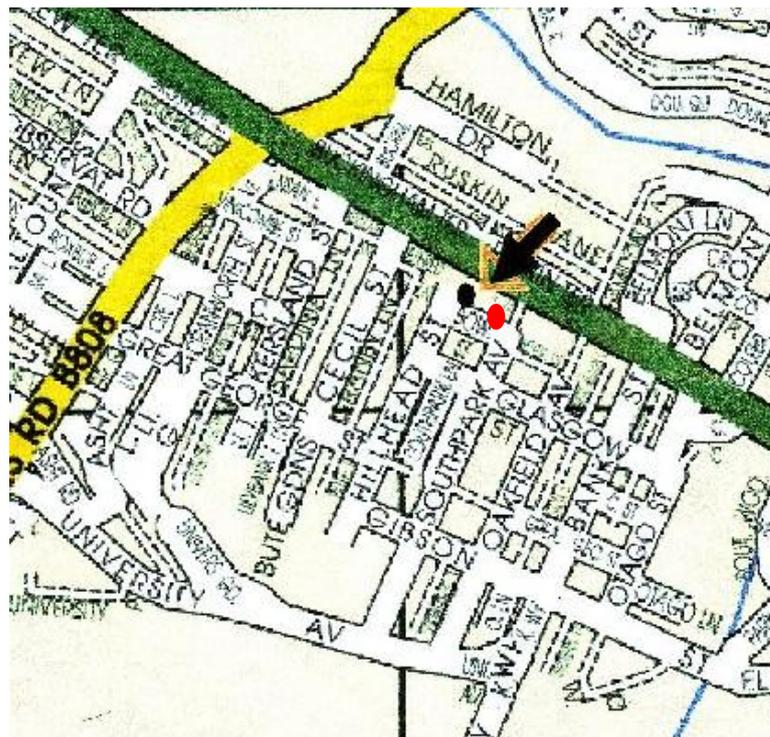


Chapter 57

Jordanhill College – 1960/61

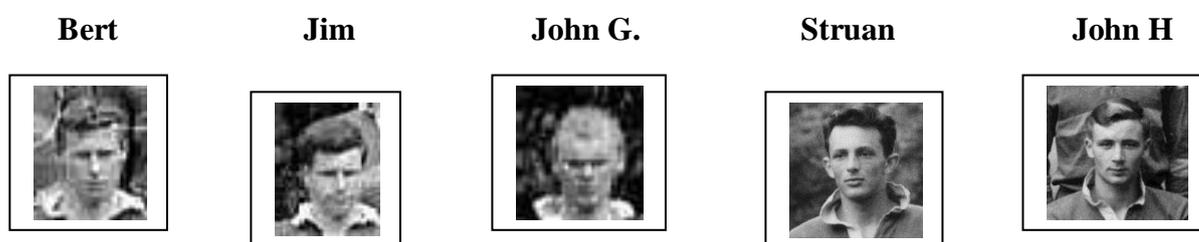
For our final year in the SSPE, after returning from the great Copenhagen holiday, my roommate Struan McCallum and I decided to find a bigger flat, and thus probably one that would involve sharing with some others in our year group. We quickly found one with great promise on the 4th floor of 5 Hillhead Street immediately overlooking Great Western Road, but also offering views of the sprawling city of Glasgow beyond from its ‘dormer’ or ‘sky-light’ windows.

[● Marks our flat]



It had a well carpeted and comfortably furnished large lounge, small kitchen, small study, tiny bathroom and three bedrooms, but with shared access upstairs from the hallway of its owners' accommodation on the 3rd floor. However we realised that the advertised rental of £25 per week would require us to find three others to share it at £5 per head per week.

As it happened, we soon discovered that Bert Jess, Jim McManus and John Gray were looking for a change away from their 'digs' where they had to be in for meals at set times, and they jumped at the chance of the increased freedom, if not the same comforts, that the flat offered. The critical matter of heating our 'cold' rooms on high was an additional shared expense by coin-operated meter for both gas fires and electricity. But despite this having the potential for usage-disputes amongst us, such never materialised. In addition, four of us [as John G. wanted his independence to eat elsewhere, apart from breakfast and cuppas] pitched in to a food-money kitty for each of the four days, Monday to Thursday, when we cooked evening meals.



If my memory serves me correctly, I did mince and tatties, Struan, cold meat and salad, Jim, fish and chips, Bert, steak or chops ... each on our allotted day all supplemented by what we could bring from home each week-end. Also, all washing-up and tidying of the kitchen was the responsibility of that day's cook. It worked out well, despite the inevitable burnt pots etc etc. Friday night was always eating-out night, curry for Struan and me, or for travelling home before a Sunday evening, or Monday morning, return to the city. Breakfasting was usually taken on the run and the use of the bathroom involved, 'first come first served' or 'deil tak the hinmaist'.

The October to December term of this final year involved two five week periods of teaching practice placements in senior secondary schools. It actually worked out at four and a half days per week in each allocated school as each Friday afternoon we returned to college to deal with any general administrative items that required attention, and, in particular, to note details of our selections for Saturday games' fixtures in our chosen sport.

My first placement was with Mr McLeod and Mr McCracken in the physical education department at Govan High School close to the subway station in that ship-building area just south of the River Clyde and thus very handily accessed from Hillhead underground station just down Great George Street from our new flat. These two gentlemen were very friendly, the former very much involved with Scottish Country Dancing. However Mr McCracken was my

main mentor and I will be forever in his debt for how, in a matter of weeks, he transformed my control of pupils and my latent teaching abilities from a mediocre standard to very promising. He demonstrated just how well he could handle pupils of all secondary ages, especially the 'toughies', to get the best out of them, and, clearly, in my eyes, to command their utter respect. I took the risk and copied his ways. Then he told me something along the following lines, "Now you can develop your own personality from what you seem to appreciate is a sound approach to our basic work." The result was that when the college principal, Mr Hugh Brown came out to visit me and assess my work during my third week in Govan, he awarded me an 'A' grade. Subsequent assessments from members of his staff, Mr Small and Mr Mackay followed suit. Perhaps I was very fortunate that the first to see me performing well in my final year was their boss! Anyway, after these five weeks, for the first time, I felt really great about my chances of becoming a useful PE teacher. Praise came to me where it was deemed due, and most importantly reasons were given for this. Criticism was constructive too, as great care was taken to justify such apparent errors, and, more often than not, alternative plans and actions were suggested where events had not run smoothly. The 'crit' system, often maligned as ineffectual, certainly, during my time in Govan, gave me a deal of confidence never before experienced during all previous 'apprentice' placement work in schools.

It was just as well perhaps that I had become more mature, because my next placement in the High School of Glasgow was 'no bed of roses' due to a number of factors totally out-with my control. For instance, like being ordered to take mostly 'touch rugby' in an old basement gymnasium instead of gymnastics lessons as preparation for more traditional lessons required by my visiting tutors. Then taking such a specialised lesson, nigh well 'unseen' in a small modern gymnasium in a different part of the school with a different school teacher altogether. I made a real mess of this sole 'crit' visit in the High School, and I was almost in tears when my tutor Mr George Orr subsequently sat down with me in private to review the catastrophe. He was so understanding and uncritical, mainly, as he told me a good few years later, because he had seen this happening before, and would have been very surprised indeed if I had performed miracles to overcome the obstacles that the context had 'ambushed' me with. Anyway, he did not mark me down, as became clear from my still achieving an 'A' grade on the pre-Christmas results list.

'Wee George', as we lovingly called this so modest man who had seen so much of life, as well as death as a World War II pilot, was my hero until the day he died. And I will never forget his gentle charisma and the sympathy he would offer when all others around might be doing the very opposite. In addition, that he, as President of Jordanhill College Rugby Football Club, also nurtured my blossoming rugby football career in so many unseen ways in partnership with his close friend Bill Dickinson, just increased the high esteem in which I always held him.

Back in college for the Spring and Summer terms, was an exciting time both academically and physically. And I will write about some of the highlights of these eventful months next.