

## 1. Introduction

I was first made aware of Chetham's in my last year at Chorlton Park Primary School, which I attended from 1959 to 1964, by a remarkable Head Teacher - one Mr. Woodell. He was wedded to his work, and was particularly involved in helping us in our choice of new school at the age of eleven. Amongst other things, he held a weekly session after school - well beyond his job description - with those of us whose parents wanted it, going over the entrance exams for the various excellent schools of the Manchester area.

Chorlton Grammar School was the obvious choice in that area for those who wanted to continue being educated at a state school. However, state grammar schools were already under the threat of Comprehensivisation if Labour came to power, as indeed they did in 1964. The two main ones were Manchester Grammar School and William Hulme Grammar School. But, because of my obsession with music, and unfocussed abilities in most other school subjects, Mr. Woodell singled me out for a Central Manchester boys-only 'Direct Grant' school by the name of Chetham's Hospital School that had a particularly good reputation for music.

If readers wish to know more of the school's long term history, it is available for public consumption here and in many other places: <http://www.chethams.org.uk/history.html>

Everyone experiences trepidation at the moment they have to move out of their comfort zone and take the plunge into the unknown, particularly at that stage. I was no exception. To be singled out by the Head Teacher of an excellent primary school with a great group of teachers [I have almost nothing but happy memories of them; the headmistress - one Miss Cockaigne - ran a very fine establishment], to go to a place with a funny name that made it sound more like a place where they trained nurses and doctors, filled me with trepidation.

It was explained to me that the school was ancient (founded in 1653), and had originally been for orphans who were given hospitality - i.e. food, shelter and education - hence the word 'Hospital' in the school's name - paid for by its founder, one Humphrey Cheetham of Cheetham Hill. Apparently this surname was very common in Manchester at the time, so Humphrey decided to drop one of the 'e's, but to retain the pronunciation of Cheetham.

It now appears that Che(e)tham was in serious debt through his business enterprises, and that creating the school was a way of unloading assets so that he could claim bankruptcy. (Plus ça change - Ed. Actually that wasn't really fair - today's legal criminals simply place their money offshore, rather than founding a school.)

All very fascinating now, but when I was ten years old, it went straight over my head. I knew Cheetham Hill as an inner city area in which many houses were due for demolition in Manchester's pioneering 1960s slum clearance initiative; the idea that it had been any different 400 years previously didn't occur to me.

It was deemed to have a fine musical tradition, mainly because of its proximity to and links with Manchester Cathedral. During the 1940s, these included the sharing between the two establishments the services of a particularly fine organist and choirmaster - Norman Cocker - who was also an interesting composer, and who had written several works dedicated to Chetham's (The Chetham Symphonies - of which there were at least five - The Chetham Blues, and several others). There were three orchestras, several choirs (including the two Cathedral choirs, known as the Statutory and Voluntary Choirs), and

many other excellent musical organisations emanating from Chetham's. [It was not to be confused, as it often was - partly because of the Tudor Uniform worn on formal occasions - with the Bluecoats Schools of the area - one in Liverpool and the other in Oldham - both of which were also old-established and apparently very fine schools.]

It was on this basis, and the obviousness of my desire to become a professional musician, that Mr. Woodell recommended to my parents that I sit the entrance examination for Chetham's, just after taking the Eleven Plus, with the hope of winning a scholarship, given that my family could not possibly hope to be able to pay the fees - then, as now, amongst the highest in the country.

## **2. Acceptance**

Some weeks after the entrance exam, my parents and I were summoned to an interview with the House Governor (for which read - 'Headmaster') - Harry Vickers - and the main music teacher - Gerald Littlewood (who in 1969 became Director of Music of the new Chetham's School of Music) - to discuss the half-scholarship they were minded to give me.

### **Fish fingers**

When Harry Vickers asked me what I had particularly liked about the school when I had taken the examination and been shown around, my reply, which took me about one minute of awkward silence to come up with, was that I had liked the fish fingers we were given at lunchtime. It was on this basis, and the fact that I could play the piano, that I was awarded the half-scholarship. (Why on earth I professed to enjoy the fish fingers I cannot be sure at this distance; either they had pushed the boat out to make sure the food was good for potential new pupils, given that the food I remember from when I was actually at the school was truly awful, or my taste buds were useless at that time.)

As I remember it, the half-scholarship was complemented by a direct grant from Manchester Corporation Education Department. The school's status as a 'Direct Grant School' rendered subject to some degree of state control, and vulnerable to being targeted by the Labour Government for its education reforms of the late 60s - see below.

## **3. The Jennings Factor**

As a child of the 50s, I had been an avid reader of the 'Jennings' series of public school story books by Anthony Buckeridge. For years I had dreamed of being part of that world, and had been hoping to be sent to a boarding school that was in every way possible similar to the school Jennings went to.

It wasn't.

For one thing Jennings' was a preparatory school - the fictitious Linbury Court - and I started at Chetham's at the age of eleven.

Jennings was a full-time boarder; I was a day-boy. I was brought to school by my father on his way to work, and I went home on the 81 bus, living as I did with my parents five miles away in Chorlton-cum-Hardy.

Jennings' schooldays were in the early 1950s; I was at Chetham's 1964-71 - a very different era.

Jennings' school was a haven in the rural Home Counties, from whence Jennings himself also hailed (Hayward's Heath, I believe it was, so not everything was fictitious); Chetham's is in the old city centre of Manchester, in the heart of Northern England. In the former, at least in theory, it did not persist down with rain on more days than not. In the case of the latter, it does. [Although let's not exaggerate; even though Manchester's situation to the west of the Pennines does tend to leave it drenched with 'relief rainfall' from the prevailing easterly wind on many occasions, it is unfair to characterise it as permanently subject to rain showers, as many who have never been there tend to. Glasgow is in much the same situation in relation to the Campsie Hills, and as a result gets more than its fair share of rain.]

Linbury Court was in beautiful Sussex countryside; Chetham's is just next to Victoria Station and looking out over the unbelievably polluted - as it was then - River Irwell, partly beautiful preserved buildings from between the 15th and 17th Century, but the other part bog standard mid-20th Century crud.

Whether or not Jennings was a scholarship boy was not, as far as I can remember, mentioned in the books; I was one of two in my year with a scholarship to Chetham's, and I only realised later the impact that that may have had on the way I was treated by both the school and by certain other boys.

Linbury Court's teachers were colourful, eccentric and strict, but good humoured and dedicated. Chetham's teachers comprised a strange mixture. There existed a remarkable diversity of qualifications, including a great piano teacher whose higher degree was in chemistry, a head of music whose diploma was in woodwork - see separate document (Chethams staff) re both of them - and one or two who were reputed to be unqualified. Not that I am in any way a great believer in letters after someone's name - after all, some of our best musicians dropped out of their degree or diploma courses - it is just that Chetham's did seem to be a haven for the under-qualified. Some were unpredictable and seemed to have a tendency towards favouritism. Some seemed to be frustrated single men or women, dreaming of a different life altogether, but who were brilliant at their subject. Some were a complete nightmare to deal with - let's face it. But some were undoubtedly extremely fine and committed balanced teachers who were devoted to the welfare and future of the boys, and to whom I, and many others, owe an enormous debt of gratitude. I will discuss my memories of some of these later.

The main difference between the two schools was, of course, that life at Linbury Court was an idyllic fantasy. The scene was very much of the same genre (and significantly from roughly the same period) as Enid Blyton's Famous Five series, or Frank Richards' Billy Bunter series - the latter now unfashionable as it is deemed racist and to potentially give fat people a complex; life at Chetham's was the harsh reality of a certain type of private school education.

And the main difference between Jennings and me (aside from our backgrounds, our social class, our age, and the fact that he wasn't real and I was) was that he made friends easily, was an all-rounder with no specific talent in any direction, and looked the part; I was a loner, a specialist in a single subject - music - to the almost total exclusion of all others, and gauche, freckly, ginger-haired and half-Jewish (although I was unaware of the latter at the time), whose family dressed him in pre-Second World War-style long short trousers (or "short longs", as some of the other boys referred to them as) and other similarly outdated items, with the social skills of a combination of Sheldon Cooper and Ben Gunn.

However, none of these obvious differences prevented me from trying to make the experience of being in a new school environment fit my fantasy. Time after time during my first few weeks I tried - and failed at almost every turn - to find similarities between Chetham's and Linbury Court. From the rule at Linbury Court placing the dormitories put of bounds during the day whilst Chetham's was quite happy to allow access to them during breaks, to that at Linbury the headmaster was called 'The Headmaster' and at Chetham's 'The House Governor', and to that the Linbury sports ground was visible from the classrooms and Chetham's was three miles away in suburban North Manchester - the list of disturbing differences went on. Trivial and oddly obsessive as it seems in retrospect, it was a real disappointment to me to find that reality was so different to the comfortable upper middle class fantasy-world to which I aspired.

One other major difference worth mentioning was that, as far as I remember, Linbury Court had no school bus - it didn't need one, as all facilities necessary were on the premises; at Chetham's there was a bus-shaped blue object, driven by a certain Mr Bill Tyrer - 'Mr. T.', anticipating the stage name of the actor who later played B.A. Baracus in 'The A Team'. It was the funniest examples of a clapped out single-decker I have ever set eyes on. I am sure it was legal, but equally certain that it would not be nowadays (this was well in advance of the advent of the M.O.T., so God knows what manner of criteria were applied to whether or not it was safe to shuttle kids in to the sports-ground and back.) However, Mr. Tyrer, who worked in all manner of practical capacities at the school, was a very good bloke and very concerned to look after the kids as well as possible, so we had no worries - just a lot of fun.

#### **4. Obsessiveness and compulsiveness**

Whilst we are on the subject of obsessiveness - which we were in the preceding paragraph - and to indulge in writing about myself for a moment, I should stress that I was an awkward child whom no educational establishment would have found easy to deal with. During my first eighteen years, I was uncommunicative, uncooperative, perverse and contrary to degrees that are difficult to put into words, particularly in my early years. As I approached adulthood I gradually learned to be a more social animal, but at the time I entered Chetham's I must have seemed like I was from another planet.

It is widely accepted that those with an unusual skill - one that requires compulsive repetition to hone and develop it, such as music - tend to be compulsive in other ways too. If you turn that on its head, if a child has obsessive or compulsive personality traits to whatever degree, the sort of activities that require compulsive repetition to hone and develop them, such as music, will tend to attract that child. It could be argued that obsessive compulsion is essential in order to excel in anything, with which I am inclined to agree. But musical performance, like sports, needs so much in the way of automatic response that obsessive self-training and repetition of the physical movements required at an early age is a sine qua non. That compulsiveness tends to make one very introvert, and to indulge in all manner of strange hobbies.

This syndrome was very much in evidence during my childhood, and that was what Chetham's had to deal with. Although I could get by quite well in most of my school subjects because of my memory, I was basically disinterested in any others outside of music and maths, which were all-consuming. I was very involved in certain other things, but they were hobbies, rather than school subjects. Some of the teachers banded their

heads against various brick walls until one or two of them fell over - Deo gratias, as Haydn would say.

But I also had a series of strange collecting habits:

I created an encyclopaedic filing system of the complete Manchester City Transport Department bus routes, street by street, memorised it thoroughly (significantly in numerical order) and was strangely bothered by the fact that there was no Number 1.

I studied the Manchester A-Z street-plan endlessly, to the point that I knew it as well, if not better than, any taxi driver, and then started on the rather more complex London A-Z.

I did the same with the UK Ministry of Transport road numbers and routes, and was bothered by the absence of an A14, an A42 and an A99 (the gaps have since been filled, but I am now disturbed by the non-existence of an M7...)

I had been an ardent train-spotter since my very early years, usually along with several other anoraks, but sometimes alone.

At the same time, encouraged by my godfather, who was a member of the Magic Circle, I also developed healthier - albeit still compulsive - interests in conjuring, hand-shadowgraphy and astronomy.

My social skills were, shall we say, at their formative stage. And it must be said that my comprehensive knowledge of the UK road system has proved useful in my professional life in a way that was unplanned. The Manchester bus routes have proved less useful, given that I left the area nearly forty years ago, and most of the numbers have changed anyway. [There is still no Number 1, so I am told. Hmmm...]

Having said that, at Chorlton Park Primary School I had made several friends, and had been nurtured very well. There was little bullying, because whenever it reared its head it was dealt with severely, and there was a certain strictness and friendly firmness in the teaching methods that produced excellent results. I owe a huge amount to the people at my primary school for their deep concern and positive guidance towards the profession I entered.

At Chetham's, the practical result of my introvert nature was that, although I was paraded in public several times almost as a mascot for the school's musical ethos, I was never invited to be involved in personal interaction with anyone outside the school, including members of the governing board.

Thus, I got to perform dozens of times as a star pianist representing the school, including, at the annual Free Trade Hall concerts, Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto in 1967 and Tchaikovsky's First Concerto in 1968. I was required to 'happen to be practising' in the sixth form study block when Yehudi Menuhin (who had founded his own famous specialist school of music a few years before) was being shown round the school in 1969. I did the same when Ted Heath visited just after he won the 1970 General Election. I was also requisitioned to play a concert for Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother in the same year.

However, in photographs of the time - of which there are hundreds in the school archives - with the exception of the group pictures of the whole school and those of complete years, I am not aware of a single one in which I appear. I never got to mingle with anyone from the

outside in any way that the school felt was appropriate. For example, I didn't get to talk to Menuhin - I was just there to play the conveniently placed (the day before his tour) upright piano as he passed through, and I could only look on with sad envy as some of my more conversational contemporaries were introduced to him and photographed with him. I have always looked back with regret that I was so introvert; I was left with the impression that the school considered that I could never be let loose on figures of importance to them without embarrassing them with awkward silences - that is if that really was the reason.

I only relate this to illustrate that I realise that whatever negatives I experienced at Chetham's - in particular the bullying that dominated my first two years or so at the school - I am fully aware that I was probably a difficult customer to deal with. On the one hand I was an asset to the school as a precocious performer at a time when its emphasis on music was becoming more and more important to its future. On the other it seems that I was never considered as any other kind of advocate or example of a happy and fulfilled schoolboy; until the middle of my third year, I wasn't one.

Most kids are happier in their primary education than in their secondary, because of growing pains, the development of ambition, the spectre of big examinations and decision-making etc. in the latter. However, it was obvious from before I can even remember that I was destined to be a musician. Thus growing pains were all overshadowed by other pains, mainly to do with not fitting in and the ubiquitous bullying that I encountered immediately I entered Chetham's.

## **5. Bullying**

Here is a link to a separate section regarding this issue. I consider it to have been by far the worst aspect of my experience at the school, at least until I was well into my third year. Without it, I am sure that I would have had a wonderful time, because the school had so much to offer; with it, on a daily basis for about two and a half years, I dreaded going. If readers prefer to skip it, as it is very autobiographical and somewhat bitterly cathartic, I entirely understand. [LINK](#)

## **6. Social Change in the 1960s**

My time at Chetham's spanned the lion's share of the 1960s - a period during which society underwent a profound change from the aftermath of post-war austerity, through the affluent time summed up famously by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, when he used the phrase "You have never had it so good", to one characterised by a wider generation gap than ever before, seemingly endless protest on the part of my generation, the Hippies, the drugs revolution, the advent of progressive rock music and the 'promiscuous society' (aided by the wide increase in the use of The Pill). Parallel to this, my overriding retrospective impression of my school career is one of a drastic seven year decline in discipline, both administered and self.

In 1964, at the age of eleven, I was becoming somewhat aware of current affairs - my parents and wider family talked endlessly in front of me about them, and we had had a family tradition for as long as I can remember of always listening to BBC Home Service (the future Radio 4) radio news together. I didn't take in all of what was happening, but there were exceptions.

Just to put the time at which I entered the school into historical context:

The Cuban Missile Crisis had been two years earlier in 1962.

The year later, 1963, had seen the assassination of JFK (during the same week as the first broadcast episode of Doctor Who, which I vividly remember being terrified by, and even more by the second episode).

The Great Train Robbery had also taken place that summer.

The Beatles had hit the big time - which was the precursor of the degree to which pop music could influence the younger generation in a way never seen before.

The winter of 1963-64 was the second severest and longest of the 20th Century, and, to date, of my lifetime.

In 1964 Harold Wilson's Labour Party won the General Election after thirteen years of Tory rule (much to the chagrin of the adult members of the Donohoe family), The Death Penalty was finally abolished in the UK, China tested its first atomic bomb, Winston Churchill resigned from Parliament in 1964 and died in 1965, and Ian Smith of Rhodesia declared U.D.I. (Unilateral Declaration of Independence [from Great Britain]).

These events were for sure momentous and heralded the end of an era, but I don't think many people realised the true extent of the gigantic social change that was about to hit the western world.

It was against this backdrop that I left Primary School and went to Chetham's.

### **Appearance**

One of the more obvious symptoms of the laxness that descended over those next few years was the decline in smartness and the relaxation in the strictness with which our appearance was enforced. This was in parallel with the rest of society.

### **Hair**

Protocol at the end of any break or lunchtime demanded that all the boys up to and including the fifth form line up in year order on the schoolyard (known as 'The Quad' at Linbury Court). At the end of the mid-morning break, the sixth-form prefects were charged with the responsibility of examining the haircuts of the younger boys. If anyone was found to have anything straying beyond the confines of an army-style short back and sides, they were either singled out and given lines to write, or 'slipped'. The residents were sent off to have their hair ruthlessly cut to conform to regulations by a local barber. Said local barber had an arrangement with the school, and rejoiced in the name of Sweeney Todd. The day boys usually had a day's grace to get their hair dealt with at home, but if they failed they were also sent to Sweeney Todd - something I managed to avoid completely; given that Sweeney's would - deliberately by arrangement with the school - make one look like a convict, I was prepared to go to a local barber near home or to take the namby-pamby option and get my mother to do it for me.

### **Uniform**

At the same time, total strictness was applied to the wearing of school uniform. We were not allowed any variant at all upon the basic requirements. The school-cap was required at

all times outside school until the end of the fifth form. Blazer, tie (displaying which of the three 'houses' you belonged to), grey socks and lace-up shoes were absolutely without variation, and total tidiness of dress was expected on pain of corporal punishment.

There was a daily shoe inspection before assembly. I was lax beyond belief with shoe cleanliness, and although I was badgered by my parents to clean them every evening, I regularly managed to get out of it. I used to wipe them with a handkerchief as soon as I got out of my father's car at the top end of Fennel Street. [There was no way I dared let him near the school, as I religiously conformed to the universal human teenage instinct of never being seen to admit to having parents; thus I never let him drive me as near to the school as outside the iconic gatehouse] The result was that my shoes remained filthy but smeared, and my handkerchiefs regularly looked like the inside of a baby's nappy. Around once a week, the state of my shoes led to my being singled out as a disgrace, resulting in humiliation, sometime having to write out hundreds of lines, and occasionally receiving some kind of corporal punishment - none of which made me any better at shoe cleanliness, for a reason I cannot explain.

### **The gatehouse, security and disappearing violins**

[As an aside, note that there was no security worth speaking of at all. The above-mentioned gatehouse now houses 24 hour security guards and a barrier across the vehicle entrance, and enforces a signing-in procedure plus the summoning of escorts for visitors. In 1964 it was a simple cobbled entrance, open to the world. In addition there was a large gate wide enough for Mr. T's school bus at the opposite corner of the quad, with a pedestrian gate at the side - this was also unlocked and unbarred. Behind the new block that housed the first four form rooms, there was a small gate - now blocked - which I used every day once I had discovered it.

I imagine that the present day security arrangements were in place before modern PC requirements came along, and perhaps stem from an occasion whilst I was still at the school when a couple of blokes waltzed in empty-handed, and left with two valuable violins - indeed, I heard that two of the boys politely held the gate open for them as several thousand pounds worth of violin disappeared for ever.]

Boys in the first year (now known as Year Seven) were not allowed to wear long trousers, and in the third year (Year Nine) not allowed to wear short ones. What happened in the second year (Year Eight) was the one concession to choice - we were allowed either short or long trousers to ease the transition.

In retrospect, I am not complaining about this strictness, mind; as an adult I became an ardent believer in school uniform and pride in self-presentation (I feel the same about concert dress), and although I hated it at the time, I am very glad that such discipline was applied. I openly admit to being a scruffy sod in everyday situations, but when any kind of occasion - e.g. visiting friends, going to a restaurant, being a member of any kind of audience, etc. I believe very strongly that dressing well enhances the occasion. I cite the school's strictness merely as an example of the way things were in 1964.

Then there was the Tudor uniform, an outfit that dated back to the Seventeenth Century, when the school was founded; as the Tudor period ended with the death of Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1601, and Chetham's was founded in 1653, why this traditional dress is not known as Stuart Uniform, I have no idea. I believe it is still worn at Chetham's on special occasions, so it is one of the few surviving traditions from earlier times. It was very often

worn in my day, particularly if you were resident or a member of the Cathedral Choir. The first time I wore it was probably on Founder's Day 1964, but the time I can most vividly remember was for the 1967 annual Free Trade Hall concert, in which I was playing Beethoven's Third Concerto. I couldn't believe how uncomfortable it was - it felt like a home-made overcoat constructed from thick cardboard.

By 1971, laxness in the enforcement of the school's dress code had led to an anything-goes attitude from many of us - myself included. What we got away with in terms of hairstyles and additions and variants upon the uniform was by then extraordinary. What was even more extraordinary was the contrast between then and the year in which I had entered the school seven years before. School-caps had become a thing of the past - in my case, along with hundreds of others, having been ceremoniously deposited in the River Irwell some time before (this was a long-standing tradition for boys reaching the end of Year Eleven, as the cap had not been compulsory in the Sixth Form) - ties were usually at half-mast, shirts were almost without fail hanging out over the front of the trousers, blazers were taken off and flung anywhere when the weather was a bit warm, socks were any-old-how, and the shoes worn were of any style we fancied.

And as for the hairstyles...There were those who did not choose to take advantage of the laxity shown by the school authorities, but they were few and far between, and I was not one of them. By the time I was in the fifth form (Year Eleven), my hair had become a panoramic vision of unkemptness - a representation of chaos and a practical demonstration of its theory. I washed it every day (unlike the rest of me). It spread outwards and downwards like some kind of ginger coloured shapeless monster, and had so many cheap and nasty products in it - most memorably something called Baye Rum, that was supposed to encourage growth - that smelling it was like being sprayed in the face by fly-killer. The parting was on the wrong side, and the single wave on each side of my head, reminiscent of a bird from one of flocks of pot ones that used to congregate on the inner walls of certain houses, gave my head the appearance of having large hairy red wings. Going to bed was like sharing a pillow with something from another planet. This was definitely not an improvement on short back and sides, but it felt comfortable at the time, given that almost everyone under a certain age had grotesque hair by then.

Bearing in mind that the rules had not changed officially at all, and that all that had was the degree to which they were applied and obeyed, this was just one example of the decline.

## **7. Cheshire County Council**

A period of doubt concerning my continuing being at Chetham's dominated the end of my second year (Year Eight), brought about by my family deciding to move from the South Manchester suburb of Chorlton-cum-Hardy to the then village of Bredbury. Situated at the beginning of the foothills of the Pennines on the way out from Stockport, it was at that time in what was known as the Cheshire Tongue, an area that got its name from its shape, as it was geographically incongruous that it should be in Cheshire at all. Nevertheless, it was outside the borders of Manchester, and this potentially affected the future of my direct grant to the school.

Manchester City Council was then a great supporter of Chetham's, at a time when Cheshire was steadfastly refusing to give any financial help at all. After all, the county did have King's School Macclesfield, and the Queen's School Chester, as well as many other independent schools, and both had fine musical traditions.

My torch-bearing father would not be told by Cheshire County Council what to do, and fought tooth and nail for the county to take over the grant. The short version of the story is that he introduced me to several large, pompous and self-important councillors in assorted Conservative Clubs in the area (the County of Cheshire was of course at that time as Tory as they come), presenting me as some kind of child prodigy - a hat that I didn't like wearing and still have problems with the concept - followed by a meeting with the Director of Education in Chester; he succeeded in persuading some of the councillors to attend the 1967 Free Trade Hall concert in which I played Beethoven 3. His tenacity - or, as some would say, his dog-with-bone syndrome - paid off, and the grant was transferred.

The reason this story is significant is that, once this change of heart had taken place, Cheshire became one of Chetham's' staunchest supporters, and a very large number of pupils came from that county. I feel quite proud to have set that particular ball rolling, even if in the long term it would have happened anyway.

The Music Advisor for Cheshire - Ronald Mallaband - came to the school some time later, to ask if the school could provide a piano soloist for Prokofiev's Concerto No. 1 for the 1970 Cheshire Youth Orchestra Summer course. I presented myself, prompted by Gerry Littlewood, as a volunteer, and managed to do a deal with him that included my joining the orchestra - firstly as a viola player, then as a timpanist as well as being soloist. I thus did my first professional performance as a soloist with that orchestra, as well as playing viola, timpani, and percussion in various other pieces in the same program. The CYO played a very important part in my early musical life (I have recently very proudly become its Patron), and it would never have happened without the Chetham's/Cheshire link. [ <http://www.cheshireyouthorchestra.co.uk/> ]

In 1996, when the University of Warwick honoured me with a Doctorate, I had the surprise pleasure of meeting John Tomlinson, the man who had made the final decision to accept me as a grantee thirty years before. He had later become Director of Education for Cheshire, and then moved on through many different posts to become the University of Warwick's Professor of Education. [ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2005/aug/30/guardianobituaries.obituaries> ] We had a good time reminiscing about how difficult Cheshire had been to persuade, and what a bloody nuisance and a thorn in the council's side my father had been.

## **8. Guardian Article - the spectre of change**

As observed earlier, the shift in society's values that took place in during the 1960s was reflected very noticeably and in an extreme way within the culture of Chetham's.

Around 1965-6 there was much talk on the TV news, and between the members of my wider family, of the dreaded planned abolition of Grammar and Secondary Modern schools and the introduction of Comprehensive education by the Labour Government.

I was aware that most of the adults I knew, including many of my own wider family, were something of a typical collection of victims of the Daily Mail/Sunday Express type of anti-Socialist (Negative Conservative) propaganda. They were fearful of 'Reds under the bed' - Soviet KGB interference in our country stirring up the unions against the establishment and provoking strikes, the Labour Government of Harold Wilson and George Brown taking us 'closer to a dictatorship', centralising government, lowering standards and undermining excellence in favour of the mediocre and bowing down to the unions.

Those of my readers who remember the era will recognise the sort of thing: "'What's yours is mine, and what's mine is my own"; that's what Labourites believe!", some would say. "The world 'asn't bin the same since them Russians sent that there bomb up", was something I overheard on an 81 bus one day. Alf Garnett had similarly erudite views. "Your darlin' 'Arold let's 'em come 'ere, tryin' to turn us into bloody Commies", and other similarly penetrative insights abounded.

"I don't know what the world's coming to!" was a phrase I heard regularly in my youth uttered by older people who had lived through both World Wars, The Korean War, The General Strike, and the Depression of the 1930s, when they watched horror-struck at the way the 'youth of today' wore their hair long, following the trend-setters of The Beatles. I didn't know what the world was coming to either, but I was more concerned with the Vietnam War and the atomic bomb than the length of a few adolescents' hair. Now that I am myself sixty, I am attempting to watch out for tendencies to look back with affectionate rose-tinted specs on the 1960s and 70s. So far I have done OK - it is the 1890s and 1920s I long for....

I hasten to add that my own family discussions were not on the above level, but nevertheless my people were died-in-the-wool Tories, and very anti the Wilson government.

I was beginning to show signs of disagreeing with virtually everything my parents said - as one does, or at least did during that era - so I became a typical adolescent beanbag socialist, without having the faintest idea what I was talking about. It was the fierce arguments that ensued that imprinted the issue on my memory, rather than the actual content.

The mutual ranting of the family inevitably began to include much fear of Comprehensiveisation - which was deemed a Soviet KGB-inspired Communist plot by large swathes of the great British public. At the same time as this, the government was working aggressively against the principle of Direct Grant and Independent Schools. This threatened to affect the future of Chetham's hugely, and was a major topic of conversation. The school authorities were also deep in discussion, albeit in secret, about how the school was going to field the forthcoming pressure to effectively either close, or be taken over by the state.

At some point during my fourth year, an article appeared in The Guardian, which, as I remember it, had all the hallmarks of an expedient leak, revealing that the school had plans to become an officially specialist music school, with girls being accepted into the school for the first time in its 300 year history.

I am sure that there was a lot more to it behind the scenes than it simply being a way of avoiding the government axe, but that was the way it appeared from the outside. Members of staff and parents reacted mostly negatively. Responses ranged from total horror and the threat of immediate withdrawal from the school, through concern that subjects other than music would suffer, to anger that we had all been kept in the dark and that the first we had heard of it was through the press. Not very much in the way of enthusiasm abounded, and it is a miracle that the school successfully pushed through the gigantic change that it entailed. The hard core - the older members of staff, the governors and feoffees - had a vision of a very special and prestigious school to rival the best music schools in the world. They thankfully won the day. However, one can sympathise with the fears, particularly on the part of people either studying or teaching non-musical subjects.

After many acrimonious meetings, push it through they did, and the new Chetham's School of Music was born in 1969, as I entered the lower sixth form (Year Twelve).

## **9. A New Era**

Suddenly there were girls. Such creatures had rarely entered the real lives of most of us, with the occasional exception of those boys amongst us with sisters. [Said sisters would sometimes attend school social functions, and as a result became sex-goddesses for a multitude of boys at the same time. One in particular I can remember very well, as by the time I was in the fifth form I had become a close friend of her brother. She had had a whale of a time - enjoying the attentions of so many boys - including myself - vying for her company that she must have felt like a movie star.] The arrival of girls into the school itself diluted the power such outsiders had over us, and certain of the new intake were so desperately popular that the whole school was turned upside down by the tornado of hormones that was unleashed. In a mixed school that was used to having the two genders side by side, this would not have been an issue. It was the three hundred and seventeen years since 1653 of having been an ivory-tower boys-only school that made the situation piquant. [Our mixed primary education in almost almost all cases seemed to precede the advent of the hormones that caused the problem. In my case, it was almost as if a monster was created without warning during the summer of 1964. This was followed by five years of mostly complete gender isolation. And then the floodgates opened.]

My happiest time was during the sixth form years (Years Twelve and Thirteen). It has to be said that the school, the world outside, and my own personal conflicts were all going through a very turbulent time. Chetham's had turned officially into a specialist school, and was itself experiencing teething troubles, it had accepted girls for the first time, and the old guard was somewhat sidelined by the new intake. But I still had a great time.

Meanwhile, the outside world had polarised between the WW2 generation and the hippies, the Left had become stronger, strikes were on the increase, the Heath government was being undermined, the Vietnam War was in full swing, The Beatles had disbanded, the largest rock festival to date took place on the Isle of Wight, Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, 500,000 people were killed in a flood in Bangladesh, the UK currency was decimalised, Spaghetti Junction in Birmingham was opened, and John Lill shared the gold medal of the piano section of the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow [I know a lot of other things happened too, but these are the ones I was aware of at the time.]

None of this was as important to my enjoyment of my sixth form years as the fact that the bullying at school had stopped - not just because I was now one of the elders, and therefore not vulnerable to bullying any more, but mainly because the culture had changed.

I stress that in both its manifestations, the school had its difficult aspects, as well as its unique and memorable ones. In its new form I had problems with the idea of indulging young people in their favourite subject and allowing them to ignore other aspects of education, thereby burning their boats. I say this as someone who has been obsessed with music for my whole life, and for whom, until the sixth form, other academic subjects were largely an irritating distraction. However, I am very glad indeed that I did go to a school where, at least for the first five years, excellence in other subjects was insisted upon, and I did receive an all-round education - albeit against my will, and sometimes taught in an

unusual way. I feel very grateful towards those who coaxed, forced, intimidated and sometimes terrorised me into involving myself in English, French, history, etc, and the sciences earlier on. I ultimately entered the profession that I had dreamed of as a child and have had a profoundly rewarding musical career. But, despite this, and that many non-musicians' expectations that we musicians have by definition to be totally single-minded from being a child, I am particularly glad of my awareness of the English language and of Twentieth Century history. Both have become a very keen interest in my later years. Since my first-hand involvement with both Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, I have become extremely interested in Cold War history, and I owe it to history master Penry Williams in particular that I have grown up with the sort of frame of mind that helps me question the impressions of that era, and to go some way towards seeing the realities.

The Chetham's of some years later had a different attitude to academic achievement. As well as excellence in musical standards, the importance of the study of other subjects was acknowledged many years ago, and it is now an all-round place of excellence.

To précis what I considered the differences between the two eras in order of importance:

Girls were introduced for the first time since 1653.

Academic standards temporarily went down.

Bullying largely ceased.

The attitude of the staff became much less authoritarian, in line with the outside world.

Discipline plummeted, but freedom of expression increased.

The school tended to treat those who had already been pupils before the change as 'residual commitments' - a phrase used by John Manduell in a similar situation at the Royal Northern College of Music, when the old Royal Manchester College and the Northern School of Music were amalgamated in 1972, and a new degree was created. I have thus had two experiences of being a 'residual commitment'. It is something I don't really recommend in retrospect, given that it is in the interests of the establishment that residual commitments are sidelined in favour of the new intake who represent the positive change being sold to the public. I cannot speculate as to the way those boys felt who had no interest in music but who had joined Chetham's at the age of eleven at any time between 1963 and 1968. They surely would have felt marginalised, and, assuming they didn't leave until the end of the sixth form, would have increasingly felt so until they went on to further education seven years after they had joined.

[Here is a link to a further document consisting of memories of certain individual staff members, each of whom had a profound and lasting effect on me, and I am sure many others.](#) You will find essays on each of the following extraordinary individuals, and I would be very interested to read any responses from contemporaries who also remember them:

The House Governor, Harry Vickers  
Matron, Audrey Vickers  
Gerald Littlewood  
Donald Clarke  
Penry Williams  
Brian Peters

Robert McFarlane  
Jonathan Bielby  
Margaret Williams

## **10. Episodes and anecdotes**

Further individual stories from so long ago of events at the school are largely unnecessary here. In most cases, you had to be there, and in any case, they are bound to be very personal, subjective anecdotes that are more about me than the school. However, there are one or two exceptions that will help set the scene of the era. That they were extremely important to me during my formative years is secondary.

### **Sung Grace at assembly**

"Lord, Lord, we thank thee for these great blessings, provided by our founder, with such paternal care. O give us thankful hearts. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen."

I arrived to find a long-standing tradition of a grace that was sung, in unison and without accompaniment, before every school meal. The master in charge of the meal would nominate someone randomly to give the note - "Roebuck; the note." [John Stanley Roebuck was a resident contemporary of mine, later Head Boy and now a very big wheel in the hotel business in the North of England.] What was actually meant was two notes. Said note-giver would intone a rising major third to the words "Lord, Lord", the first note of which was obviously usually plucked out of the air as very few of us had perfect pitch. From having seen a manuscript of the Grace in the Chetham's Library after I had left the school, I believe the authentic version of this traditional grace was intended to start on a G, but it could have been any note at all.

[As an aside, I don't think I was asked for the note once in all the time I was at the school. Oh, could I have had fun.... Later on in my third year, there developed the trick of trying to sing a note that was not so high that the mostly non-musicians on the staff would realise, but that was as high as one could get away with, so that the assembled company could not sing it, and ended up sounding like they were all simultaneously having a red hot poker gently slid up them - either that or the more musically aware ones entered a world of alternating between chest register and falsetto (those who were old enough) or a strange series of leaps up and down of a seventh or so in order to be in a cope-able register.

Yet later, when I became the daily assembly pianist, I continued this trend by occasionally transposing the hymns up as far away from the original key as I could, so that the hymn-singing would sound like a fox had gotten loose amongst several hundred chickens.]

Sadly I never did get to accompany the grace, as no one whom I was aware of knew that it was originally harmonised. It would have been impossible anyway. One extraordinary aspect of it was a pulseless plain-chant character, as if it had no time signature, and yet everyone seemed to know how it went, and we did succeed in singing it together. It was picked up by the new boys entirely by rote, and had been copied across generations.

The manuscript bore no resemblance at all to the one that had been sung at every meal for countless decades. For me it was the most vivid first hand example of how melody passed between a majority who do not read music gradually changes, in the same way that a folk-song does. Percy Grainger would have had a field-day.

Of course, the main reason for its hurried nature - in particular the Amen at the end - could have been that the boys were keen to partake of the delectable fare, provided for them 'with such paternal care' (see below).

Here is a document containing what I dimly remember of the grace as it was sung, underneath which is my even dimmer memory of what was written in the library manuscript (which I only saw once). In the case of the latter, a simple harmonic accompaniment that may easily be imagined had been added. However, throughout the whole of my time at the school, the grace was sung without accompaniment; it has to be said that anyone who could successfully negotiate the dodgem course that was the boys rhythmic solution would have been a genius.

[If anyone has any idea who wrote the grace, I would be very grateful for the information.]

### **Food**

While we are on the subject of lunch, the quality of the food served up at Chetham's during those seven years is one of the few reasons I was glad not to be resident. It is almost a cliché to moan about the quality of school food, and I would avoid doing so if the Chetham's offering had been anything more than reasonable. But, I am sorry - it wasn't. It was low quality and, although the portions were of reasonable size, one always felt hungry very quickly afterwards.

Yet another rule had relaxed by the time I got to the sixth form, and we non-residents were allowed to bring in sandwich lunches in order to avoid having to pay for, and eat, the substances provided.

I have sampled the food provided nowadays at Chetham's, and it is usually excellent. I also recall the food provided by Manchester City Council at my primary school, which was hardly Cordon Bleu, but was nevertheless perfectly good, and sometimes really nice. In addition, its content was strictly controlled by government for its nutritional value, as primary school lunch was the only decent meal some kids received in the 1950s and 60s. [I don't suppose it is much different now, and I will never forget the media coverage of some parents' reaction to Jamie Oliver's attempt to improve state school kids' nutritional intake.]

I found it difficult to persuade my parents of the less-than-appetising nature of the lunches, and thus to convince them that they should stop paying for school food and give me sandwiches. So one day I wrapped a sausage up in a paper towel and took it home. Apart from the hard time I received for not wrapping the offending sausage up properly and thus soiling the inside of my blazer pocket with the unidentifiable red substance in which it had been served, it was a good move; the sausage-meat (in the broadest sense) concerned was so alien that it should have been in a museum, and was in a skin that could have been easily mistaken for Clingfilm. [To be more realistic, I imagine that the food was simply the cheapest available from outside sources.]

I got my way with the sandwiches. However, one of my closest friends used to beg me on a daily basis for some of them, and eventually I got my mother to provide me with twice as many as I needed - he seemed permanently hungry, and, coincidentally, a resident.

### **Noye's Fludde**

Benjamin Britten's Noye's Fludde is wonderfully written and designed for young people and school performance, and is at the same time inclusive, eminently practical, demanding to exactly the right degree, and extremely moving and memorable. When I was twelve, the 1965 production by Chetham's in Manchester Cathedral was the climax of many weeks of preparation, both in terms of music rehearsal, and in costume and theatrical design.

Those chosen to play the parts of the animals in the performance also had to create their own masks. The Voice of God was played by Brian Goring - an upper sixth former with a great booming speaking voice, who was tragically killed in a mountaineering accident in the Cairngorms very soon after leaving school. Mrs Noye was played by a professional singer based in Saddleworth - Edith Chatterton. The conductor was John Gittins, who was teaching A level music when I first arrived at the school, but who sadly died at the age of 33 soon afterwards. Noye - or Noah - was played by the extraordinary Gerald Littlewood - see above. Two members of staff - chemistry master (!) Donald Clarke, and Head of Chetham's Junior School Brian Gee - played the piano duet part. As far as I can recall, those apart, along the 'professional' string quartet and organ, boys from the school played all other characters as well as the instrumental parts i.e. Noye's sons, the Gossips, the animals, recorders, handbells, etc plus the rest of the orchestra.

I was a mouse.....

My homemade mouse mask didn't fit on my head properly, and, during the section depicting the entrance of the animals into the Ark, I somehow managed to get the eye holes totally mis-aligned with my eyes. Flailing around blind, as I attempted to make my way to the boat, I fell off the temporary platform that had been built for the occasion onto the cathedral floor. I have rarely felt pain like it in my life, and whilst I was lying on the floor, the animals minus one mouse continued their procession into the Ark, two by two plus one mouse, and it seemed were completely unaware of my lying there. Despite the temporary agony in my left arm, there was obviously no damage, and I managed to cover it up at home, as I felt humiliated. No one ever knew except for my fellow mouse, who thought it hilarious, particularly when I was later verbally savaged by a veritable menagerie of other creatures for arriving at the Ark separately from my rodent partner.

Having said that, the experience of the performance and the long lead up to it was one of those occasions that helped to cement my desire to be a professional musician. Whenever one re-hears or plays a piece of music one got to know inside out during one's formative years, it is like returning to an old friend. Under Gerald Littlewood's direction, we all got to know Noye's Fludde from first note to last, plus all the production issues, the religious significance, and a lot about Benjamin Britten and his pacifism. One of our family friends somehow got to know a lot of the details of this forthcoming production, and got me to play through large chunks of the work (specifically the flood and the central hymn) on her piano every time we visited her - this continued for several months after the performance. Even though, at the age of eleven, I was only a mouse and really jealous of the boys playing the piano duet part, I regard this as having given me a major opportunity, of which, to this day, I can remember every moment.

[Gerald Littlewood as Noye, with Mrs. Noye and the Gossips. Photos by Harold Donohoe.]

[You will notice the school emblem - the Gryphon - hanging over the entrance to the ark. The school motto is probably written around the edge, although it is not properly visible in the photo. The motto was 'Quod Tuum Tene'. My O Level Latin, taught to me at Chetham's

by one Martin Brewis, tells me that it translates as 'What you have, keep'. This has always struck me as a less than charitable mantra, but perhaps what it really means is that once you believe in something you should stick to it. I notice that it has been changed in recent years to 'Love to live to play'. Yes, well....]

In 2013 Chetham's toured Noye's Fludde around the UK to celebrate the Britten Centenary, so it feels like somehow things have come full circle.

I am sure that the school presentation of the premier of John McCabe's 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' during my sixth form years, in which I played assorted percussion instruments, would have had the same impact on the younger ones who took part. There is nothing like such a project for building team spirit, giving children an exciting experience that will encourage them to explore music further, and, above all else, giving them something they will remember for life, whatever the profession they end up in. For the school to have commissioned McCabe to write this work was a very inspired move. And for composers like Britten and McCabe (Williamson, Maxwell Davies and others) to rise to that sort of challenge is very impressive.

### **The Dental Hospital**

This story unsurprisingly concerns teeth. The school provided its boys to Manchester Dental Hospital for the young dentists to treat as part of their training course. We were all free to opt out of it in favour of our own dentists, but I was one who volunteered my teeth for the student dentists to practise on.

My apprentice dentist was a certain Mr. Dobson, and I have often wondered where he ended up practicing. He did a remarkable job of overhauling my second set of teeth when I was 12 or 13, and it was he who told me that a good idea whilst he administered the anaesthetic injection and applied the drill was to think through the music I was learning at the time - a technique I have used ever since; the only drawback has been that whenever I play Beethoven's 5th Concerto, there is a section of the first movement that always conjures up a memory of a needle that felt about a metre long and a drill demolishing the interior of my back teeth.

The Dental Hospital was a bus ride away from the school. After one of my fillings, and whilst still slightly doozy with the relief of the appointment being over (I was and still am a terrible wuss over dental treatment), Mr. Dobson asked me to take back to Chetham's the whole collection of the school's dental records. I have no idea why he was required to deal with this, nor indeed why the records had to go back to the school. In addition I have no idea why he thought I was a responsible enough adolescent to entrust such a thing to - his perceptiveness was obviously flawed.

The upshot was that I left the cardboard box containing the dental records of over 600 schoolboys on the bus. I do not know if they were retrieved or not - I was told that they were permanently lost, as a result of which I was given a thousand lines ['I will always take care when given the responsibility of looking after the property of others' - or something similar] by Harry Vickers, plus a few lashes across the buttocks with a Bunsen burner tube by Senior Master, Arthur George. When I presented the thousand lines, I was told that they were untidy and I had to do them again; this happened twice i.e. I wrote out three thousand lines altogether, The Boss relented, and I was finally deemed to have paid my

debt. [I have often wondered what happened to those records; if they really did permanently disappear, presumably someone found them and kept them. Surely no one would just throw them away, as they would so obviously appear important.]

The point of the story is that I do believe that it helped to give me a definite sense of responsibility for other people's property that perhaps I would not have had otherwise. Later, as a percussionist, it was inevitable that I would borrow and lend assorted different instruments, and I found it a very heavy responsibility to look after those instruments that were not mine, and I got perhaps more upset than was really necessary when something I had lent out did not come back on time. [I found it even more upsetting when things were not returned at all - I lent a small gong and bass drum to the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra - then the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra - in 1975, and they were appropriated permanently. When I tried to retrieve them some years later, it was denied that I had lent them, and as far as I know, they are still there. I don't need them, and they were not hugely expensive, but it still makes me feel uncomfortable to think that colleagues will behave in such a way.] \*Similar things (lending books, or recordings etc - you know the sort of thing that tends to happen) bother me rather more than is seen as logical by others. Maybe it is a kind of complex borne of those three thousand lines I had to write in 1966, and I am very grateful for it - it is definitely better to be that way than the other, even though it can make one seem sometimes excessively proprietorial. Quod Tuum Tene, and all that it implies ['What you have, keep, and what isn't yours, give back.' I suppose it is a variant upon 'Never a borrower nor a lender, be'.] So being given lines does work....!

\*I have to admit that it didn't prevent me accidentally leaving a borrowed glockenspiel in a telephone box in 1973, but I did manage to get it back, unaffected, from the local police station, where a kind, upstanding citizen had handed it in. The owner never knew, although he might do now.... I have felt guilty about that ever since.

### **Bach at Bredbury Green**

My new family home in 1966 was a dormer bungalow, with my newly-acquired grand piano in the dormer that doubled as my bedroom, in the fairly leafy semi-rural (then) suburb of Bredbury. The only practical way to travel to and from school was by train from Bredbury Station to Manchester Piccadilly, with a walk of around twenty minutes at either end. I didn't walk quickly, so I am estimating around four miles a day, five days a week using my legs. Wouldn't it be great if kids did that nowadays? I didn't do sports other than cycling and running - which I was quite good at - and yet that walking habit must have had a long-term impact in later life.

My father - ever the activist - got involved, as he had done in Chorlton before, in the local amateur dramatics and the church community generally. He effected an introduction for Chetham's to the school in Bredbury Green which resulted in our giving a Baroque concert in their hall sometime in the winter of 1970. I was chosen to play harpsichord in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, amongst other things. [If this seems a little incongruous, rest assured that it was. I have played the same role in the same piece twice since, both of which were also incongruous. However, I claim that the first time was the best, as my fingers were not yet strong enough to demolish the harpsichord completely.]

I am sure the concert was a success, and although I don't remember it, I am equally sure the reciprocal one that Bredbury Green School gave at Chetham's was too. However, my most vivid memory is of part of the process of transporting the members of the Chetham's orchestra and the instruments to Bredbury Green.

I don't know how we got the harpsichord to Piccadilly Station. Nor do I know how we got it from Bredbury Station to Bredbury Green School, although I think I vaguely remember a vehicle from the host school picking us and it up. Neither do I know why a vehicle did not take us and it all the way from Chetham's to Bredbury Green. Nor do I know why we only went in the evening for the concert, having done all the rehearsals at Chetham's. All of that has sadly faded from my memory.

What I do remember is humping the harpsichord at Piccadilly Station Platform 3 into the guard's van on the suburban diesel train that covers the route, accompanied by jeering and sarcastic applause from some of the other passengers. More significantly, I remember the train breaking down approximately halfway between Brinnington and Bredbury - about a mile from our destination. It was announced that there was no chance of getting the train going again for some time. The concert was due to start within about an hour of our original estimated time of arrival, and we were stuck on the middle of an area without roads on a dead train with a double bass, several cellos, and a harpsichord, as well as several smaller instruments.

A solution was found: we somehow obtained permission from British Rail via the guard to unload everything and carry the whole bloody lot along the railway tracks to Bredbury Station.

I have often pondered the vision - Gerry Littlewood obligingly supervising and yelling constantly that we must not stray off the sleepers of the up-line (the down-line was still being used, although the trains did slow down for us), a crowd of about twelve violinists, four violists, and a flautist leading the way, carrying a very light load each, three cellists with their instruments on their backs like a family of tortoises, two boys carrying the double bass between them, and me and five kind volunteers from amongst the other passengers on the train carrying the sodding harpsichord. My little group must have looked like six pall-bearers at the funeral of an unusual being whose corpse was shaped like a giant misshapen television aerial. And you should have seen us trying to step on the sleepers without falling onto the gravel between them. Fortunately the weather was dry, although cold; if it had been a more typical Mancunian winter's evening, several instruments, particularly the harpsichord, would have been permanently damaged.

This little lot walking gingerly up the railway tracks for a mile or so in the winter evening's darkness must have seemed very eerie to anyone in the surrounding fields. When a train or two went the other way, the drivers must have been warned as they slowed down sufficiently for the passengers to rubberneck at this curious collection. I often wonder what the insurance company would have had to say if anything untoward had happened. Can you imagine such a thing taking place in the present day?

Somehow we made it, the concert went ahead, and the train back to Manchester did not break down. Even the tuning of the harpsichord wasn't irretrievably affected by its ordeal, and I am very happy to report that my playing did not reduce it to matchwood - I learned that technique much later.

A very happy event, which my father probably felt quite rightly proud to have initiated.

## **11. Conclusion**

I was going to write something about some of the friends I made whilst at Chetham's, some of whom changed my life, and with some of whom I am still in touch. However, that would be much more about me and my particular world, and less about the school. I will certainly be doing that on another occasion, but for now, I think I have written enough - almost...

I did write at the beginning of this tome that I would try to limit it to the years before Chetham's became a specialist music school in 1969. However, several times I have strayed into my sixth form years, which were the two first years of the music school. Thus the period I have been writing of finished in 1971.

To sum up my time as a pupil at Chetham's: overall I had a great formative experience, encountered some remarkable teachers, made some good friends, and learned a huge amount about life, music, society and human instinct.

I hated my first two years or so, and desperately wanted to leave, but the bullying that was tolerated explains that almost completely. I began to take things in my stride much more over the next three years, and when the girls arrived and the new school was created, I had a whale of a time. I remained something of a slightly eccentric loner, whom many found difficult to relate to, but I was happy in my strangeness.

Almost everyone's adolescent years have their fair share of trauma, and if you throw in an ivory tower existence plus a large amount of obsessiveness, the trauma factor will increase exponentially. In my case, the law of the jungle that dominated the first part of my time at Chetham's probably did me some good by stimulating a fighter instinct that I didn't know I had. Harry Vickers' philosophy vindicated? My opinion is that there are other ways to help young people learn to stand up for themselves, and that it cannot ever be a justification for turning a blind eye to bullying. But it is certainly true that we often learn more from our negative experiences than our positive ones.

I absolutely hated leaving in 1971, and missed it terribly during the next few months, until I had settled into the new experience of being a university student. I remember so many aspects, good and bad, but mostly good, and individual events from my time at Chetham's that I can honestly say that I was glad to have been there, and am proud to be associated. That my particular time straddled the enormous changes in society on the outside, plus the change from boys public school to mixed specialist music school on the inside, had its disadvantages. But it also had huge advantages, and I am very glad to have experienced it.

As ever, if you have been, thank you for reading this.