

Chapter 5 Business

W. Brown & Co My father ran Aylesbury Cattle Market and I liked what I had seen of the work that was entailed and the conviviality. On my first day I was introduced to Mr Green who would give me my task for the day, "you will need this Rogers" he said, giving me an object with a handle and a three sided blade, "come with me down to the market". Mr Green explained that on Friday there was to be a sale of attested dairy cows, today was Thursday and all the shit from the unattested fat stock sale on Wednesday had to be scrapped off the pens for tomorrow. Over to Rogers.

Glory the cattle drover lived in a hovel at Oving and talked endlessly about the wife although no woman would ever put up with him. Glory's job was to hold open the gate for animals to enter the appropriate pen after being sold. On one occasion he put four huge Galloway steers in with one little Jersey cow. Brow Pratt, cattle dealer, told him he should have more gumption than to put four huge steers in with one little cow. Another dealer commented that Glory didn't understand the word gumption, to which Glory retorted "Course I do that's the stuff you put on cows tits".

I remember that once at the cattle market I lost a very large bullock on the railway line, but I think my shining glory was when half a dozen sheep escaped. At that time at the top of market square Aylesbury, James Walker, the jewellers had a very smart shop with a heavily recessed entrance, before entering the shop proper. Chased by young Rogers the sheep headed towards the top of the square and went straight for James Walker. The entrance way funnelled them in and, most unfortunately, it was a hot summer's day and the door was open. Frightened sheep are not good news for jewellers' carpets.

The zenith of my dealing achievements was reached at Aylesbury Cattle Market on a Wednesday. On the previous Monday I had been entrusted with the job of selling the day old chicks at Tring. The pullets were in great demand and made a shilling each. No one wanted the cocks and it occurred to me that 240 birds had to be good value for one pound. Father was not too happy to see me feeding them watered milk on the lounge carpet, but the birds prospered. By Wednesday they were stronger and amazingly all had survived. I put them in the auction and there were two keen bidders. One had an ancient tattered and oiled coat, held round him by binder twine. He eventually bought the chicks for seven pence each! I later reflected that Natt Grossmith who went on to found a huge poultry empire did not often concede a six hundred percent profit over two days. Further reflection told me that there was no doubt that he had a substantial profit earmarked for those chicks.

I was also under instruction from Harry Clark, a surveyor and master draughtsman at the Tring office. He would take two days to draw a geometrical North point to adorn a plan he had prepared of someone's landed estate. One wealthy client commissioned Harry to prepare a series of plans on best parchment vellum: not till later did he discover that they were being converted into lampshades!

In a year or two I was doing all manner of things: surveying, property negotiating, helping in the market or whatever. One Wednesday was spent in the market as usual and I learnt that Mr Jones had come in to see me to buy a house in Limes Avenue, but as I wasn't there he bought it from Percy Black, who would collect the £100 commission that I had missed. Decision taken to spend no more time messing around in the market for five shillings commission. Hugh Dix was my mentor at this time, not surprisingly known as Tubby in view of his vast size. A man with a sense of humour, a love of people, with an ability to mix at any level

and a desire to natter on forever if it was a case of reminiscing about the past. He was a man of direct action: at one time at around 1.30pm I was in his office when his wife Phyllis phoned saying that he was late for lunch. As she rabbitted on he moved the phone in a large arc to replace it in its cradle and so silence her. I think Hugh would have found his funeral arrangements hilarious. On the occasion, Wingrave Parish Church was packed to overflowing and the cortege was at the house only two hundred yards distant. However, Ron Miller was extracting some dead elms and the timber lorry got stuck, blocking in the cortege. Hugh eventually turned up twenty minutes late for his funeral with everyone looking at their watch declaring that the old bugger was delayed yet again.

In his capacity as Sheriff's Officer, Hugh Dix had to seize various goods in security for judgement debts and, if not paid, then sell the goods. I remember he once sold a boxed Spitfire Fighter for eleven thousand pounds. On another occasion two engines for formula one racing cars sat in our offices for about two months until the debt was cleared. That particular racing firm still exists and is now prominent in the field of Formula 1 motor racing.

I recollect that my first professional assignment with Hugh was to value a house on the Southcourt Council Estate which, surprisingly for those days, was being bought by the tenant. We duly rolled up mid way through the morning and Mrs Mop answered the door with her hair in rollers, "we are from the insurance company, come to do your valuation" says Hugh, "but you can't come in without an appointment I haven't made the beds yet". "Gal - that's alright as long as you've emptied the piss pots". Oh you'd better come in then".

It wouldn't happen today, but the variety of activities I have undertaken under the broad banner of surveying is pretty

wide. From cattle market to furniture auction room, right through every aspect of estate agency, advertising, structural surveys, building society surveys, land surveys, inventories, schedules of condition, planning applications, planning appeals, rating work, negotiations with the Inland Revenue, rent reviews, letting and sale of shops, offices and factories, measuring slag heaps, applications before the licensing justices (I remember one of these as a tall order since I had to visit and comment on all licenced premises within 1 mile of the application site which was in the centre of Aylesbury. I think twenty five hostelrys were involved and after my first nine half pints of beer I had to delegate some of the work.) Another of my lessons of life was learned at the public enquiry into the Aylesbury Town Map 1958. At the auction room we had a porter, Gower, who owned a couple of acres in Buckingham Road. The draft map showed this land to be zoned for car parking and I suggested he try and get that changed to residential. He agreed to this but, being without funds, it was agreed that I would fight the case for him on the footing that, if successful, I would sell the land for the usual commission. The enquiry went on for a week or so and high level most eloquent barristers marched to and fro in their finery and mounted complicated cases for change. Rather nervously I put my case and asked the Planning Officer a few simple questions. When the final copy of the map was eventually published there was only one change of substance and that was the re-allocation of Gowers' field. The second lesson I learnt on the same outing was that Mr Gower then did not hold true to his agreement with me and I didn't get paid.

Christmas office parties were the highlight of the year. There would be a one hundred per cent turnout at Tring Hill Cafe and after a fair amount of imbibing, games would commence. Teams from Aylesbury, Tring, Berkhamstead and Hemel Hempstead would participate with gusto and various things would be done with balloons and a teaspoon

on a length of string. The final game never varied; bonus points for the team producing the trousers of Richard Cole, Senior Partner. I remember that at one party my guest was to be a married lady; she would not remove her wedding ring so put a plaster over it. Goodness knows what they all thought. I think it was perhaps at the same function that in my earnestness to compete in one of the games my foot caught an occasional table and brought forty- six glasses of sherry crashing to the floor.

One of the tasks I had inherited was to run a fortnightly furniture auction. This was held in a dilapidated corrugated iron shed in Church Street, Aylesbury. It made no money and created an enormous amount of hassle. I campaigned for several years before I managed to get the firm to agree to close it. From my days in the auction room is born my dislike of Victoriana. Countless suites of furniture would come in comprising a chaise longue together with matching chairs. Again and again I would ask a shilling and more often than not there was no response so down to the dump it went. The occasional suite might make as much as five shillings if it was of exceptional quality and perhaps inlaid. Gems did turn up occasionally and Frank and John Bly the antique dealers from Tring were always very helpful in giving guidance as to any object that needed special treatment.

Property auctions can be exciting but the mentality of buyers can be hard to understand. Selling land worth one million pounds it is always nice to have a real start so that I will usually go as low as necessary to get there. You will quite likely have to struggle to get just one bid of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, but once it gets to one million pounds there are twenty people waving their catalogues at you.

Nubar Gulbenkian My firm used to run the Bucks County Agricultural show and I was drummed in to sell tickets on the gate. An old van arrived with a driver and passenger, duly ticketed, in the front. To the rear, seated on a rickety old kitchen chair was the unmistakable, heavily bearded figure of Nubar Gulbenkian, the oil billionaire and President of the Show but without his badge. The officious Rogers required him to purchase a ticket indicating that if he could prove he was the President, the Secretary would give him a refund – the arrogance of youth!

Sadler and Baker, Camberley It was thought desirable to widen one's experience by working in a different environment and I thus went down to 'improve' with Sadler & Baker at Camberley. Accommodation was in rented rooms with shared kitchen; two ladies sharing one kitchen is not conducive to a happy atmosphere. The rent was two pounds ten shillings per week, which made quite a dent in the wage of five pounds. My boss was Philip Rowlinson. He was in charge of Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors professional examinations and a strong and professional character who was quick to correct some of my errors. Nevertheless he could not prepare me for the day when a most attractive applicant, with considerable décolletage, wanted me to show her a building site in Frimley Wood. The job took most of the afternoon and she eventually bought the plot for eight hundred pounds.

At S & B the manager, Mr. Moxon, very much cherished his Hillman motor car. One afternoon he was due at the dentist's to have some teeth removed and I managed to persuade him that I borrow his car for a job. He was less than overjoyed when I returned the car with the back badly smashed in and the front dented. (I had been third in a line stopped at a red light on the downhill main road through Camberley when I became aware in my mirror of a car

approaching far too fast from behind and so released my handbrake).

Aylesbury Association The Aylesbury Association for the Protection of Persons and Property is a “vigilante” organisation, which was founded on the 30th September 1785. These days its function is to provide an annual dinner for the businessmen of the Town (and one lady who does not attend) when much wine is drunk. There are usually four speeches under titles such as “The Town and Trade of Aylesbury” “The Military” etc. Many are boring with wagers being placed on the duration of the epic but there have been excruciatingly funny discourses by the likes of Stan Styles, touching his forelock and cocking a snoot at the good and mighty (Stan ran Jones and Cocks, ironmongers in Silver Street and I can just see the “four candles” Two Ronnies sketch taking place there). Having joined young in 1958, at the suggestion of my father, my name duly rose in the rankings until the committee wrote offering me a year of Presidency. Now I thought the entertainment needed some livening up and replied accepting the great honour but expressing the view that a little femininity in the proceedings would not go amiss. Indeed at my first attendance in the 1950s two of the three entertainers had been of the female variety. In no time at all I received a strongly worded letter forthwith withdrawing the invitation – what bores!

Typing the name “Stan Styles”, I thought I should pay a visit to the 88 years old “Mayor of Quainton” as he is known. The old twinkle is still there and knowing that he had an adventurous war I asked for some details. At Dunkerque he was part of the rear-guard and escaped by swimming out to the “Brighton Queen” paddle steamer. He then served in various East African posts where he shook hands with Haile Selassie, whose titles included Emperor of Ethiopia, King of Eritrea, Lord of the Sudan and Lion of

Judah but Stan had strict instructions from his superiors not to even think of the well known nickname. He produced for my inspection a bayonet in its scabbard: this very weapon had grazed his thigh in Burma but Stan made sure the wielder's war ceased at this moment. Stan says the Japanese were regularly fired up with sake and the tannoy callings of Tokyo Rose to Johnny were somewhat unnerving.

Allotment Garden footpath This was the event that put me in the direction of development. The local Council wanted to put a footpath through some allotment gardens owned by Aylesbury Allotment Association Ltd and I was asked to advise. Six months later terms were agreed and I received my fee of seven guineas. However, I noted that many of the allotments were vacant and asked if they had ever thought about building on them. They had considered it but had done nothing about it. In the fullness of time I obtained consent for thirty houses and sold the land. This was the start of my learning curve.

Roof Fall I was carrying out a survey of an old cottage at Long Crendon. In the roof, I was poking about with a six foot rod. I pushed the ridge beam and a whole section of worm eaten timber fell round my ears.

Auction Ring My firm regularly held auction sales of the contents of country houses. My job was to ensure that the moveable items appeared at the rostrum at the right time and in the right sequence. Quite some planning had to go into this. There was talk about the antique dealers "ring": I was amazed one afternoon when, following a sale, I was checking the attics and stumbled on the ring knocking out its ill gotten gains: the sheer effrontery to complete their chicanery in the same building where the offence was committed.

Speak your mind I had one hundred and fifty houses to sell for a particularly volatile builder who could be quite obnoxious at times. On several occasions I thought of telling him what he could do with his houses, but then did the mental sum of one hundred houses left, times three hundred pounds, equals thirty thousand pounds - be careful. When it got down to fifty houses, I did eventually let fly, having been antagonised by some very derogatory remarks about the ladies manning the site. Although expecting a letter of dis-instruction none arrived and I think our relationship was the better for the contretemps.

Company of Buyers I was selling some building plots in North Bucks for the County Council. What with me, the County Council Estates Officer and his assistant, the County's solicitor and his assistant and the Clerk, we numbered six facing a company of buyers numbering two. Even worse, the two were together and counted as one. Nevertheless I launch into the auction sale, but just before calling for bids, the door was thrown open by a distressed gentleman complaining that he has been held up in traffic. No he's definitely not too late! We then had an extremely successful auction with the plots getting comfortable beyond their reserve price.

Quick bid Another auction, at North Marston, again for the County Council, was of a very run down farm house with four acres. We thought it was worth about seventy thousand pounds and that was the reserve price. There was a good company of buyers. I asked for seventy thousand pounds and a man in the front row bid it. The rest of the company was stunned and I am sure he bought the property cheaper than by commencing the bidding at thirty thousand pounds.

Cock and Rabbit I had some cottages to sell at The Lee and decided to offer them for auction at the Cock and Rabbit pub in the village right on opening time. The vendor bought

a round of drinks, and then quickly another round for the quite large company of buyers. The sale was delayed by half an hour and I am sure that he was more than repaid for his generosity by the spirited bidding.

Know the answer to the question I found myself at the Royal Courts of Justice acting for a builder in a case where the client was retaining monies on the justification that the bungalow was not properly constructed because the ceilings were bowing. The Specification for the ceiling timbers was three inches by two inches softwood and this had been installed. Our case was that the owner had put boxes in the roof, which had caused the ceiling to bow. We brought as a witness one of the removal men who had put the boxes in the roof. In cross-examination the barrister for the plaintiff was questioning our witness about his statement that the boxes each weighed about half a hundredweight. How was he qualified to tell the weight of a box? Well sir, I am an amateur weight lifter! Case won.

Litigation. I had sold various properties for a client including a block of let cottages. About a year later the client phoned and asked if I would help him in a valuation matter. About a year before I sold the block of let cottages, they were valued by surveyors for estate duty purposes. The valuation was much higher than the price for which I had sold them. He wanted me to act as valuer in his action in negligence against the other surveyors. Reluctantly I had to agree and a conference took place with his advocate at Lincolns Inn. During the conference it was disclosed that the defendant surveyors had retained Mr. Weatherman of Connells, to act on their behalf. At the conclusion of the meeting, I said that I did not know Mr Weatherman, but I was sure that he was a reasonable man, why didn't I go and see Mr Weatherman to try and agree the matter now. Oh no Mr Rogers, we don't want you to do that at this early stage.

Lord Hartwell Lord Hartwell, owner of the Daily Telegraph, asked me to call in to see him at Oving to discuss the sale of a house on his estate. Inspecting the property, which had a modest garden, I intimated that the price would be considerably enhanced if he could include some extra land with it. The house occupied a dominant position on top of a hill and I enquired what was the extent of land under his ownership. With a little stutter he replied “well as far as you can see”. Nevertheless I could not manage to extract more than three acres.

Football match Aylesbury Building Society staff had a yearly match with the surveyors of the town and the surveyors were one short – in desperation they resorted to a rather venerable Rogers to mind goal. I reluctantly agreed but thought it would be as well to have a word with the referee so that he was fully aware of my antiquity. Three balls entered my net and two penetrated the Building Societies’ goal. The surveyors won – the referee disqualified two of the Societies’ strikes.

Gazumping Estate Agents get all the blame for this but in reality it is the last thing the agent wants to happen. At the time of a rapidly rising market I was instructed to sell a Manor House for a Member of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and he raised the topic. I explained that to a young couple £500 could be the difference between having, or not having, some pretty essential basics of life and it was all a case of degree. When I charged him that he would gazump in some circumstances he vehemently disagreed. I then put a hypothetical position to him. You accept an offer of £2m for your house and a later bid of £2.1m arrives. You decline it – “correct”. Then along comes a builder who owns a site behind the Manor where he thinks he can build 1000 homes if he can get access through your paddock. He offers £4m – “Yes, I get your point”

Sick Parrott A rather powerful young Australian lady invited me to sell her 400 years old heavily beamed cottage at School Lane Weston Turville. One end had settled considerably over the years so that, from the entrance door to a bedroom, the floor sloped away at a gradient exceeding 1 in 10. Apparently mother-in-law had stepped into the room and ended up on the far wall! There was a large parrot in a cage: as I walked by it said something. Enquiring if I had correctly heard that the bird said "Parker is a bastard" the owner confirmed that this indeed was the expression. Asking for an explanation she indicated that the parrot was very sick and Mr. Parker the veterinary surgeon twice attended but was unable to even diagnose the problem. In desperation she phoned the veterinary department at Whipsnade zoo but they did not accept outside assignments. Nevertheless shortly thereafter a knock on the door revealed a man from the zoo. He soon established what was wrong and retrieved from his van an injection, the application of which cured the parrot. The owner was loud in her vilification of poor Mr. Parker and the bird picked it up.

Quick wit Life long friend Derek Bowers was fighting an appeal at Haddenham in respect of a refusal by the District Council to grant his application to build forty houses and eight shops on five acres in the middle of the village. He was cross-examined by bumptious Johnathan Fairn for the Council who said "Mr. Bowers you see yourself as the entrepreneur of Haddenham" "I'm sorry sir I do not understand that word" "Mr Bowers you're going to build houses here, you're going to build houses there, you're going to build houses everywhere" "Oh no sir", says Mr Bowers, "I think you mean Aylesbury Vale District Council". Appeal won.

Football team socks I was asked to attend a Board meeting of Aylesbury United Football Club for them to consider a batch of sealed offers for the Club's ground which had

consent for residential development (the Directors knew that there would be some very spirited bids). However there was some prior business and the manager responsible for the second team made a plea for new shirts, shorts and socks. His wife did the best she could to darn and patch them but they were falling apart. I think the cost would be about £135. “Good Lord man, do you think we are made of money, go away”. The bids were then opened culminating in a figure of £1,853,000 (a lot of money in 1983)

Clay heave I had a new experience at Stoke Mandeville, in one of the mid 1970's heat waves. I was called to a year old bungalow, which was suffering heavy fracturing of the walls and various stresses causing windows and doors to seize. By constructing a cardboard model the only way I could get the cracks to open in the same way was to push the model from below. This was my first experience of clay heave caused by dried out clay beneath pear and apple trees taking on moisture once the trees were removed. The first movement breaks the drains and more moisture is introduced. Over three months I took level readings and whilst the front of the dwelling was stable the rear wall rose one whole course of brickwork, or three inches.

Real house price inflation Chancellor Barber had increased the money supply and there was an almighty hike in the value of houses. Between March 1972 and June 1972 values doubled. (Yes – doubled in three months). For instance, in March I was selling three bedroom detached new houses at Haddenham for £8,000: three months later the same house types were fetching £16,000. Needless to say there followed a cooling off period and a year later the price was £14,000.

Leighton Buzzard disaster The staff at this office ran a weekly lottery ticket, and they won! Take the motivation away and sure enough the performance plummets.

Town Planning A couple of years after the dramatic new Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan was published I found myself sharing a bottle of port with Ray Bunn the assistant County Planning Officer and asked where the overall strategy had come from. He and Fred Pooley had been up to central Government where the policy of some hundreds of thousands of new houses for Buckinghamshire had originated. On the train back from London, on the back of a fag packet, they did some numbers and it soon became apparent that you could not swamp Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Buckingham with too many houses so why not plonk a New Town up in the north of the county. Somewhere around the village of Milton Keynes looked the right sort of spot. Numbers had to be massaged but by the time they had reached Aylesbury station they had the right total.

I have to mention Pooley's Palace the dreadful multi-storey county office building that dominates the county town. It is especially awful when stained with rain blotches. At a county committee meeting one of the councillors asked to speak to the horticultural officer – he wanted to know if he had any exceedingly fast growing ivy and, if so, could he plant some around the entire perimeter of the building?

Nimby Arthur Humpston suffered from the Nimby Syndrome at Monks Risborough. He had an acre of land adjoining his house and it was clear that the site was eminently suitable for the erection of four detached houses, in keeping with the area. Because of vociferous local objections from neighbours his application was turned down but his appeal succeeded. The neighbours were still spirited in their objection and somehow or other the Appeal consent was challenged in the High Court and set aside. A new planning application was thus promoted and this too was refused. Another appeal was undertaken and this again was

permitted enabling a sale of the land to proceed. Three points emerged from this sorry story:

(a) Mr Humpston's fortunes improved because the land doubled in value, due to the enforced wait before striking a sale.

(b) Having been so vehemently against development, neighbours then asked Mr Humpston if they could have access over his new road, so as to build houses in their back gardens.

(c) Confirmation of what I have seen so very many times: It is disgusting for a neighbour to build a house in his garden, but it's quite all right for me to build one in mine.

Trust You can't always trust a client. This lesson was learned when I had a client who had consent for seventy or eighty dwellings to be built on the southern side of the village of Aston Clinton. Unfortunately the then Ministry of Transport had put a village by-pass line right through the site, sterilising the proposed development. Without initial fee and on the footing that I would sell the dwellings if I could get the by-pass moved, I did succeed in persuading the Ministry to drop the idea of a Southern by-pass. Quite a major achievement I thought, but the builder reneged on his promise of sales.

Speed One deal for four million pounds took about half an hour and was completed within fourteen days of the outset.

Lady Rosebery I was retained to dispose of Prebendal School close to the Church in Aylesbury, upon the closure of the establishment. It had taken two years and an appeal to the Department of the Environment before achieving planning consent to convert the building to office use. The eventual purchaser to come forward was Lady Rosebery

from Mentmore Towers, who was looking for a 'smaller' house upon the death of Lord Rosebery. After all the fighting to get a change of use to office purposes, I then had to submit an application seeking to convert six thousand square feet of offices to one dwelling house! Lady Rosebery was a delight. She very kindly invited me and my wife to lunch at Mentmore Towers, just prior to Sotheby's sale of the contents. We were to arrive at ten thirty for a conducted tour of the ground floor and, after lunch a comprehensive look at the upper level. Luncheon was a memorable occasion for me, sitting in such grand surroundings together with Lady Rosebery's Lady in Waiting. Clad in white gloves, the butler and maid ensured a smooth passage of food and drink. My interest was in trying to steer the conversation back to Lady Rosebery's experiences. On one occasion she was playing cards with King George V, when the butler announced that the Queen's carriage had arrived "well she'll damn well have to wait, I have a winning hand" was the retort. At another time, in 1940, she was lunching with Winston Churchill and the First Lord of the Admiralty; the disposition of the Home Fleet was the subject under review. Churchill wanted it to remain at Scapa Flow and the First Lord of the Admiralty to base it at Portsmouth. In her presence Churchill eventually conceded that the fleet could be moved. An unwelcome guest imposed on her from time to time was Stafford Cripps: she could not stand the man.

The topic of fidelity of Parliamentarians arose and I expressed the view that, during the 20th Century, quite likely every married male Prime Minister had a lover with one exception. Asked to name the man in the clear I said Sir Alec Douglas-Home. This begot the response "What about my father?" I had forgotten that Lord Rosebery was Prime Minister in 1901.

Examination of the contents of Mentmore Towers etched on my mind the dexterity of man in the immense variety of art

form that could be seen and the sheer quality of the work. Anne Bolynne's milking pails stick in my mind as do some four hundred years old chairs which, when the covers were removed, displayed the most beautiful embroidery with crisp bright colours as if done today.

In the afternoon, upon entering one of the principle bedrooms with several Sotheby's staff cataloguing, Lady Rosebery said "Mr Rogers let me show you my favourite piece". The piece was a most ornate French ormolu bureau. Opening a door she said "watch this", pressing the number three button when the number three drawer below sprang out. I said, "can I have a go?" "of course" she replied. Number one drawer on the right hand side shot out at my command. I then reloaded my drawer and Lady Rosebery went to reload hers. However, in so doing, the ormolu surround came away in her hand. Staring at the rogue piece, she addressed the nearest Sotheby's person with a peremptory "mend that will you". The final call was downstairs to the kitchen where the Sotheby's china specialist was drooling over the contents. I asked him what most excited him and he pointed to a Sevres oyster stand in the finest white china, with blue edging "I didn't even know Sevres did this" was his comment. Lady Rosebery then said "perhaps you would like a memento of your visit Mr. Rogers?" "yes please Lady Rosebery". "Mr Sotheby that will be alright if I give Mr Rogers a plate?" "Well, Lady Rosebery, if you do that I'll have to count them all over again". Whereupon Lady Rosebery replaced the chosen monogrammed plate on its rack!

Surveyors Christmas It was customary in Aylesbury for competing surveyors to bury the hatchet over an extended Christmas lunch. The odd man out was David West who was rather pompous and could not bring himself to drink house wine like the rest of us: each year he had his own top label bottle of claret. Getting to the Five Arrows early I

asked if the landlord could swap labels between his best red and the plonk: he gladly obliged and, true to form, David ordered the swapped label. Asked what he thought of the wine David pronounced it superb: we persuaded him to reluctantly take a sip of our “plonk” which he pronounced undrinkable. (The good news about David was that he had a gorgeous West Indian wife, Joy)

Hartwell House Aylesbury’s stately home is the Grade 11 listed Hartwell House in its grand parkland setting with ornamental lakes and owned by the Trustees of The Ernest Cook Charity (of travel fame), It was here that King Louis XV111 of France set up his Court until returning to the throne in 1814. (When President Clinton stayed here his lady required an exercise machine to be lugged up to her bedroom but it was not put to us. When the Emperor and Empress of Japan stayed, works to be undertaken included removing the wall between the two principal suites. The suites were not small! We met and became friendly with Robert and Sylvia Huth whilst dining at Hartwell: they insisted we come to their suite to observe the seventeen different sitting locations in the room (Robert and Sylvia were our hosts when I had the adventure with the lady with a sprained ankle at the Bel Air hotel). Under our management the premises were used as a ladies finishing school drawing its clientele from around the world. There was never any shortage of volunteers when the inventory of contents had to be checked.

The school closed and we put the house on the market. At this time there was a business cocktail party when I fell into conversation with David (the wine buff from the preceding paragraph) and his lovely wife, whose house adjoined the Hartwell Estate. David enquired how the marketing was going and I intimated that we had serious interest but the source had to remain confidential. Of course he pressed hard and I eventually succumbed letting him know that the Government were seriously interested in taking the building

as a Boarstall centre for young offenders. Predictably he hit the roof. It just so happened that my colleague and good friend Val Christensen was nearby and David went over to Val for corroboration. Now Val is smart and very quick thinking. He immediately endorsed the fib and said I should be chastised because the information was strictly confidential. Off went David in a huff. At this time Val was having a liaison with a rather nice young reporter on the local newspaper, the Bucks Herald. At his next session with her she asked about Hartwell and Boarstall – the paper was set up to headline the story the following day. Val just managed to get it pulled in time. One of the prospective purchasers whom I escorted round the house was David Hicks, the famed interior designer and his wife Lady Pamela, daughter of Earl Mountbatten, being pulled along by a small dog. It was a windy day and I indicated that I wanted to show him a fine statue of a rider on a charger located in a beech plantation. As the wind parted the branches briefly he exclaimed “Frederick, Prince of Wales”. Enquiring how he so readily knew this the answer was a brief “related to the wife old boy”.

National Charity I was acting for a national charity whose local Chairman was a military man of considerable presence, used to having things done his way. We were successful in obtaining planning consent for a thirty thousand square feet office building on the charity's land, where it was desired to re-locate the regional headquarters. Thirty thousand square feet was far in excess of what was needed and the hope was that the charity could develop the site, take a small area for themselves and lease the remainder to provide a regular income. There was a condition to the planning consent, limiting occupation to a locally connected business; this made the prospects of finding a tenant pretty remote. In seeking a release from the condition we arranged a meeting with the Department of the

Environment at Queen Anne's Gate, between the Colonel and myself on one hand and Mr Jones of the Department on the other. On arriving at the security desk we were asked our business with Mr Jones. The clerk was visibly shaken at the shouted response from the Colonel 'assassination'. The meeting got nowhere and I had to come to Mr Jones' defence, since he was simply going by the book and the Colonel was starting to emit smoke. The Colonel was fuming in the lift as we descended. A few days later I had a telephone call from the department from Mr Jones' superior "we've been thinking about your meeting last week with Mr Jones, would it be in order to write to you agreeing the relaxation you seek?" The Chairman had got hold of somebody and put pressure to bear politically. All for a worthy cause in this instance.

Quieter parties As the years progressed I became less wild at Christmas parties, but other younger souls emerged to carry on the tradition. One such was Dave Allen and, quite late, it was decided to descend on the party of Wilkins & Son, esteemed lawyers in Aylesbury, whose party started four hours after ours. The extremely professional senior partner Jim Stevens, enquired of me if I had any knowledge of the gatecrasher who had just come through the door wearing a blue lavatory seat round his neck. I made a rapid decision to deny any knowledge of my number one sales negotiator. Having been to my office Jim probably knew that our lavatories were furnished in a matching blue.

Steve Taylor Each year the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors held a Grand Dinner at one of the Oxford Colleges. I found myself sitting opposite this Stephen Taylor from Nottingham. He was different! Young and full of self-confidence. The conversation ranged here and there but I was taken with his outrageous but true story about how, in America, he somehow found himself to be officiating at a rather unusual party. In the room was a large

clotheshorse of the type operated by hoisting to the ceiling on a rope. This was draped with sheets and unclad males were aligned on one side and females on the other. Stephen's job was to hoist the apparatus until a female made her choice. In the event two ladies went in the same direction at much the same time and Stephen had to determine the winner.

I saw him as wild but sharp and threw down some bait about the man we were looking for to run our commercial department. Stephen's arrival in the Partnership certainly enlivened the meetings and I was to applaud some pretty hostile exchanges that he embarked on – you need direct expression in business. He could lace a report with humour: one such ran to thirty-three pages and I was disappointed when there was not a thirty-fourth. Steve was always up for a challenge: his first wife was a French, Maltese, Egyptian! Now he has turned to art and has a considerable talent as a painter.

Land Buyer I could see potential in employing a man whose sole purpose would be seeking to act for major purchasers of residential building land and proposed to my partnership the employment of David Beaumish on a generous commission package. John Scott the senior partner was opposed to this saying the man could earn more than us if he was successful – what a problem! In his first year David found 2,500 houses to sell in Hemel Hempstead.

150 years Celebration In 1982, Brown and Merry reached its one hundred and fiftieth year since incorporation by William Brown in the reign of William IV. Business had been good and we decided to do something special. In the village of Aldbury Near Tring is the Stocks Mansion. This was owned by Playboy magazine and served as a training school for Bunny Girls. We would be hard pressed to find a better location. In addition to the gracious reception rooms

there were indoor and outdoor pools and a clover leaf jacuzzi complex, overlooked by the Bunny Resting Balcony which was knee deep in cushions. In the afternoon we had the family celebration with hot air balloon rides, magicians, dodgems and a roller skating rink. The serious business got under way at dusk. As the drink flowed there followed an orgy of indulgence, probably capped by the union in the indoor swimming pool between an office manager and his secretary.

Hostile Takeover Bid My most challenging professional job had to be assisting a client public company in defence of a hostile takeover bid. The time limit to carry out a series of sixteen complex residential land valuations of sites in the Home Counties was just one week. The whole gammut of work had to be undertaken with no prior knowledge of the sites to be valued. Each one had to be inspected, a plethora of documents assessed and valuations constructed. The only possible way to achieve this was to cut oneself off from the office and work from home. It was then possible to work straight through to midnight and if you woke up at three, you could go back and do some more. The neighbours must have wondered about all the motorbikes arriving with packages, but the valuation at seventy six million pounds went out on time.

Rob Clarke I have the highest regard for my good friend who has an innovative approach to development, an ability to see and overcome the difficulties facing others and a refreshingly frank and open style. In 1987 he won the National title “Housebuilder of the Year”, presented by a rather “snide” Chris Tarrant. He is also a superb orator. At the funeral of his father-in-law he had the congregation in fits of laughter. At her wedding, his daughter was in tears. (She arrived in a beautiful backless wedding gown accompanied by three bridesmaids each with low cut dresses, at the slow march, so that at each step there was a

discernable tremble - very disturbing!) He was asked to lecture Associations of Town and Country Planning Officers on the subject of a developer's view. Margaret is Godmother to Rob and Lyn's son Oliver. As a director of Royco in the mid 1980s, Rob was promoting a residential site, Watermead, where he wanted to build 800 houses. He eventually secured consent with his plans to build something special and you only have to look at Aylesbury today to see how special it was, and how far ahead of any other site in the town it is now. He would construct ornamental and recreational lakes, a central Piazza and pier and plant around twenty thousand trees. There was one major hiccup. The spoil excavated to form the lakes was used to construct a hill providing a ski slope. The river Thame, a tributary of the Thames, ran nearby and there were strict rules in place controlling the manner in which water could be extracted to fill the lakes. Late one night Rob received a call telling him that the upstream meadows were flooding and sheep were up to their knees in water. Dashing down to the site Rob found that the weight of the hill had pushed up the bed of the river and blocked the flow of the Thame. He accordingly roused his digger driver and cut through a passage to alleviate the problem – there was soon a raging torrent but the sheep survived.

In early 1988 the housing market was strong and Rob was insistent that prices would be kept at a modest level. Demand built to fever pitch and I had to find a way to deal fairly with sales. I think it is improper to require people to queue for maybe days to buy a house and it was decided that there would be a lottery. At dawn on a Sunday morning we opened the gates and prospective buyers entered the small marquee where they were financially appraised as to their ability to fund a purchase and then went through to the main marquee. Such was the excitement about the development that we had four hundred accredited prospective buyers. Numbers went into a butter churn and the available sixty

houses were sold in an hour. Shortly after the sales event Rob organised a lavish luncheon in the large marquee where the guests were the great and the good and also other developers. The wind started to blow. I was sitting next to the Managing Director of a national firm when Rob made the announcement that we must vacate the tent because of the fear that it would be blown down. My lunch companion steadfastly sat there intimating that he had had breakfast in an hotel in New York, on the top floor, with the fire alarm ringing and he would finish his meal. Little did he know that all that was supporting the marquee were the two mechanical diggers that each held up a tent post!

In his usual way Rob had put on some splendid entertainment. The National windsurfing champion and the runner-up were charging across the main lake at breathtaking speed and gybing at the end of the pier. What a show in such a violent wind. Rob engaged Stephen Yardley (of the Howards Way TV serial) and Dulcie Gray to enhance the proceedings: Miss Gray explained to me that she had been driven over by Stephen in his “lying down motorcar”. Additional entertainment included a performance by the City of Oxford orchestra and a massive firework display.

Rob invited me on a memorable junket. Reporting at Luton airport I was somewhat impressed when the pilot came to the lounge saying that he was available if we could let him know when we wanted to depart. Since I was the lightest (the other guests were bankers) I was given the co-pilots seat. This one-man pilot certainly earned his keep, flying a twin engined jet across Heathrow, being constantly engaged in some activity or other. Rob had hired a yacht: what a vessel! Arriving at Santorini, the pilot said it was round the next headland and we would straffe it. In to view came this fantastic three decker with yellow funnel. We were so close to the water the plane was bouncing. Continue the attack

and then full thrust and straight up, twist and dive down at full power. That was the jet set bit, then followed the comeuppance. Arriving at the beach, adorned with naked bodies, there is no landing stage as the runaround comes out to get us. As a sailing man, boarding was no problem, but “my oh my”. Bankers in cellular drawers wetted by the sea are not a pretty sight.

The skipper was reluctant to enter Kos Harbour because the vessel was so large but Rob insisted. Going ashore, we were anxious to avoid the company of one particular guest so arranged to depart separately and rendezvous later. The rendezvous was a bar where we chanced on two ladies. “Did you see that yacht” “Which one” “The one that fills the whole harbour” “It belongs to Rob” “No, you are crew” “Would you like to come aboard for a drink” “Yes!!!” So big was the yacht that the gangway from the shore was almost vertical. As we stepped aboard the steward asked the ladies where they would like to sit and what drink would be their preference. Before going ashore we had arranged plans “A” and “B”. Plan “B” required Harry to vacate his suite and this he was duly required to do! A yacht works wonders.

Sale of the business In 1988 the climate was good for the sale of successful estate agency businesses and we had a number of approaches. Ken Stacey and I went to the Prudential at Holborn where we were permitted to use the middle management lavatories. They did not have a clue. Asking about salary structure they said a good man would get £30,000 per annum. What about a bonus? Yes, 10 per cent. They expected to retain people currently well into six figure salaries for £33,000. A sale was eventually settled with Royal Insurance. Ours had been very much a business with a family feel and I liked to think we looked after the staff well. With the big Corporate structure everything changed and the personal touch went. So did some important “bolt-ons” such as the Commercial and

Agricultural Departments. The emphasis was on Financial Services. For me, the Christmas Party was always a conduit for behind the scenes information about things that might be wrong. Under the new regime the cost of the party was seen as unnecessary expenditure to be curtailed as far as possible. A man with a good reputation for designing petrol station forecourts was put in charge of the business: he did not even know the language of the trade.

Diversification Stuart Macintosh was a very shrewd client for whom I sold a tract of potential building land. (His family was against the idea since they understandably considered that it would be better to sell when consent to build was received). To celebrate the deal the buyers took us to the famed Bell Inn at Aston Clinton. Stuart enquired if the pigeon he saw on a plate was of the same type as the varmints he shot. On confirmation and learning that it cost £19 he nearly fell off his chair. Over the next couple of years the development potential of the land evaporated and Stuart bought it back for a song. Farming was hard and he had friends who had done well by letting their land out to the organisers of music festivals so he went down this road. As it happens the event was exceedingly popular: it was also in close proximity to Princes Risborough, very loud and it went on very late. The police were not at all happy. The following day I saw Stuart on ITV news. He gave a brilliant interview saying that he blamed the Government: they tell us to diversify, and when we do this a little bit, all hell lets loose.

Red tape The red tape surrounding development proposals has grown inexorably. In 2008 I sat round a table with seventeen others (including eight lawyers, all female) trying to thrash out the final details of documentation about which we had been negotiating for years. A huge complication was the availability of a £6m Government Grant to help with infrastructure. Despite the grant the requirements being

heaped on the developer of the Major Development Area put the whole deal at risk. In the face of my remonstrations the Authority would not lessen its requirements causing the deal to fail and the grant to be lost. (Experienced National developers were involved with design for the site and had spent much time working up the scheme. At the very last moment the representative of the Government Quango CABE – The Commission for the Built Environment – put in an objection. He had not even visited the site but wanted us to model it on a development at Dortmund in the Rhur!)

I have to compare this situation with one in 1975 when I called to see the planning officer suggesting that he was short of housing land. A client owned 75 acres and perhaps he would consider this being developed with housing on the footing that fifteen flood prone acres by the river would remain open public space. Come back and see me in a month was the response. Back I trotted to be asked how many houses: I said “shall we call it 600 or ten to the acre.” “That sounds reasonable” was the reply. A few weeks later the permission was issued with just a few standard conditions!

Chequers Estate We had elected as Senior Partner Ken Stacey, a man of style, grace and ease, far removed from the likes of Stephen Taylor and me. He acted for the National Trust who own large tracts of woodland at Ashridge for which he organised the maintenance. One afternoon he received a call saying that one of his trees had fallen on an occupied parked car. Dashing to the scene he found the fire brigade had just released the two passengers from the rear offside. The stricken tree was of “Y” shape: had they been in the front or rear nearside they would have fared badly. The Brigade did not think there would be any repercussions about the tree since both man and woman had been naked and wished to protect their anonymity!

Ken had a personal appointment as Secretary and Agent to the Chequers Trustees which body was chaired by the Lord Privy Seal of the day. From time to time he would lunch with the Trustees and I am sure would hold his end up well: he would be no slouch in keeping up with the cigars and brandy. It was difficult to extract stories from Ken. Once a year he would have an afternoon and tea with the Prime Minister. Of course they were all sharp but the one whom he got to know best was Margaret Thatcher since she was by far the longest incumbent in the post. She would recall the most insignificant detail of conversations they had had years before. It was Ken's responsibility to ensure that the appropriate tree was available when some Prime Minister or Head of State visited and was due to plant one. I believe there were one or two close shaves when Ken had to whistle up a tree at very short notice.

At the time of the Second World War my father was involved with management of the estate and he received a visitation from the police. Apparently a Dutch tenant farmer, with a German sounding name (Randag), had ploughed the field adjacent to Chequers in such a way that a huge arrow pointed at the Mansion. This was quickly rectified.

Land Sales Specialising in the sale of residential building land, I list below some of the sales of larger sites, which I handled.

	Per acre
1959 Tring Road, Aylesbury, 30 acres. £26,500	£883
1960 Aylesbury, 10.01 acres. £20,500	£2,048
1962 Haddenham, 5.01 acres. £15,000	£2,940
1963 Aylesbury, 8.01 acres. £32,200	£4,020

1967 Aylesbury, 7.63 acres. £41,250	£5,406
1969 Haddenham, 5.00 acres. £30,000	£6,000
1969 Aylesbury, 5.29 acres £25,000	£4,725
1970 Aylesbury, 4.69 acres. £50,000	£10,660
1971 Aylesbury, 5.25 acres. £132,500	£25,238
1972 Wingrave 8.0 acres. £187,500	£23,437
1972 Aylesbury, 30.01 acres. £1,800,000	£59,800
1973 Aylesbury, 32.01 acres. £960,000	£29,990
1973 Aylesbury, 6.66 acres. £505,000	£75,825
1976 Aylesbury, 60 acres. £475,000	£7,916
1980 Tring 13.95 acres. £1,425,000	£102,150
1980 Bletchley, 4.31 acres. £440,000	£102,088
(This relates to Bletchley Park)	
1980 Aylesbury, 26.01 acres. £1,430,000	£54,979
1981 Aylesbury, 4.51 acres. £276,000	£61,197
1981 Aylesbury, 7.77 acres. £517,000	£66,537
1981 Aylesbury, 8.61 acres. £1,000,000	£116,140
1982 Abingdon, 13.81 acres. £1,381,000	£100,000
1983 Aylesbury 11.71 acres. £1,853,100	£158,249

1985 Aylesbury, 17.14 acres. £5,117,000	£298,541
1985 Buckingham, 13.71 acres £1,943,000	£142,721
1986 Sittingbourne, 10.05 acres. £1,005,000	£100,000
1986 Edlesborough, 6.01 acres. £2,100,000	£349,417
1986, Aylesbury, 10.01 acres. £2,800,000	£279,720
1986 Aylesbury 17.66 acres £1,750,000	£99,093
1987 Aylesbury, 6.13 acres. £2,027,000	£330,668
1987 Aylesbury, 24.35 acres. £3,075,000	£126,283
1987 Sittingbourne, 7.01 acres. £1,800,000	£256,776
1987 Aylesbury, 10 acres. £4,000,000	£400,000
1987 Aylesbury, 14.26 acres. £6,600,000	£462,833
1988 Marston Moretaine, 5.41 acres. £3,294,000	£608,872
1990 Aylesbury, 4.85 acres. £1,306,000	£269,278
1991 Tilehurst, Reading, 5.62 acres. £1,731,425	£306,303
1992 Aylesbury, 10.92 acres. £2,497,500	£228,708
1994 Shefford, 15.01 acres. £4.700,000	£313,124
1996 Coldharbour, Aylesbury, 210 acres.	formula
2013 Broughton. Aylesbury 220 acres – major part	
2015 Aston Clinton Rd, Aylesbury 73.6 acres £6.5m	£88,315

There is, of course, great disparity in the sites listed above. Some are of far higher quality than others, construction difficulties vary, there may be different legal considerations and market trends can have an abrupt effect. By 2013 the market in the Aylesbury area had gone on to prices of as much as £1.5m per acre but by 2015 these extreme prices had disappeared: consents are now loaded with such requirements as to reduce the net value to a six figure sum or less per acre.

Bletchley Park Visiting “Station X”, the centre where some 8,000 codebreakers operated in secrecy during the war, a charming quite elderly assistant demonstrated to us the operation of “Colossus” a re-creation of the world’s first computer: it must have been 20’ long and 7’ high with bits sprouting here and there. During his talk he castigated the authorities for selling off part of the site for housing. At this point Margaret nudged me to keep quiet. On behalf of the County Council I sold the site in question at Auction, in the Mansion, to Barratt Homes but I honestly did not know the significance of the land since the operations at Bletchley Park were kept a closely guarded secret until fairly recently. (The sale details are included in the schedule above)

At times the code-breakers did wonder if they were wasting their time. They warned the 8th Army of a trap by Rommel in Egypt but the Generals stepped straight into it. Following Al Elamein they could not understand why Montgomery did not punch forward at high speed. He had 275 serviceable tanks and Rommel had 11!! Their knowledge of Rommel’s shipping movement was so complete that ships were sunk selectively in an endeavour to keep secret the fact that codes were broken. One code-breaker was censured for reporting a message from a junior officer criticising Admiral Doenitz.

Aylesbury United Football Club As the Club's existing ground was to be developed I searched for, and found, an alternative site in Buckingham Road. Soon after the move had been effected I was amazed to receive an invitation to watch a game: Aylesbury United were to play England! This was to be a practice match before competing in Europe and was to be played on the 4th June 1988. England won. However it was not so totally one-sided as you might think. Hercules of Aylesbury came mighty close to scoring with a thunderbolt shot to the top corner of the net, which Peter Shilton just managed to push over the bar. Patrick had asked his mother to obtain autographs of the players. She duly went about this task and found most players co-operative. From a distance I could see that her conversation with Peter Beardsley rankled. Saying she needed his autograph for her son he replied "Oh Yea?" with a smirk.

Taxation and worries For much of the time that I have been in business, taxation rates in the UK have been levied at 88%. There was also a time when that snake in the grass Harold Wilson, who did not have the words "yes" or "no" in his vocabulary, imposed a 105% tax on some income! In addition there was the constant threat of nuclear attrition. Now, whilst the income tax rate has moderated, indirect taxation has burgeoned and VAT has arrived. With the thaw in relations between East and West the nuclear threat is diminished: all there is to worry about now is Terrorism, Global Warming and the very real worry that the world is running out of fossil fuels at the same time as demand increases. "Peak Oil" if it has not yet already arrived, cannot be far away. That eventuality will lead to runaway food prices and the risk of social breakdown. No previous civilisation on this earth has survived and I hope that, by knowing our space in the cosmos, we make break the mould.

On the subject of Harold Wilson, I recall that Marcia Williams (Lady Falkender) bought a house through me at Stoke Mandeville, not far removed from Chequers. Wilson was a frequent caller. Further, my long-standing friend Basil Ramsden was teeing off from the 10th at Ellesborough Golf Club when he hit a terrible slice as Wilson was playing the 16th with the Prime Minister of Burma. The ball hit Wilson on the ankle. There were no apologies and Basil had the ball mounted. Basil never hit a slice and I do wonder if there was some pre-meditation in this. For a “proper” accountant he had a wicked sense of humour.