I greatly liked and admired as the first university graduate (Aberystwyth) in the family, was a natural scientist anxious to explore little mites, which apparently flourished in the rocks and beaches of Jersey. We found plenty of them (Gwilym named one – bright red in colour, the colour of Wales, Arsenal and the Labour Party – after me) and it was a cheerful and exciting time cycling around the little island and relishing the fact that the official language at that time was French, which gave opportunities to exercise my schoolboy linguistic skills. After Anglesey and the Isle of Wight, I was for the first time in my life officially ‘abroad’. One particularly attractive feature of Jersey was that there appeared to be none of the dismal food rationing that prevailed at home, and treats like Jersey cream teas were readily available. For this and other reasons, I liked this place they called ‘abroad’ and wanted more of it. I went to Jersey again in 2014 on holiday with my present wife Elizabeth, and it was just as nice. The films, in the underground museums (located in wartime underground hospitals), of the wartime occupation and the rejoicings on VE Day reminded me of my childhood and made me emotional, though Elizabeth and I also noted that the reluctance of the Allies to send forces to liberate Jersey meant that they actually celebrated the day after VE as Jersey’s day of freedom – Churchill was therefore not such an honoured figure in the Channel Islands.