

INTERESTING TIMES

PART I: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

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The last half of the Twentieth Century, the precedents and the consequences

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Regardless of whether the Chinese Curse¹ (*May you live in interesting times*) originated in oriental philosophy or was merely the fictional product of some Westerner's fevered imagination, there's no doubt that the latter part of the twentieth century was one of the more turbulent periods in the history of the world.

When the phrase came into use in the thirties and forties, you could have forgiven those who used it for wishing that things would quieten down in the future. *Interesting times* would be an understated description of the years that followed World War One, encompassing, as they did, the rise of the Soviet Union, the emergence of fascism in Italy and Germany, the Spanish Civil War, the circumstances leading up to and following in the wake of the Great Depression and the first part of the titanic struggle between Mao Zedong's Communists and Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang.

If those who lived through those years were hoping for tranquility once current difficulties were resolved, their hopes were never going to be fulfilled. Indeed, when one looks back to the years that followed the Second World War the participants had hardly enough time to gather their breath before the times became **very** interesting indeed.

There were a number of historical strands, some going back well before the start of the twentieth century, that came to fruition or a significant turning point between 1950 and the start of the twenty-first century.

That era also encompasses the early part of my own life, and from the vantage point of retirement as I look back over my life and times I find myself musing over the significance of events that I may have been too preoccupied to pay attention to as they were going on. The results of those musings can be found in this particular project.

As an avid reader, and a historian by academic training and inclination I have a deal of material on my bookshelves that relates to the period, and this project will, I hope, provide a degree of focus for a considerable chunk of my reading over the next few years.

Looking back, I recall a childhood that seemed comfortably isolated from the outside world, at least until the sixties, when things became very scary at an alarming rate. After an examination of the way things were through my childhood, or rather the way it *seemed* things were, I propose to examine a number of themes and events and the way they changed the social, political and cultural environments we live in.

That shouldn't be seen as hearkening back to some dimly remembered golden age when things were so much better. *You can't as the saying goes, go home again*, and looking back on my memories of the fifties there's no real reason why I'd be inclined to.

Neither should what follows be seen as a nostalgic look back to a golden era in the decade that followed the fifties. Sure, it was an exciting time to be young, but there were, at the same time, any number of things that would, with the benefit of hindsight, have been better avoided.

Without a doubt if there's one decade that's been eulogized, scrutinized, analyzed, and pulverized to within an inch of its life it's the sixties, but while that's the case, as I approach **my** sixties I look back to the sixties trying to figure out where we went wrong. It's becoming increasingly difficult avoid the

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_you_live_in_interesting_times

conclusion that things have gone rather seriously off the rails, though at the same time you wouldn't have described where we were heading before the sixties as the most desirable of destinations.

Unavoidably, the experiences of each generation are influenced, and largely determined by, the experiences of the generation before them, and the sixties' experiences of the baby boomers follow on from those of their parents as inevitably as the blood follows a punch on the nose. As my generation hit the grandparent stage there are two, and possibly even three, generations around who've had their fortunes influenced by what we were doing *back in the day*.

Looking back, it seems the process of change is gathering speed. We may well be going to hell in a hand-basket and there's everything to suggest that the hand-basket's accelerating.

Much of the problem lies in the principle that when you open a can of worms, any attempt to re-can the worms will require a larger can. There have been many ideological worm cans opened since the end of World War Two, and most attempts to return the wriggling mass to a container have tended to favour a minimalist can.

We tend to go looking for simple, *straightforward* solutions to questions that are increasingly complex, one-dimensional answers to questions that are increasingly multifaceted.

It wasn't always like that. If you look at the history of the western world you will see long periods of firmly imposed orthodoxy, and the fragmentation that has taken place over the past forty years is something almost unparalleled in the history of western civilization.

That's not to suggest that there haven't been major sources of sectional, class and religious conflict over the past thousand years, but when you look back over history the big conflicts tend to be between two or perhaps three rival ideologies or belief systems. At any time you're going to find more than two or three forces at play, but I'd suggest that the nature of conflict means that you tend to find different interest groups lining up on either side of the whichever side of the divide happens to be closest to their preferred position.

In the future the important decisions aren't going to be made by the First, Western or Developed World. They used to be, or at least that was the way it seemed, but as we see realignments in the pecking order, decisions are going to be influenced by emerging interests rather than long-standing precedence.

If that's the case in international diplomacy it's also true when you look at a national, regional or local level. Things seemed to be simpler years ago, so we find people trying to return to a halcyon era when the world wasn't being turned upside down. At least that's what I hear when I pay any attention to the populist poses the politicians and various other ideologues are adopting.

If you run through European history over the past millennium, you'll find for most of that period the majority of the population were forced to concentrate on survival rather than debating or discussing matters of philosophical import. The peasants and town-dwellers of the feudal era were too busy feeding and clothing themselves to ask too many questions about their place in the *status quo*.

Once the feudal order started to break down, the Agrarian Revolution² did away with the previous system of small-holdings operated by peasant tenant farmers and the Industrial Revolution³ did the same thing to the artisan skills of people who made things by hand, there's a period of extreme turbulence before the almost universal desire for a more orderly existence brought about the sort of new orthodoxy that emerged towards the end of the Victorian era. That's not to suggest that there was anything resembling a one-dimensional unified society.

American politics increasingly settled into the fairly straightforward Democrat *versus* Republican model that still drives political debate in the USA. In the UK the old Conservative-Liberal/Whig⁴ divide turned three dimensional with the rise of the union movement and then realigned itself into the same Conservative-Labour rivalry we see in Australia. Those straightforward divides have their advantages, and one of the most significant of them is the fact that when you've got a clear line of demarcation it's easy for folks to figure out which side of the line they're on.

For all the posturing about *equality of opportunity* in countries like Australia and the USA it's obvious that where people from the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder found themselves moving upwards they left many of their old attributes behind them.

That, however is getting a little ahead of the developing narrative.

² I use the term 'Agrarian Revolution' to describe the period between the 17th century and the end of the 19th century, when agricultural productivity and output rose rapidly and in turn supported unprecedented population growth that helped drive the Industrial Revolution. Enclosure, mechanization, crop rotation, and selective breeding all contributed to the process. Before the 18th century, British agriculture was based on an open field system with subsistence-cropping strips of land in large fields held in common and farmers sharing the crops produced between them. From the 12th century, common fields were gradually enclosed, passing to individual ownership, and the process accelerated as time passed. The development of agricultural machinery during the 18th century meant that farmers needed large, enclosed fields. Under the land reform provisions of legislation like the General Enclosure Act of 1801, many farmers lost their land and grazing rights and few found work in the new, larger enclosed farms. Many relocated to cities in an attempt to find work in factories as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace.

³ The Industrial Revolution in 18th and 19th century Britain brought significant changes to manufacturing, mining, and transport before spreading to Europe, North America, and around the world. Regardless of whether you see it as a single process or a chain of linked events, the result was the transformation of an economy based on manual labour and draft-animals to one where machines accounted for most of the activity in the manufacturing sector and transport was increasingly mechanized. The textile industries were the first to be transformed, and trade expanded as canals, improved roads and railways were built. Steam-powered machinery and the development of machine tools in the early 19th century encouraged the development of new technologies in other industries. Around 1850 the development of steam-powered ships, railways, and subsequent inventions such as the internal combustion engine and the introduction of electrical power continued and accelerated the processes of change and transformation.

⁴ As the predecessor of the Liberal Party, the Whigs were one of the two political parties in the United Kingdom between the late 17th to the mid-19th centuries. As supporters of constitutional monarchy rather than absolute rule the Whigs supported the leading aristocratic families, the Hanoverian succession and nonconformist Protestants, while their Tory opponents favoured the landed gentry, the Stuart family's claim to the throne, the established Church. Later generations of Whigs were supported by the industrial interests and wealthy merchants, while the Tories relied on landed interests and the British Crown. By the first half of the 19th century the Whig platform emphasized the supremacy of parliament over the monarchy, a vigorous foreign policy, support for free trade, Catholic emancipation, the abolition of slavery and parliamentary reform.

MORE THAN TWO REVOLUTIONS

Back in the dim dark ages of my late-fifties/early sixties Queensland primary school education the conventional wisdom, or what I remember of it, suggested that the modern world had been shaped by a couple of revolutionary developments in industry and agriculture that kicked in around the middle of the eighteenth century and more or less tapered off around the beginning of the twentieth century.

From a Eurocentric viewpoint, of course, that's probably more or less true. The industrial devastation caused by strategic bombing through the Second World War was still in the process of being rebuilt, and Germany and Japan were still on the cusp of major industrial power status. The Japanese economic miracle was still in its infancy, and anyone predicting subsequent developments like the emergence of China and India would probably have found himself being bundled away by the nice men in white coats for an extended spell in an institution for the delusional.

China was, after all, coming off the disaster labelled the Great Leap Forward⁵, and the Cultural Revolution and the era of Chairman Mao's Little Red Book coincided with my Senior education.

Looking backwards from the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century it seems fairly clear that what we've come to know as the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions kicked off an on-going period of increasingly rapid economic, technological and social change that will continue, more or less, until we've either run out of things to invent or have drowned the planet with the consequences of four centuries of increasingly rapid technological evolution.

Academic historians, being the kind of creatures they are, can, do, and probably always will argue about whether those labels are accurate, when they started, what should be included under those titles (assuming that they are valid) and where and whether each of those phenomena concluded. Like the world's economists laid end to end, they'll ever, however, reach a conclusion.

Under other circumstances I might be inclined to join them, but the scope of the current exercise doesn't reach back to the actual origins of these things, and while I'm interested in the origins that interest is limited to the way in which events and developments way back when shaped the world I found when I entered it a little over half way through the twentieth century.

From that viewpoint I'm inclined to take the existence of these two revolutions as a given and explore their ramifications across other areas because it's fairly clear, or at least it's fairly clear *to me*, that once the major social disruptions associated with the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions, the

⁵The Great Leap Forward, an economic and social campaign of the Chinese Communist Party between 1958 and 1961, aimed to rapidly transform the country into a modern communist society through the rapid parallel development of China's agricultural and industrial sectors through agricultural collectivization and rural industrialization. Private farming was prohibited, those engaged in it persecuted as counter revolutionaries, and small backyard steel furnaces established in commune and urban neighbourhoods. Controversial agricultural innovations based on the theories of Soviet biologist Trofim Lysenko included close cropping, and deep ploughing while moderately productive land was left unplanted because concentrating manure and effort on the most fertile areas would result in productivity gains, but these innovations actually resulted in decreased production and their effect was exacerbated by a locust plague after their natural predators were killed in the Great Sparrow Campaign. The Great Leap ended in catastrophe, with estimates of the ensuing death toll range from 16.5 to 46 million. Criticism of Mao Zedong's leadership through the process prompted the beginnings of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

Highland Clearances⁶ and the Great Irish Famine⁷ had run their course, there was a further wave of revolutionary changes, a secondary shakeout that produced major changes that transformed entertainment and education, and played a major part in shaping the world in which my generation grew up.

Looking at these matters, of course, there's a tendency to look at these things as something that started *here*, progressed *along these lines* and reached its culmination *here* before other matters came to the forefront. You could, for instance, see the Industrial Revolution as something that had peaked some time in the Victorian era, and was duly supplanted by what you might term the Age of Empire, which was in turn brought unstuck by the two World Wars, after which the era of decolonisation and the Cold War brought about a new world order, which was duly re-shaped by the collapse of Soviet Communism, which in turn...

I prefer to see these matters as a continuum, gradually unravelling as it goes on, spinning off new threads, and I'm not overly hung up on classification, timelines and defined eras. In a way, we're still in the same stream of processes that started in eighteenth century Britain as factory workers churned out goods at a rate and a price that was unimaginable under traditional work practices. The fact that the factories are now located in China rather than England would, in that reading, be a continuation of previous trends rather than a new development.

No, as I look at these things, I see an Industrial Revolution that followed close on the heels of an Agrarian Revolution and then spun off a number of related threads that were, in their own way, equally revolutionary and proceeded down their own paths to the point where we now have a world undergoing significant change in a process that's not going to finish unless some chain of cataclysmic catastrophes brings the whole edifice tumbling down.

There were, at least in my view, equally significant revolutionary developments in the realms of Education, Entertainment and Sport (as expressions of a mass culture that wasn't possible until the changes wrought by the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions were in place) that weren't entirely dissociated from the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions but weren't actually part and parcel of those two theoretical entities either.

Before the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions, for the vast majority of the population *work* had been a matter of subsistence survival, a six days a week grind that would have extended to seven if church attendance hadn't been such a vital avenue of social control protecting the *status quo*.

⁶ Forced displacements throughout the Scottish Highlands during the 18th and 19th centuries led to mass emigration to the coast, the Lowlands and North America and were part of the process of agricultural change throughout the British Isles. The impact of the Clearances on the Gaelic-speaking semi-feudal culture based on the mutual obligations between a chieftain and his clan resulted in lingering bitterness among the descendants of those forced to emigrate or to remain incrofting townships on small areas of poor farming land. The effects of the Clearances were exacerbated by the lack of legal protection for tenants, the swiftness of the change and the brutal manner in which many evictions were carried out. The Clearances were closely linked to the British government's efforts to curb the clans after the Jacobite Risings and the Battle of Culloden in 1746 and led to the destruction of the traditional clan system.

⁷ The Great Irish Famine, a period of mass starvation, disease and emigration between 1845 and 1852 when a million people died and a million more emigrated was one of the most significant events in Irish history. Although the immediate cause of the Famine was a disease commonly known as the potato blight which had affected crops throughout Europe through the 1840s, since around one-third of Ireland's population depended on the potato as their main source of food the disease had a greater affect in Ireland than it had elsewhere and its effects were magnified by a range of other social, political and economic factors. The resulting changes to the country's demographic, political and cultural landscape meant that the Famine entered folk memory and became a rallying point for later nationalist movements.

Under that regime, lower class children were given tasks to carry out when they were physically able to carry them out, the idea of sport as mass entertainment was unheard of, the recreational games that later turned into modern sports were largely informal and most people's experience of music came as church music or what later became known as *folk* music. Interestingly, Rob Young's **Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music** has those musical forms sidling along in their own bucolic backwaters completely ignored by the emerging middle classes until the likes of William Morris⁸, Gustav Holst⁹, Vaughan Williams¹⁰ and Cecil Sharp¹¹ started to rediscover them in the early part of the twentieth century¹².

In such an environment education was a hit and miss affair largely (though not exclusively) based on the parents' socio-economic circumstances. The children of the aristocracy were, as a rule, educated at home by private tutors or governesses, while the sons of the emerging middle classes were largely shunted off to boarding schools. The children of the lower classes in rural areas were enlisted to perform household and other tasks as soon as they were capable of doing something useful, a practice that subsequently carried over into the emerging industrial cities with children as young as three being employed in mines, textile mills and other activities¹³ (Charles Kingsley's¹⁴ chimney sweeps in **The Water Babies** being a prime, but by no means the only, example).

As the Industrial Revolution took hold, the use of children in dangerous situations as portrayed by Kingsley and Charles Dickens¹⁵ produced, according to the conventional wisdom, a sense of outrage that led, first to a ban on child labour in mines and factories and, second, to the rise of public

⁸ Artist, writer and textile designer William Morris (24 March 1834 – 3 October 1896), an important figure in the emergence of British socialism, developed theories of hand-craftsmanship and was a major contributor to the resurgence of traditional textiles and methods of production to create affordable hand-made art. A prolific writer, Morris produced poetry, fiction, essays, and translations of medieval texts, Icelandic sagas and Homer's *Odyssey*.

⁹ English composer Gustav Holst (21 September 1874 – 25 May 1934), most famous for his orchestral suite *The Planets*, composed operas, ballets, choral hymns and songs and with Vaughan Williams explored and maintained the English vocal and choral tradition in folk song, madrigals and church music.

¹⁰ Apart from producing an extensive array of symphonies, chamber music, opera, choral music, and film scores, English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (12 October 1872 – 26 August 1958) was also a collector of English folk music and song which influenced his original compositions.

¹¹ Widely regarded as the founding father of the folklore revival in England in the early 20th century, Cecil James Sharp (22 November 1859 – 23 June 1924) spent ten years in South Australia before returning to England, where he became interested in the vocal and instrumental folk music of the British Isles, and traditional English dance at a time when morris dancing was almost extinct. Many of England's traditional dances and music owe their continued existence to his work with the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

¹² Young, R. *Electric Eden: Rediscovering Britain's Visionary Music* pp. 46-88, a chapter titled *An Orgy on the Green* goes into such matters in considerable detail.

¹³ *The Oxford Companion to British History* p. 201.

¹⁴ Clergyman, novelist and historian Charles Kingsley (12 June 1819 – 23 January 1875), at one point Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge produced several historical novels, including *Westward Ho!* (1855) and *Hereward the Wake* (1865), as well as his classic, *The Water-Babies* (1863), a fairytale about a chimney sweep, which reflected his concern for social reform. His muscular Christianity proclaimed the virtues of manliness and sport, and while his portrayal of working class life were largely sympathetic they were also rather paternalistic, and his works tend towards a rampant 'Anti-Roman' theology that may have sat comfortably with a Protestant audience but were uncomfortable reading when I read *Westward Ho!* as a Year Seven student in 1963.

¹⁵ As the most popular English novelist of the Victorian era Charles Dickens (7 February 1812 – 9 June 1870) was responsible for some of English literature's most iconic novels, most of which first appeared as serials in magazines. Personal experience after his father was imprisoned for non-payment of debts influenced his writing and explained his interest in socio-economic and labour reform.

education as a means of *employing* the children who were now precluded from joining the workforce. A cynic would suggest that the public outcry that produced the situation was orchestrated by the people most likely to benefit from rising literacy levels, and the cynic may well be right on the money.

But there was more that came out of what we might call the Education Revolution than rising levels of literacy, and a scholar could probably come up with a lengthy treatise on the ways in which the emergence of a literate population shaped events through the twentieth century.

The systems that grew out of this Education Revolution in many ways resembled a multi-headed hydra, constantly evolving through the interaction of politicians, educational bureaucrats and, increasingly, as time went on, those working at the coal face.

No two systems across the developed world worked in quite the same way, but it's possible to draw a general picture that covers most of the basic aspects of systems that operated under slightly different local ground rules but were, basically, heading in the same direction.

At the same time those systems would be almost totally unfamiliar to anyone under the age of thirty, so it's probably worth spelling out their basic features. Given my experience as a classroom teacher a discussion of the way things changed after the early seventies will, naturally, be the subject of a later chapter; but the social and political impact of the Education Revolution was such that it's worth examining here.

By and large, we're talking about a system where a prescriptive curriculum was largely taught by rote learning, where behaviour management might have been a mixture of the carrot and the stick but the stick was the predominant element, and where attainment and scholastic achievement was measured through external examinations, which also, as time passed, came to be associated with particular career opportunities.

Those external examinations were, at least in the early stages, meant to establish who was capable of moving on to the next level. For example, passing the Queensland Scholarship examination, administered to students in their final year of primary school entitled successful students to tuition at Government expense at any State High School, Technical High School, Grammar School or other approved secondary school.

Unruly or potentially disruptive students were kept in line by a mixture of physical violence, the threat of withdrawal of privileges such as access to sporting teams and emotional blackmail (*How do you expect to be able to provide for a wife and family with that attitude, boy?*). As a result, while the threat of physical pain might not have been enough to persuade you to *bend not break the rules*¹⁶ your decisions in that regard came from the interaction of your own risk assessment and your ability to endure physical pain.

The rise of public education also brought with it the emergence of social, cultural and linguistic engineering that would previously have been impossible.

To anybody who didn't live through a fifties-style education, the concept of an education system as a means to create and disseminate national and ethnic mythologies would probably seem to be stretching things more than a little, but consider the following scenario, bearing in mind that education systems across the western world and in Japan were probably cut from substantially the same cloth.

¹⁶ Madness, *Baggy Trousers*

The actual content would, of course, vary in its orientation, but would almost inevitably reflect the official government and cultural party line.

Instruction in the basic subject areas would largely have been administered through standard text books, on the basis of one text per year per subject area, with each text containing enough material to keep the average student occupied for the time allocated to each subject.

The Queensland version of what would these days be termed the *Language Program* had a Reading Book, containing carefully selected age- and cultural-appropriate prose and verse, along with an accompanying English book which worked through areas such as Vocabulary, Grammar, Punctuation and Derivation, with exercises that would be transcribed by the students and marked by the teacher, and exercises in Composition in which students completed further exercises that would these days be regarded as explorations of particular genres.

Handwriting was taught through the *Copy Book*, an avenue that provided further opportunities for the dissemination of homilies and expressions of cultural values.

Mathematics content was administered through the text book, supplemented by the content transcribed from the blackboard, and when you'd finished the Maths and English exercises for the day, had them marked by the teacher and completed whatever corrections were necessary my experience was that you were told to *read your Social Studies book*.

And the Social Studies book was an interesting creation. You wouldn't have been inclined to spend too much time rereading the Reading Book, but the standard version of historical and geographic instruction tended to be based around narratives that allowed a certain amount of daydreaming, particularly when you looked at the stories through which basic geographic knowledge was disseminated.

These, from what I can recall, were largely based around the train journey with a boy and a girl boarding, for example, the Sunlander which would stop at each of the major centres along the Queensland coast, and at each stop there's be some interesting adult who would describe the area, give a potted version of the local history and detail the industrial and agricultural production in the hinterland.

For any student towards the top of the class, the frequency with which you were told to *read your Social Studies book* meant that by the end of the year you probably knew the content backwards, forwards, right to left and back again.

The possibilities for cultural propaganda in such circumstances would seem, at least as far as I'm concerned, patently obvious, and I'd confidently predict that a reading of the corresponding texts in, say, the United States, France and pre-war Japan would, respectively, be heavy on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the reforms that followed the French Revolution and unwavering loyalty to the Emperor.

While I have neither the time, resources or linguistic skills to explore such texts in Nazi Germany and the old German Democratic Republic (a.k.a. East Germany) I suspect that the content of such texts would have been a major influence on the flood of German youngsters who ended up in the Hitler Youth, and that as the Iron Curtain came down and the Cold War kicked in the content would have been strong on socialist solidarity in the face of fascist and so-called democratic capitalist aggression.

The old Queensland Social Studies book was probably fairly bland in comparison with, say, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia or North Korea but came from a particularly Anglo-centric perspective. We got a fair slab of British history, and where Australia was concerned, history was largely a matter of Captain Cook, the First Fleet and the Explorers and not much else.

The narrative involving Cook, from what I recall, skipped past his early career, glossed over the observation of the transit of Venus and noted the circumnavigation of New Zealand before a lengthy account of the voyage along the east coast of Australia based largely around the geographic features Cook named, the near disaster at Cape Tribulation and the subsequent stay at the Endeavour River.

Once the flag had been hoisted on Possession Island subsequent voyages were glossed over until Cook's death in Hawaii. Given the length of that first voyage, the fact that Cook managed to avoid deaths from among his crew from scurvy, something that was apparently sensational news when he returned to Britain, while noted was downplayed in comparison with the really important aspect of the voyage (which was, of course, the discovery of the east coast of Australia).

The role of Cook's second and third voyages in finally consigning the myth of the Great Southern Continent to oblivion, of course, was not much more than a footnote, and the explorations of Dutch explorers downplayed on the grounds that they failed to find anything interesting.

The possibility that the Portuguese sailed along the same coast as Cook some two hundred and fifty years earlier? Not a mention.

Once the First Fleet had arrived, and Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson found their way over the Blue Mountains once you'd mentioned the heroic hardships endured by the rest of the explorers there wasn't much else to Australian history, at least according to this reading, and the discovery that, actually, there was a whole lot more to it was a major element in the seventies rediscovery of the subject and the subsequent history wars of the nineties.

But while public education was an avenue through which cultural orthodoxy could be inculcated, it was more than that. For a start, public education required people to do the teaching, and education became a powerful avenue for social advancement.

Education as a career choice wasn't the only such avenue. Once you'd passed your exams there were other possibilities in the public service and the worlds of banking and insurance, all of them with their own opportunities for advancement, but as far as teaching was concerned, the road to recognition involved a mixture of results and ratings.

In the age of the external public examination, of course, results were a straightforward matter. With a set curriculum covering defined content it was a matter of how the kids went on the day, and a teacher's status within the school and the local community was largely dependent on how many students they managed to get through once they'd been deemed good enough to be entrusted with preparing students for the all-important exam.

On a systemic level, on the other hand, status was determined using more subjective criteria. Initially, with schools being set up across the countryside by a number of different, often community-based, bodies there was a need for some form of quality control to guarantee consistency and uniformity, and the quality control took the form of the itinerant Inspector of Schools, a figure who came to dominate the educational landscape through the fifties and sixties.

Initially, of course, the role of the Inspector was to ensure that things within the school were being done the way they were supposed to be done, but in an evolving system the way things were supposed to be done was still in the process of being defined.

Consequently, once someone had achieved the position he was in a position to set much of the agenda in schools within his jurisdiction, and much of that agenda depended on his own biases. Much of the actual content was, of course, clearly defined and tightly prescriptive so teachers looking for the extra couple of marks assigned under headings like *Industry and Zeal* would do well to note the particular Inspector's *concerns du jour*.

School inspectors pronounced sagely on matters like pronunciation, and while the emerging education bureaucracy, centred around the Inspectorate, was relatively small in comparison to what we see today it was able to wield an inordinate degree of influence, set about reinforcing beliefs and attitudes that were seen as socially desirable.

The result was, by the time I started my schooling, a system that was extremely prescriptive and hierarchical, and my arrival in the classroom as a newly-qualified teacher in 1972 coincided with some fairly heated controversy about the necessity for male teachers to wear a tie. Seen from a twenty-first century perspective, of course, such questions might seem ludicrous but I would point out that as recently as 1990 it was expected that the coach of the Queensland Primary Schools Cricket side was required to wear his blazer while warming up batsmen through throw-downs!

Once those issues had been tackled there were more important matters that were brought into question and from the seventies onwards the prescriptive curriculum, conventional pedagogy and hierarchical promotion mechanism were all broken down. The way in which those changes were implemented form a substantial part of the narrative that runs through my own years in the classroom, and provides the backdrop for much of the current controversy regarding curriculum issues.

But those issues fit into this exercise further down the track. Having noted the nature of the emerging educational environment it is time to examine the implications of rising literacy in the wider community.

As school attendance became increasingly *compulsory* (the cynic might also be inclined to question whether truancy laws were enforced with equal severity right across the socioeconomic and geographic spectra) rising literacy levels brought with them a publishing industry that would previously have been unimaginable.

The rise of the *dime novel*¹⁷, the *penny dreadful*¹⁸ and weekly or monthly illustrated newspapers and magazines marked the start of a *popular* culture that would previously have been unimaginable, but the emergence of the publishing industry was only one aspect of the revolution in entertainment that followed the introduction of the five- or five-and-a-half-day week.

A student of sport history would point towards the almost simultaneous emergence of organized professional sports in the 1860s and '70s. Within a relatively short period England had national cricket, soccer and rugby competitions, and while the American Civil War caused the demise of cricket

¹⁷ Although the 'dime novel' was the nineteenth-century equivalent of today's mass market paperbacks and comic books, today the term tends to signify any form of cheap, sensational or superficial work of fiction.

¹⁸ Initially used to describe lurid British serials appearing in parts over a number of weeks, with each part costing a penny, 'penny dreadful' came to signify cheap sensational works printed on cheap paper for working class adolescents.

in favour of baseball, and Rugby or something like it was morphed into gridiron, the same sort of thing happened in North America. Concentrated urban populations produced large audiences for professional or semiprofessional sport on a Saturday afternoon, though Sunday was largely still a day for religious observance.

Sport wasn't the only nonliterary form of entertainment.

As previously suggested, for the majority of the population music used to be what was heard at church or around the village, but concentrated urban populations brought with them the possibility of staged *popular* as well as *serious* musical performances, and the readers of popular magazines and newspapers could be treated to new topical material based on known tunes (*airs*).

It's the music halls of Victorian England or the vaudeville theatres across the Atlantic where you start to see the emergence of what we might recognize as *popular* music.

Up to this point, as far as I can see, music in the western world at least, fell into three distinct categories. There was music for the church, music for the royal court, concert hall or opera house and music for the population at large. The first two categories tended to be *written* formally, the third wasn't necessarily written, but tended to spread through the community by what some would refer to as *the folk process*.¹⁹

What was later to become known as *Folk music*, of course, was shaped by a number of other influences, including the developing music curriculum in the education system²⁰ but at the same time there's no doubt that there was a substantial body of music that was passed down through the oral tradition.

By the late nineteenth century with the emergence of new forms of entertainment there's a fourth category, *popular* music that borrows some elements from the other categories but is written largely by *professional* writers to be performed on stage and later on screen, and while it drew from outside influences, this new *popular* music was written to meet fairly specific requirements.

First, it had to entertain. There wasn't much room for exploration of complex philosophical issues, for example. It could approach serious subjects, but it could only go so far, usually only far enough to express some fairly conventional emotions, usually involving pride or sentiment.

Second, it helped if the writer could find a way to involve the audience. One obvious way to do that was to provide a catchy chorus that encouraged the listener to sing along, but, equally important, the tune needed to be simple enough to be played by people with limited or minimal music skills. That's something that we've tended to forget a little later on, but in the days before the emergence of recorded music a big part of a songwriter's income came from the sale of sheet music, song books and even player piano rolls.

There's little doubt that people played and sang music to a much greater extent than they tend to do today. Today we tend to listen to the sounds made by others, but back then before the

¹⁹ Whether you label it the 'folk process' or 'oral tradition' or ascribe some other label the process of somebody starting out learning a song, more than likely forgetting some of it, replacing the missing section with something of their own, and then passing the song to on someone else, was almost certainly the process through which music spread through communities where literacy was the exception rather than the rule.

²⁰ For an examination of such issues, see Georgina Boyes' [The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and The English Folk Revival](#) and the early chapters of Rob Young's [Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music](#).

widespread distribution of recorded music people listened, once they were out of the theatre or music hall, to music they'd made themselves. One statistic that struck me as weird when I met it close to forty years ago came at the front of Humphrey MacQueen's **A New Britannia**, where it was pointed out that over the course of the nineteenth century seven hundred thousand pianos were imported into Australia²¹. Considering that the continent's population didn't pass a million until well into the nineteenth century, that's an amazing statistic (if it's true) and you'd suspect that the majority of them wouldn't have been played by technically skilled concert pianists.

Looking at the rise of this form of popular music, I inevitably find myself drawn to Richard Thompson's exploration of the matter in his **Thousand Years** project and performances²². While it's not meant to be an exhaustive scholarly exploration of the subject, it's a case of what works within the restrictions Thompson has placed on himself²³, it's interesting to see what he's chosen to represent the nineteenth century. There's a union song (**Blackleg Miner**), a bit from Gilbert and Sullivan (**There Is Beauty...**) and a couple of music hall numbers in **Waiting At The Church, Trafalgar Square** and **Sam Hall**, though I suspect music hall renditions of the latter would possibly have lacked the "Damn your eyes" chorus, and **Shenandoah**....

It's a selection that gives a fairly good example of elements of what later became more simply termed *pop* music. There's *sing-ability* in **Blackleg Miner** and **Shenandoah**, as well as a degree of *clever* humour in the G&S, **Church** and **Trafalgar**, but more than anything else there's a sense of performance in the story of the girl (and I'm presuming that we're talking servant girl or shop assistant here, rather than some daughter of the bourgeoisie) left waiting at the altar or the bloke reduced to sleeping in Trafalgar Square with a corresponding appeal to the broadest possible audience.

While this fairly sophisticated sense of commercialism emerged to play on the sympathies of the widest possible audience, there was a predictable but hardly universal rejection of that development in artistic and literary circles. Given the nature of the beast, that development didn't follow the same path around the globe. There were centres where what became known as the *bohemian* or *avant-garde* culture became firmly entrenched, others where you'd expect to find it where it didn't.

As a rule you'd expect to find the offbeat types gathering in Paris, Berlin, London or New York rather than Lille, Dortmund, Hull or Poughkeepsie. Where such scenes grew up was, on the whole, dependent on the individuals involved and the networks they developed, but as a rule they were based in the capital rather than regional centres and around the universities and other institutions of higher learning than in the factories or office blocks.

The growth of public education had, after all, produced a need for teachers and a subsequent necessity of finding some way to train them. As time passed there was a general sense of upward mobility that was largely dependent on access to tertiary education.

One suspects that many of those lured from the back blocks to the metropolis for higher education and subsequently found themselves back at home brought with them attitudes and ideas

²¹ "Much of the Australian legend depends upon folk-song and ballad which in turn call for portable instruments such as banjos, fiddles and bones. Something must be said about the 700,000 pianos reputedly brought into Australia during the nineteenth century" (Humphrey MacQueen [A New Britannia](#) p. 111)

²² http://www.richardthompson-music.com/catch_of_the_day.asp?id=117

²³ There are certain obvious limitations involved within a format based around a vocal trio (one male, two female voiced) with accompaniment limited to an acoustic guitar, percussion and occasional keyboards.

that wouldn't have got there otherwise, and found the odd kindred spirit in their local community who would have been encouraged to follow a similar path to the metropolitan educational facilities.

The actual forms these bohemian activities took were, largely, the result of the individual personalities involved and the interactions between them, but there's a general sense of trying to undermine the complacency that was coming through in the new *popular* culture.

That undermining might be as subtle as a James Joyce poem referring to the fact that '*earth and heaven trembled*' due to the '*black and sinister arts/of an Irish writer in foreign parts*'²⁴ or as blatant as the '*Merde!*' (generally translated as '*Pschitt*') uttered by Alfred Jarry's²⁵ grotesque Pa Ubu at the start of **Ubu Roi**²⁶, which was based on the author's portrayal of his physics teacher's eccentricities and these developments took place against a background of political and military changes that were as sweeping as those that transformed the agricultural, industrial and commercial worlds.

²⁴ <http://www.iu.edu/~liblilly/joyce/poetry.html>

²⁵ Alfred Jarry (8 September 1873 – 1 November 1907) one of the forebears of the Theatre of the Absurd, Dadaism and the surrealist movement. Although he also wrote novels, poetry, essays and speculative journalism, Jarry is best known for his play **Ubu Roi** (1896). As schoolboys, Jarry and his friends, wrote scripts mocking his obese and incompetent physics teacher, Felix Herbert (Pa Hebe), and the parodies were rewritten as **Ubu the King (Ubu Roi)**, **Ubu Cuckolded (Ubu cocu)**, **Ubu Bound (Ubu enchainé)**. His other works included a play, **Caesar Antichrist** and three novels, **The Supermale (Le Surmâle)**, **Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, pataphysician (Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien)** and **Days and Nights (Les Jours et les nuits)**. After years of drug and alcohol abuse, on his deathbed Jarry's last request was for a toothpick, and he repeatedly referred to his bicycle as an external skeleton

²⁶ **Ubu Roi** satirizes literature, politics, the ruling classes, current events and the complacent bourgeoisie. Ubu, a fat, vulgar, gluttonous, grandiose, cowardly antihero, grew out of speculation about the imaginary life of his physics teacher and Jarry explores his political, military and criminal exploits through parodies of plot-lines and scenes from Shakespeare.

INDUSTRIAL-SCALE WARFARE

In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, it was obvious the old scheme of things in continental Europe, with four major powers (France, Prussia, Austria and Russia) surrounded by a number of minor princedoms, duchies and city states didn't suit the best interests of anyone outside the four powers, and that where the four powers were concerned bigger was better and might was right.

As a result, the unification movements in Germany and Italy, the internal rumblings within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the interactions of rival spheres of interest in Europe and overseas produced the network of alliances and rivalries that, in turn, meant the actions of a Serb assassin in Sarajevo plunged the western world into the bloodbath that was World War One.

The fact that, apart from the Crimean War and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Europe had been free of large-scale wars for close to a century might have something to do with the apparent failure of the powers that be to understand that killing, like farming and manufacturing, was now possible on an industrial scale that was previously unimaginable.

Had they looked a little more closely, of course, the penny *should* have dropped.

Apart from the two European conflicts referred to above, the majority of conflict around the globe had been in the colonial sphere, which presumably didn't count all that much since the people on the receiving end of the European firepower were Africans and Asians.

The two exceptions to the rule, at least as far as the European powers were concerned, were the American Civil War, which involved massed armies in what was effectively the first *total* war, and the Boer War, which demonstrated that when a small non-major power faced off against one of the big five, they weren't necessarily going to play by the old rules.

The death toll in the American Civil War (over 350 000 on the Union side and more than a quarter of a million Confederates) should have been sounding a few alarm bells, with losses of 20 000 on either side in a single battle (Gettysburg), and subsequent developments in weapons technology should have suggested that casualty lists were only likely to grow unless the generals modified the tactics they had used over the preceding century or so.

There were, on the other hand, developments in other areas that were embraced with considerable enthusiasm. The rise of the railways and their strategic importance as a means of transferring men and supplies had become obvious during the American Civil War, and much of the strategic significance of battles around Chattanooga, Sherman's campaign against Atlanta and his subsequent March to the Sea at Savannah lay in the three cities' function as hubs of the Confederate railway system²⁷.

The railway system played an important role in determining the results of battles when Prussia defeated Austria in 1866 and again during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, though in the latter case it was as much a matter of French mismanagement as a Teutonic efficiency. In the wake of that war, however, the French lifted their game while the newly unified German Reich set about ensuring that railway stations close to the borders with Belgium and France had platforms up to a mile long, allowing full divisions to arrive and be deployed almost simultaneously.

²⁷ as is obvious from the map in Keegan, *J A History of Warfare* p. 356

The figures Keegan cites for the First War's mobilization across Europe would have been unimaginable in Napoleon's day. Germany's standing peacetime army (800 000 strong) was multiplied six times as reservists and close to one and a half million troops were transported to what became the Western Front during the first seventeen days of August 1914.

In all, within a month of the commencement of hostilities the French had deployed 62 infantry divisions, the Germans 87, Austria 49 and the Russians 114²⁸, a number that underlined the strategic significance of early German victories on the Eastern Front, most significantly that of Tannenberg (26-30 August 1914).

Without the railways, Germany's ability to engage its enemies on two fronts would have been substantially lessened, and taking out strategic railway junctions and structures like bridges became a significant element in planning strategic bombing campaigns in World War Two.

Given Napoleon's adage that an army travels on its stomach, advances in food technology that allowed rations to be preserved made it possible to maintain a large army in static positions for considerable lengths of time.

Until this point, of course, the easiest way to keep the troops fed was to have them either live off the land they were passing through or supplement their basic rations with whatever they could scrounge along the way. Canned and dried foods, however, could now be produced industrially and distributed by rail, another consideration that first came into play on the Union side during the American Civil War.

One could, of course, suggest that much of the grit displayed on the Confederate side stemmed from the need to capture the Union supply train in order to eat.

Those factors, of course, meant that success in battle was significantly affected by technological considerations, and the development of aircraft and submarines added extra elements to the military mix.

Before World War One civilian populations were largely unaffected by wars unless the combatants turned up on their doorstep or they had their food supplies severed by a naval or military blockade. In terms of strategic bombing and submarine warfare, of course, the Great War only gave an initial indication of the possibilities, although German U-boats still managed to destroy 8 million tons of shipping between 1914 and 1918. The Second World War Battle of the Atlantic increased those figures substantially, with four and a half million tons sunk in 1939-40 and 3 708 000 tons in 1941²⁹.

German attempts to cut Britain's supply lines during World War Two were matched by their attempts to break British morale, as well as the islands' industrial production and air defences in the Battle of Britain, with concerted attacks on London, Southampton, Plymouth, Bristol, Liverpool and Birmingham before central Coventry was virtually destroyed on 14 November 1941³⁰.

Significantly, five of those seven centres were port cities, underlining German determination to destroy as much as possible of what had managed to make its way across the Atlantic before it could be used in the British war effort.

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 307

²⁹ B Laffin, J. (ed.) *Brassey's Battles: 3500 Years of Conflict, Campaigns and Wars From A-Z* pp. 60-61

³⁰ *ibid.* pp. 88-89

Once the United States was brought into the war, of course, similar destruction rained down on Germany, culminating in the fire bombing of Dresden on 13-15 February 1945, an act that was motivated by the need to take out a significant road and rail junction in order to prevent Germany rushing through reinforcements to stem the Russian advance towards Berlin. Since the city was crowded with refugees fleeing from Marshal Koniev's armies, the casualties were truly staggering. One hundred thousand killed, sixty thousand injured and six square miles of the city totally destroyed³¹.

With increasing industrialization affecting the outcomes of battles on the ground, it is hardly surprising to note an unwillingness of those who find themselves outgunned to adopt alternative approaches to warfare.

Under the Boer War's David and Goliath circumstances, given David's refusal to play by the old rules (understandable, given the circumstances) it was inevitable that Goliath bent them as well, with Boer commando tactics being countered by placing noncombatants behind barbed wire in concentration camps.

Perhaps, bearing those developments in mind, when Britain and France faced up to Germany in August 1914 it was seen as a welcome return to the familiar routines of warfare.

Firepower, however, wasn't what it had been.

In Napoleonic times generals had to manoeuvre their troops to point hundreds or thousands of muskets in one direction if they were going to be effective.

A century later, one man with a machine gun was probably more effective than a couple of hundred of Napoleon's finest. In the end, a touch of innovation and the eventual effect of a continental blockade won out, but it was obvious that after the *War To End All Wars* the nature of warfare had changed substantially.

The social upheavals that followed the War, however, meant that none of the surviving veterans returned to a *Land Fit For Heroes* and the economic and political issues that were played out over the next twenty years meant that a second war was probably inevitable.

While the First War was, in its own way and in terms of what was possible at the time, a *total war* the Second, given the technological advances that produced the submarine, the heavy bomber, the tank and, eventually, the atomic bomb, redefined what was possible when it came to the *totality* of destruction, and the understanding that it was now possible for humanity to wipe itself out was a major influence on the social and political attitudes of the kids born in the forties and fifties.

The failure of governments to cater for returning veterans after the First War had produced much of the unrest that led to the social and political clashes of the twenties and thirties. As the Second War morphed into the Cold War there was no way that Germany and Japan were going to be punished in the same way that Germany had been hit in the Treaty of Versailles.

³¹ *ibid.* p. 150

THE POSTWAR WORLD

Reconstruction, and the installation of effective pro-western democracies in the vanquished nations (or at least in the portion of them that found themselves on this side of the Iron Curtain) was the order of the day, and a substantial part of the 'good times' of the fifties can be traced to that activity. Good news if you were German or Japanese, but a less welcome development if you were a British citizen in one of the areas that had produced the first wave of the Industrial Revolution.

In Britain things took a while to bring themselves back to pre-war normality, with wartime austerity measures like food rationing continuing for several years after the end of hostilities. The scale of the damage caused by the German air and missile offensive meant that rebuilding was always going to be a lengthy process, and one can't help thinking that process was affected by the huge cost of the war effort and other factors.

In fact, given the benefit of hindsight you can't help thinking (along with the cynical old man in the brothel in *Catch 22* that the best way to come out of World War Two as a winner was to suffer defeat on the battlefield but need to be reconstructed after the war in order to prevent the Communists from taking over.

That old man, of course, was talking from an Italian perspective. The cynic would point out that the other way to come out of the War as a winner was to sit comfortably on the other side of the Atlantic atop a wealth of mineral and industrial resources churning out the armaments that would decide the issue on the battlefield without the dislocation caused by bombing, shipping losses and wartime rationing of scarce resources.

In the United States, as the factories that built the tanks and aircraft that powered the fight-back by the Western Allies were converted to peacetime purposes a wave of consumerism meant that, for a while at least, it seemed like economic good times were guaranteed into the indefinite future. The most significant influence on what followed may just have been one of the least likely suspects. The *G.I. Bill*³² put many returning veterans through university studies, and provided much of the literary work that underpinned what happened in the sixties.

That's not to suggest for a moment that every surviving veteran ended up studying creative writing at some bohemian liberal arts college, but many of the works that became standard reference points (**Catcher In The Rye**³³ and **Catch 22**³⁴, for example) were written by what Barry Humphries' Sandy Stone would have termed *returned men*.

You'd expect that some of those who benefited from the provisions of the G.I. Bill would have ended up teaching high school and influencing the first generation of *teenagers*, though from a twenty-

³² The *Servicemen's Readjustment Act* of 1944, otherwise known as the *G.I. Bill of Rights* was designed to help World War II veterans adjust to civilian life by providing college or vocational education, unemployment compensation and low interest, zero deposit home loans. The Bill was meant to prevent a repetition of the Bonus March of 1932 and a relapse into Depression after World War II. By the time the original Bill expired in July 1956, approximately 8 million World War II veterans had participated in education or training programs.

³³ J.D. Salinger's wartime service took him through the D Day landings in 1944, the Battle of the Bulge and he was one of the first U.S. troops to enter a liberated concentration camp.

³⁴ **Catch 22** Author Joseph Heller flew 60 combat missions over Italy as a bombardier in a B-25 before studying English at the University of Southern California and NYU on the G.I. Bill.

first century perspective, it might seem to be exaggerating slightly to talk about a *first generation* of teenagers.

It's not as if kids leapt magically from age twelve to age twenty without going through the lengthy process of adolescence. What changed in the postwar era were the expectations about young people and where they were placed in a broader social context.

Until the fifties, in the western world your career prospects were still largely influenced by your parents' place in the pecking order. While, there were opportunities for kids from underprivileged backgrounds to get ahead, and many of them did, for the most part the best kids could aim for was, arguably, one or two rungs higher than their parents had managed.

In that context, the opportunities for social and economic advancement through education were especially significant, though they necessarily involved the need for students to jump through the hoops of the external examination and, along the way, achieve the results that brought an open scholarship for university study.

Towards the end of my working life we were repeatedly told that the days of the job for life were a thing of the increasingly dim, distant past, often by people whose extensive CVs would have had people of my parents' generation wondering *What's wrong with this guy? Can't he hold down a steady job?* but in the fifties and sixties there was the expectation that once you were established in your allotted career path, that was it, at least until you hit retirement age.

To a large extent the expectation that a job was a job for life was a natural fit for people who'd lived through the turbulent years of the thirties and forties. Looking a little further back, of course, you had the turmoil associated with the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions, so it should hardly come as a shock to learn that people defined success in terms of stability and continuity rather than chaos and change.

.What you did, in other words, was what you did³⁵, and in most cases there was a clearly defined career path from the time a kid joined a company to the time he retired or she married and left the work force.

These days psychological research seems to suggest the teenage brain is very much a work in progress, and the suggestion seems to be that an individual's mental development doesn't straighten itself into something resembling its finished form until they're well into their twenties.

Before the war and the postwar expansion of the education sector, *well into their twenties* probably equated to seven or eight years into the workforce and more than likely married with kids. For people in that situation, once you'd left school you'd slotted into a clearly defined spot in the pecking order and the expectation was that if you were a good boy you'd gradually progress from the bottom of the ladder to a point where you had some sort of supervisory role based on seniority and your ability to fit in and toe the designated line.

Misfits, of course, either got the sack or failed to gain the promotion.

³⁵ Keith Richards: "My parents were brought up in the Depression, when if you got something, you just kept it and held it and that was it" Richards, K. *Life* Kindle edition, no page reference.

The message was much the same for the offspring of the better-off. Assuming they made their way to University, there were the requisite exams to pass before graduation, and the fairly well-defined career path that came after it.

There wasn't, in other words, much room for teenage rebellion.

The postwar expansion of secondary and tertiary education, on the other hand, started to create a vacuum that hadn't existed before. Kids were encouraged to stay in school longer, some of the old certainties didn't apply, and the relevance of aspects of the educational *status quo* were being called into question as archaic and irrelevant reminders of a staid and straitjacketed past.

That questioning, at least as far as I'm concerned has consigned a number of babies along with the bathwater to the dustbins of history, but we're talking, after all, about an era when the icons of modernity and relevance seemed attractive.

Until this point teenage rebels didn't have much room to move, but postwar prosperity, changes in expectations and money in the pocket, whether it was a weekly or fortnightly allowance or earnings from a part-time job, started to change that.

On top of those factors there was the influence of the media.

Until well into the fifties, kids and what they were doing wasn't particularly newsworthy. Then following, say, the publication of **Catcher In the Rye**, there were questions being asked about the reality of teenage *angst*. Films like **The Wild One** started taking elements that were out there and extrapolating from them, and once Elvis swivel-hipped his way onto the front pages rock'n'roll was a major talking point.

Still, at this point, even if it was something you could read about in **Time** or **Life**, teenage rebellion was something you had to get away with. It wasn't a given, and each little gesture of defiance was made in the face of substantial disapproval from the mainstream media.

Again, with the benefit of hindsight, the actual expressions of teenage rebellion in the fifties were pretty tame stuff. At the time, however, with the perceived threat of rampant world communism and the understandable desire to return to a neatly ordered society after the traumas of the thirties and forties teenage behaviour like the wearing of red socks was seen as an omen of impending social catastrophe.

At the same time, while the voices of the Establishment were decrying the degenerate immorality of these teenage proto-rebels by pointing these things out they were also providing a basic orientation course for disaffected youth.

Over the years I've given a fair amount of thought to these matters, and I've come to the conclusion that the origins of the whole teenage rebellion bit lie in the kids' need to work out where they fit into the rest of society by defining themselves.

Until the fifties, and even for much of the sixties, things like your identity were pretty much determined for you, and you were, figuratively, poured into predefined moulds. You knew, more or less, where you were going (a mixture of your parents' socioeconomic background and your own educational attainments saw to that) and, given the fairly rigid social constraints that were in place at the time, what you were going to be doing along the way and what things would be like when you got there.

Those social constraints, of course, were largely held in place by the orthodoxy that was trumpeted by newspapers and movie theatre newsreels where (in Australia at least) a clipped British accent pronounced sagely on whatever footage was being displayed on the screen.

Those newsreel clips, of course, followed immediately after the playing of the national anthem which was, it's worth pointing out, *God Save The Queen*. The whole Australian national anthem question that emerged in the post-Whitlam era was still a good ten years off when some of us were asking why we had to stand up for the anthem in the first place.

These days the parenting manual seems to be suggesting that there's nothing scary about teenagers, and, in some ways those manuals are probably right. There wasn't much, when I look back on it, about the way my peers and I went about our adolescent business that was actually scary.³⁶

There were drugs out there somewhere, and you might even have known someone who knew someone who thought he might be able to...

Given the hormones that were bouncing around sex was a matter of great concern, but the likelihood of a teenage boy *getting a shot away* for a start, let alone repeating the act on a regular basis seemed almost impossible outside the institution of marriage, which was probably where you were headed if you'd succeeded and the girl found herself *in trouble*.

With those questions removed from practical consideration, the most that your average fifties or sixties teenager could expect to get away with when it came to identity-defining was to adopt the latest fads in terms of hair style, clothing and music and face down the inevitable parental and media reactions with a surly *Well, this is me, baby. Better get used to it*.

The reaction from the other side was, of course, to suggest that the *End of Western Civilization As We Know It* was at hand, and the media was ready to cite endless examples of the ways in which this collapse was taking place.

And at the same time every scandalous reaction was another signpost pointing towards an interesting possibility, though most of those possibilities seemed unattainable (or at least they did from where I was sitting, others might have been more fortunately situated).

That might seem to be stretching things a bit far, but even in 1967 denunciations of the *dope-smoking hippie filth* to be found in the pages of a San Francisco magazine called **Rolling Stone** would have alerted previously unaware kids to the magazine's existence. I read those denunciations with a sinking feeling because I'd *already found* and read the odd copy, and the glare of publicity was going to make future issues harder to find.

Even in the mainstream media it was possible to keep track of this emerging subterranean world.

Reports of an obscenity trial here, denunciations of something else there, descriptions of the bohemian lifestyle practised somewhere else provided what amounted to a route map for those who'd signed up for teenage disaffection and wanted to pursue matters further. So, as we turn our attention to these disaffected teenagers that started to emerge in the fifties, it's probably worth considering the society that surrounded them.

³⁶ As I remarked to a nearby teenager at a public meeting about the Bowen Skate Bowl, when I was a teenager I thought *Scary* was part of the job description. The grin I got in return seemed to suggest that such is still the case.

Or rather, the *societies* that surrounded them, because even on a national level the societies of the fifties weren't as internally cohesive as they seemed, and there were trans-Atlantic significant national differences between the inhabitants of North America and those of the British Isles. You could, of course, go further in North America and distinguish between those who saw themselves and were increasingly seen as *Americans* and the citizens of Canada and would probably be roundly abused by the average Canadian in the street if you didn't.

And travelling away from the actual United Kingdom, within the *British* portion of the globe you would find fairly clear distinctions between *Home* and *Overseas* Britons, and in the Commonwealth that replaced the old Empire there were significant distinctions between Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans.

When you looked at each of those countries on a case by case basis there were significant internal divisions that meant things weren't quite as cohesive as people wanted to believe they were.

The most obvious divisions were based on class and colour; of course, once you'd removed the major historic, racial, political and religious divides from the issue.

Colour wasn't such an important consideration in fifties Australia, of course (or rather we *pretended* it wasn't, you wouldn't have wanted to be obviously black in that environment) where the divides were largely religious and to an extent British/non-British, further complicated by the individual's background at *home*.

The fact that so many people of my grandparents' generation saw Britain, or, more specifically given their family backgrounds, England, as *Home* was probably the first signal I picked up that things weren't quite the way they seemed on the surface. *This is the country where I was born. It's where I live, so why wouldn't it be home?*

As far as I could tell, the people who made these references hadn't been born there either, and obviously didn't live there.

There was something mildly disquieting about those thoughts.

Of course, things are *never* as straightforward as they seem on the surface, and much of the rest of this exploration of the events, issues, themes and concerns that have registered over my lifetime is going to aim to get under that surface and see what was really going on.

To anybody who didn't live through the fifties and experience what came after, it probably seems that I'm drawing a pretty long bow by describing the years between the end of World War Two and the early sixties as the era of the *five Cs*, *confidence*, *comfort*, *consensus*, *conformity* and *conventionality*, but as I've gone about pondering and trying to remember what those days were like, I found myself increasingly attracted towards those terms rather than synonyms beginning with other letters of the alphabet.

I could, for example, have gone with *Illusion* or *Delusion* rather than *Confidence* to describe the mindset of the fifties, but that would be applying hindsight in a manner that would arguably be at odds with the overall spirit of the times., and you need to pick up a sense of the times if you're going to examine the way things changed, aren't you?

CONFIDENCE

For anybody in my parents' and grandparents' generation, having made it through the Depression and the War, the fifties probably seemed like a good time.

If you looked at it through their eyes the economy was running along steadily after it had readjusted from wartime priorities, unemployment was not a problem, and they were starting to see the technological advances that contributed to the fifties feeling of Comfort.

As far as the big political picture was concerned, while there were storm clouds on the horizon, The Berlin airlift, the Korean War, Hungary, the Suez Crisis and the Malayan Insurgency were some of the notable ones - I seem to recall an overall belief that things were, really, looking good.

We are, after all, talking about the Eisenhower years in the US, the era that shaped so much of what was portrayed in American sitcoms and soap operas. As little as twenty years later you had *Happy Days* and *Grease* looking back to a halcyon era far removed from the emerging reality of the seventies. When it came to confidence, you'd be pushing it to find a better expression of that sort of mood than Harold Macmillan's campaign slogan *You never had it so good*³⁷ with its unspoken rider of *Reelect the government and it'll keep getting better*.

In Australia it was the Menzies era, a time that can be characterized by two books, one, a work of fiction masquerading as fact, and another where the title's intended irony was consistently misread.

While *The Lucky Country* didn't appear in the book stores until the mid-sixties, Donald Horne's description of *a lucky country, run by second-rate people who share its luck* was a fair summation of the decade that preceded the book's publication. Even if it wasn't, the alacrity with which the term was appropriated as an irony-free descriptor of Australia's climate, history, geographical situation and sporting prowess in an affirmation of the country's way of life says a great deal about the way Australians saw themselves at the time. An initial ten thousand copy print run sold out in nine days.

If that feel good factor wasn't enough in itself, there was always Nino Culotta, the Italian alter ego of John Patrick O'Grady. *They're A Weird Mob* told the story of an Italian reporter despatched to these shores to report on the lives of Italian migrants for the readers back home, and is, in its own way, a minor classic of Australian comic writing.

Go looking for it today, however, or enter *They're a Weird Mob* into the ubiquitous Google search and you won't find much apart from references to the 1965 movie, which stayed true to the spirit of the book but tweaked the details. At the time the book appeared, on the other hand, it was, or at least seemed to a primary school kid in short pants, a significant part of the late-fifties/early-sixties landscape, and it was, for years, the best-selling Australian novel. Anyone reading it today would probably be left musing on how far the country has come in the fifty-odd years since the book appeared.³⁸

³⁷ Harold Macmillan (10 February 1894 – 29 December 1986, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom January 1957 to October 1963). A speech in Bedford in July 1957 and the suggestion that the nation had never had it so good provided the catch-cry that resulted in a massive Conservative victory in the October 1959 general election, increasing their majority from 67 to 107 seats after a campaign based on economic achievement and working-class affluence.

³⁸ For one of the very few references thrown up in a perfunctory Google search, see this piece by Humphrey MacQueen: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/books/laying-our-cultural-foundations/2007/11/16/1194766927215.html>

For those unfamiliar with the basic details of this little piece of assimilationist Australiana, Nino Culotta, an Italian journalist looking for an opportunity to get to know Australia and Australians takes a job as a builder's labourer and, as you'd expect, meets and marries an Australian girl and settles down to a comfortable existence in the Sydney suburbs.

His adventures and the antics of his builder mates continued over a couple of subsequent volumes. In **Cop This Lot**, Nino takes them on a trip to Italy. Where **Weird Mob** derives much of its humour from what happens when old world attitudes come across Australia, this time the situation is reversed and it's Australians trying to make sense of the Old World.

Gone Fishin' starts with the early sixties credit squeeze and an impending nervous breakdown that can be solved, according to his doctor, by a spot of angling. Rather than following the advice and wetting the occasional line, Nino becomes a professional fisherman, and while his builder mates are largely missing from the narrative, when they do appear a classic 'swifty' reveals that Nino has mastered the Australian tradition of putting one over your mates.

Gone Gougin' comes across as a formulaic account of what happens when three mates take a bit of time off from the wife and kids and head for the opal fields at Lightning Ridge.

The most significant bit of the whole series comes at the end of **Weird Mob**, when author O'Grady, thinly disguised as his Italian mouthpiece, delivers a bit of advice to prospective migrants about the land they've arrived in and the people they're going to meet. *I find myself thinking of young Nino, and how fortunate he is to have been born in this country.... It is good to know that there is at least one country in the world where he who works will eat. And there is room for so many more people to come here to work and eat.*³⁹

The final message of the novel is that migrants should count themselves fortunate to have been given the chance to settle in Australia, that they should leave the Old World and its attitudes behind, and assimilate into Australian society, and the assimilation process should include learning to use the colloquial Australian version of English.⁴⁰

In reality, of course, that advice isn't aimed at the migrants at all, and is a pat on the back for Australia and Australians, and the subsequent feel good factor was probably as significant a component in the book's success as the humour and the portrayal of everyday Australian life.

That particular incarnation of Australian life was, of course, significantly different from twenty-first century reality. It's not clear if Nino and company are still in the land of the six o'clock swill⁴¹, but after a session on full strength beer driving home, presumably over main roads rather than the back streets

³⁹ Culotta, Nino *They're A Weird Mob* p. 195

⁴⁰ "There is no better way of life in the world than that of the Australian. I firmly believe this. The grumbling, growling, cursing, profane, laughing, beer-drinking, abusive, loyal-to-his mates Australian is one of the few free men left on this earth. He fears no one, crawls to no one, bludges on no one and acknowledges no master. Learn his way. Learn his language. Get yourself accepted as one of him, and you will enter a world that you never dreamed existed." *ibid.* p. 204

⁴¹ The last-minute rush to buy drinks before the bars shut at six o'clock was a feature of everyday life throughout Australia for much of the 20th century. Given the fact that for most workers knock off time was five o'clock, a culture of frantic heavy drinking was hardly the improvement in public morality that the Christian Temperance Union and the Rechabites were looking for. Introduced in most states during World War I (1923 in Queensland, with surprisingly civilised eight o'clock closing), and repealed between 1937 (Tasmania) and 1967 (South Australia) and with the swill repealed in New South Wales in 1955, if Nino and his mates weren't directly affected, it was a sufficiently recent phenomenon to have them leaving the Bankstown pub at six o'clock (*ibid.* p. 46) after knocking over five schooners of beer.

seems to be normal behaviour. Smoking might not have been compulsory, but seems to have been close to universal, bloody is a swear word⁴², jockeys and horse trainers are familiar public figures and multiculturalism would have comprised reluctant acceptance of non-British European migrants, *chop suey* and *chow mein*, recognition that spaghetti didn't always come in a tin and a grudging acceptance that Catholicism wasn't, by definition, unpatriotic.

Musing on these matters in twenty-first Australia it's possible to ponder the concept of someone attempting to offer the same degree of reassurance in the era of boat people, global warming, the War on Terror and the Global Financial Crisis, but it doesn't take much thought to consign the concept to the *far too hard* basket.

An Italian journalist who arrives in the country on an ocean liner, finds his initial accommodation at the Mayfair Hotel in Kings Cross and ends up working as a builder's labourer within twenty-four hours might be stretching things a bit, but it's hard to come up with a back story for, say, an Afghan or Sri Lankan refugee that would reassure an Australian population that has been subjected to numerous denunciations of ethnic gangs and immigrant *refusal to integrate*.

That is, I think, largely because over the course of the past fifty years we've lost that sense of confidence that pervaded the Western world in the late fifties and early sixties. It wasn't universal, and there were significant undercurrents that ran against it, but, by and large, the conventional wisdom of the time was that things were pretty good, and while there were threats on the horizon and Reds under the bed, all would be well as long as we had our great and powerful friends by our side.

Australia, we were told, was a wonderful country, full of wonderful people, and everything was going to be fine because all these migrants would end up just like us. That, when you look at it, was the sentiment that underlay the Culotta series, and I'm inclined to ascribe many of the changes in attitude that transpired in Australia through the sixties and seventies to people of my generation starting to learn that things weren't quite as straightforward as they seemed and wanting to see something done to have the reality match the rhetoric.

On the surface if you accepted what seemed to be the conventional wisdom of the day, there were plenty of reasons to feel confident about the future.

We had, after all, come out of the Great Depression, and while it had been a near-run thing, in World War two the good guys had won. True, the actual conflict of World War Two had been replaced by a new form of confrontation in the Cold War, but there was a confidence that if push came to shove the awesome might of America would make any recalcitrants see reason before it became a matter of *dropping the big one*.

The events surrounding the Berlin Wall the Cuban Missile Crisis and the beginning of the Space Race all combined to show that confidence was illusory, and played a significant part in shaping the changes in attitude that happened later in the decade.

As far as World War Two was concerned it's hard to escape suspecting that the Allies, or at least the Western Allies won the war more through good luck than good management. There were other factors, but if you had to single out one decisive factor in the European War it had to be Hitler's decision to invade Russia. Take the millions of men and thousands of tanks that Hitler threw into the shredder on the Soviet steppes, transfer them to western Europe and the Normandy invasion becomes a decidedly dodgy proposition.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 58

Much of the success of the Western Allies can be attributed to the fact that the American factories that churned out Tommy guns, Sherman tanks and Flying Fortresses were comfortably away from the possibility of enemy air raids.

Had the American aircraft carriers been in Pearl Harbour when the Japanese attacked, or had the battles of Midway and the Coral Sea turned out differently, there's every possibility that by seizing Hawaii, the factories and shipyards on the west coast of the US wouldn't have been quite so secure. Under that sort of scenario, Roosevelt mightn't have been so keen to commit to the *Europe First* policy that saw Hitler defeated and part of the continent kept safely outside the Iron Curtain.

While we're on the subject of things that *might have been*, it's interesting to speculate what would have happened if the Japanese High Command had a slightly better grasp of the topography of New Guinea and the ranges lying between Burma and Assam. Even a perfunctory examination of the fighting along the Kokoda Track and around Imphal and Kohima⁴³ suggests the Allied victories that turned the tide in the Pacific could very easily have gone the other way and the postwar history of Asia would have been an entirely kettle of fish.

Of course, had the Japanese not bombed Pearl Harbour, and if Hitler had decided to remove the nuisance in his rear before tackling Russia, it isn't too hard to visualize a Britain either broken under the combined strain of the U-boat and the Junkers 88 or bankrupted by the cost of carrying on the fight against Hitler by buying the arms that were needed from the USA and then losing a substantial proportion of what they'd bought as it attempted to cross the Atlantic.

Regardless of *might have beens*, history is, ultimately, written by the victors and despite all the above my childhood featured a steady stream of war comics where GIs, diggers and (mostly) Tommies fought their way through Europe, across the Western Desert and around the Pacific. As they did so, they met Italians who usually had their arms in the air, Germans whose vocabulary seemed to consist largely of "*Gott in himmel!*" and "*Donnerwetter!*" and bespectacled Japanese who attacked in waves, shouting "*Banzai!*"

Of course, had I been born even half a dozen years earlier, those impressions would probably have been different. The immediate postwar years would have been a scary time, particularly when you reached the cusp of the fifties. At first there was a short interregnum while the victors gathered their breath and took a look around to see how the land lay once the peace treaties had been signed.

That didn't last long and in China it didn't last at all.

Once the Japanese were out of the way the argy-bargy between Chiang-Kai-Shek's *Kuomintang* and Mao's PLA resumed, and it wasn't long before the Eastern Bloc countries were testing the waters around Berlin. In both cases the threat of nuclear action kept an Allied presence in West Berlin and prevented Mao's troops from crossing the Taiwan Strait. When North Korea moved to fill in a perceived power vacuum as a substantial section of the American garrison was withdrawn, the South would almost certainly have been overrun if a Soviet boycott of the UN Security Council hadn't prevented their use of the veto to halt UN intervention.

⁴³ "In March 1944 the Japanese 15th Army under Mutaguchi advanced over the Chindwin into India towards Imphal and Kohima. Slim's 14th Army was taken by surprise, but three divisions were able to take up defensive positions around the town of Imphal on 4 April. The Japanese besieged Imphal on the following day, the British garrison being sustained by an airlift of men and materials. Imphal was relieved on 22 June after bitter close-quarter fighting. Japanese offensive power was severely damaged at Imphal and Kohima, and they were forced to fall back to Burma!" Oxford Companion To British History p. 505.

Once Korea had been sorted out, it seems that while the Eastern Bloc spent the next years getting its house in order, the West settled back into a state of complacency that was rudely interrupted by the launch of Sputnik in 1957.

There were other blips on the horizon.

The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Suez Crisis of 1956 were signs of things to come in the postcolonial world, and what happened in Hungary around the same time was a nasty foretaste of what was going to happen when East Germans, Czechs or anyone else behind the Iron Curtain started getting ideas above their station.

Scary as those events might have been, the feeling of confidence would have been boosted by the failure of the Malayan Insurrection. Never mind the minor fact that in Malaya the guerillas were largely ethnic Chinese who were unable to blend in with the wider population in the same way that the Filipino *Huks*⁴⁴ or the Viet Cong could.

But no matter how much you emphasize the down side, the overall mood around the Western world at the end of the fifties was one of confidence. Cautious confidence, perhaps, but confidence nonetheless. While Russia had sneaked ahead with Sputnik, surely the wonders of British and American technology would see that unexpected development overtaken and comfortably surpassed which was, more or less, the way things worked out.

The *Red Menace*, the Domino Theory and all the other Cold War paraphernalia still received plenty of time in the spotlight, of course. There were political advantages to be had through kicking the Communist can, and it paid to be *tough on Reds* in much the same way that a later generation of politicians set out to be *tough on crime*.

Underlying the political rhetoric there was always the confident assumption that the West was in the process of embarking on a new golden age, a new era of prosperity based on consumer comfort.

⁴⁴ Formed to resist the Japanese occupation, the Hukbalahap movement was a left wing peasant campaign that continued after the end of world War Two, opposing the Filipino landed elite and the American alliance, establishing an alternative government in Luzon. (Hutchinson Dictionary of World History p. 274)

COMFORT

Looking from a twenty-first century perspective, given the plethora of electronic and digital devices available to today's consumer everyday life in the fifties seem bleak and spartan.

Actually, writing at a stage when we're a week into a new kitchen with the previously unavailable luxury of a dishwasher anything before the installation of the aforementioned kitchen seems, well, not quite bleak and spartan, but definitely less convenient than the current configuration.

Twenty-first century life, after all, has become what amounts to a blurred continuous present with new elements, events and experiences flowing in at a rate that's hard to track. The quest for immediacy, the *I want it now* that has come to characterize what might be termed the Facebook generation but could equally well be sporting an entirely new moniker next week or next month is as far removed from the world in which I grew up as Victorian England was from the Elizabethan era.

Seriously, we've probably achieved something that could match three hundred years of technological advancement in the space of thirty or forty contemporary years, so anything more than a decade ago would have to seem distant and primitive on a technological level. Upgrading a seven year old computer recently involved an increase in processing speed, on-board memory and hard drive space to levels that would have been unimaginable a decade ago, and with the arrival of the iPad and similar tablet devices the computing landscape in 2020 will have developed in ways that 2011's wisest savants would probably find hard to imagine.

A mere decade ago, while we already had email and the internet, who would have foreseen Facebook and Twitter or predicted the paths that Google, which started life as a simple search engine, has evolved?

Looking at these matters in that twenty-first century light is, of course, the wrong perspective to use. To get a truer picture you need to imagine sitting in the fifties looking back twenty years.

While electricity was slowly bringing in a new wave of domestic appliances, and you could buy washing machines and refrigerators as far back as the late thirties, those appliances didn't become widely used until the cost relative to the weekly wage went down, and the cautious pessimism that would probably have been second nature to the generation that grew up through the Great Depression and the Second World War had dissipated in the warmth of postwar expansion that fuelled the confidence characterized in the preceding chapter.

Interestingly, one of the first opportunities for Townsville consumers to avail themselves of new technologies involved selling them through the local electricity board in the days when the Labor caucus of the Townsville City Council met in the lunch room at the railway yards.

Consumers who wanted to replace the ice box with a refrigerator could pay it off through their electricity bill, a practice that seems perfectly good business practice since today's power utilities will happily set you up with, for example, split-system air-conditioning. However, back in the thirties such practices were seen, if you were a smalltime electrical retailer, as a classic case of creeping socialism.

Coming out of the Depression you couldn't blame people for being cautious when it came to long-term financial commitments. Hire purchase, even in the benign form of a *pay it off with no interest* scheme, was a necessary evil, it was not the sort of thing to embark on unless *really* necessary, and if you did it was a *one at a time* thing, which meant consumers prioritized their purchases.

You bought your fridge first, then you saved up again for the washing machine, which is a totally different approach to the twenty-first century practice of *maxing out the credit card* as you buy everything you need in one hit.

So when you look at the Comfort side of the fifties scenario, you need to go back to the days before the majority of the population had access to virtually everything the twenty-first century consumer takes for granted, and to look at these things you need to get as close as you can to the day to day experience of those who lived through those times.

Imagine, then, how you'd go about your daily routine without access to anything electrical.

You'd possibly have an alarm clock, but from the time you took your cold shower and started lighting the stove (let's assume there's no gas supply either) to boil the water for your morning cup of tea everything's going to take much longer than you're used to.

That tea would, more than likely, have been made in a tea pot using leaves that had gone from packet to tea caddy rather than the contents of a tea bag. Instant coffee may have been invented as far back as 1901 with the Nescafe brand appearing just before the Second World War and high-vacuum freeze-dried coffee coming out of wartime research into ways of preserving combat rations but in day to day life, as far as my recollections of the fifties are concerned, tea was ubiquitous.

Running through the rest of your morning preparations for work, school or domestic duties with minimal use of electrical devices would have been a lengthy process. Shaving with foam and razor for example, would have been a time-consuming rituals that you may well be able to skip today but would have been *de rigeur* for anyone who wanted to maintain a veneer of social respectability. Designer stubble was a good decade away.

I suspect if you operated on that basis for long enough to get used to it and then started to bring electric appliances into the equation one by one you'd see each addition as something approaching a luxury, and you'd probably have some interesting decisions to make as you went about adding new appliances, something that would probably happen one at a time.

I have clear memories of Mum slaving over the laundry in the old copper underneath the old Queenslander where our family lived before we relocated to Townsville. There may well have been an ice box rather than a refrigerator upstairs, though I have no way of checking that sort of minor detail, but assuming that was the case, which would you go for first, the washing machine or the refrigerator?

Would you go for it before or after you've acquired a hot water system?

Having agonized over some of those decisions and slowly built up your array of domestic appliances you'd also quite possibly be on the verge of succumbing to the consumerist tendencies that iconoclasts like Frank Zappa took delight in targeting in the sixties.

There was a second, and much more subtle aspect to the emergence of the modern electric appliance, and one that I don't recall being remarked on too widely.

In a very real sense, all these appliances were labour saving devices that reduced the amount of time and effort that needed to be allocated to everyday domestic tasks. I suspect, regardless of any other issues, the reason married women were automatically expected to relegate their ambitions to *home duties* was that there wasn't any *other* way for the majority of the population to get those things done.

If we're talking the era of the icebox, the copper, the wood-fired stove and the flat iron, the processes of washing, ironing, cooking and cleaning would take up most of the domestic day, and going through the routines that would deliver meals, clean clothing and a clean living environment would become a matter of mind-numbing drudgery.

In those circumstances, the definition of the *good provider* girls were encouraged to find would have been expanded to include the capacity to deliver gadgets to make home duties less onerous.

It's not too hard to see the neighbourhood pecking order increasingly taking the presence of washing machines, refrigerators, electric stoves and vacuum cleaners into account. In the fifties, of course, if your inventory of electronic essentials included a television set you were close to the top of the heap. Much, I guess, like having a colour TV in mid-seventies Australia....

And there were all sorts of possibilities that we take for granted today that were opened up when those appliances appeared on the scene. Refrigeration was convenient, and it was possible, for instance, to store ice cream at home. Given the size of the freezer compartment in the fifties fridge, the ice cream came in the form of a small brick or a tiny tub rather than the two- or three-litre bucket and might have been stored alongside either frozen vegetables or a frozen chicken, but not both at the same time.

Given the teenager's predisposal towards smartarsedness it probably comes as no surprise to learn that these manifestations of a new lifestyle weighted towards previously unimagined comfort and convenience attracted plenty of sneering through the mid-sixties. *Plastic* was widely used as a condemnation of that lifestyle from kids who had never had to deal with the copper or the wood stove and had managed to forget the dim dark days when you had to shell fresh peas and perform similar menial tasks which were now being done for you.

It's possible to cite any number of examples of those sentiments in music from the sixties, from Frank Zappa's *Plastic People* to the Rolling Stones *Mother's Little Helper* as sedatives and tranquilizers kicked in to rescue those who couldn't quite make it to *relaxed and comfortable* status.

There was a while back there in the sixties when some of my contemporaries veered towards a simpler, more 'natural' lifestyle, as espoused by, among others, the editors of *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, but it wasn't long before most of them were back in the mainstream as the refrigerator, the chest freezer, the dishwasher and the microwave oven delivered convenience that would have been unimaginable a few years earlier.

Many of those subsequent developments, from teflon to the silicon chip emerged as the byproducts of the space race as the USA and the USSR jockeyed for top dog status in the technological stakes. At the time, there were plenty of members of our parents' (and their parents') generation scratching their heads at the money being spent on rockets and satellites to deliver astronauts and cosmonauts into the vacuum of interplanetary space, and it's intriguing to ponder where we'd be if the political imperatives of the Cold War hadn't forced the two superpowers to invest vast sums of money on projects that seemed, at least at the time, to be meaningless status symbols.

Beneath that, however, there was an ugly undercurrent. The space race was all very well, but the platforms that delivered dogs, monkeys and men into space could just as easily rain down death and destruction if someone went so far as to press the appropriate button, and, indeed, the first steps in the space race were played out against a background of impending nuclear holocaust, a theme that will be explored more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

And there was an underlying Cold War element to the acquisition of the gadgets and appliances that delivered that comfortable and convenient lifestyle, another element that attracted the scorn of those who subscribed to revolutionary rhetoric in the era of Che Guevara and Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*, not that the scorn was too long-lasting.

By the mid-seventies as we went from black and white to colour TV and recognized the usefulness of the microwave oven, the chest freezer and a refrigerator that was large enough to chill everything while the old one was relegated to beer fridge status it was clear that comfort and convenience would continue to be significant factors in our everyday lives.

The fifties sense of confidence was gone, consensus, conventionality and conformity were increasingly things of the past but an aspiration to a relaxed and comfortable lifestyle supported by a wide range of electrical devices wasn't going anywhere.

In many ways this consumerist pursuit of comfort is still with us.

Where once it was a matter of building up your array of appliances over time, now there's the expectation that any young couple (and in most cases every young individual) will have access to all of these gadgets from the get-go, and that they'll house them in a piece of real estate with a price tag that's heavy on zeroes at the end.

It's interesting to watch some commentators talking about the influence of China's increasing affluence on the world economy in general and Australia's mineral exports in particular. From where I'm sitting it looks awfully like the fifties in the Western world, but on a much larger scale, and one can't help feeling that the Chinese Curse is going to be with us for a fair while as we see the Chinese and Indian middle classes going through the same processes as the Western world went through in the fifties and sixties.

One also wonders, of course, how those changes are going to work out in those parts of the world who are accustomed to seeing themselves at the top of the socioeconomic heap.

CONSENSUS

In the late eighties and early nineties, I frequently remarked that *Nothing matters very much and very few things matter at all.*

Going back forty years to what I'm inclined to label the Age of Consensus, that statement would have been more along the lines of *There are only a few things that matter, but they matter a lot.*

The descriptors are going to vary from nation to nation, but for Australia in the fifties the things that mattered were *Our British Heritage*, *Our Christian Faith* and *Keeping our Country White*.

At the start of **The Hobbit**, J.R.R. Tolkien explains that you knew what a Baggins would tell you about a particular question without going to the trouble of asking, and that seems to me to be an almost perfect definition of the mind set of my parents' generation when I was growing up.

That's not to suggest that consensus was universal. There were major cultural and religious divides in Australia that went back to the earliest days of European settlement. The most basic one was the schism between the Irish Catholic and Non-Irish Protestant communities that found its bitterest expression in the Conscription Referenda during World War One.

For many Australians the events surrounding the dismissal of the Whitlam government on 11 November 1975, was a defining moment in Australian politics. I was interested to note a recent comment by Malcolm Fraser that suggested when it came to acts of political bastardry, the actions of Governor General Kerr were hardly in the same league as Billy Hughes' attempt to turn the Conscription referenda into a vote on "the merits and demerits of the Irish and Irish Catholics."⁴⁵ According to Fraser, the wounds from that particular bit of bastardry didn't start to heal until the 1950s, but I can vouch for the fact that I was still hearing derogatory references to Catholics and Catholicism from members of my parents' generation towards the close of the sixties.

Since I didn't grow up in an Irish Catholic environment, I don't know what was said behind closed doors away from Protestant ears, but I suspect from an early age Catholics were told that regardless of personal opinion there were certain matters you just didn't raise in public. So, while I'll talk about consensus as if there was some sort of ideological strait jacket in place, I'm not suggesting there wasn't a strong undercurrent of dissent running through postwar Australia. I'm sure there was, but people learned very quickly it wasn't something you went around shouting from the rooftops.

Take, for example, a couple of quite minor expressions of *Our British Heritage*.

To today's generation the news that a screening at a movie theatre would invariably be preceded by the national anthem, and that everybody was expected to stand while it was played would seem quaint. From personal experience I can point out that failure to stand for *God Save The Queen* produced a sense of discomfort that made it an activity that was best carried out in the company of a large group of like-minded souls.

On the subject of *God Save The Queen*, I remember only too clearly the kerfuffle that surrounded the question of a suitable national anthem in the seventies and eighties. While I don't have statistics or other records to prove it, I'd suggest that many of the most outspoken current denigrators of *Advance Australia Fair* would come from the Monarchist pro-*God Save The Queen* camp. *Advance Australia Fair*

⁴⁵ Inquirer 2 *The Weekend Australian* 20-21 February 2010

may not be the most inspiring anthem you've ever heard, but exposure to Olympic medal presentations and pre-Test match formalities suggests it's a long way from the bottom of the barrel.

An even more laughable expression of *Our British Heritage* was the fact that, in the lead-up to the introduction of decimal currency, the suggestion that the new currency should be called the *Royal* was actually seriously considered rather than immediately laughed out of court.

The emphasis on *Our British Heritage* expressed itself in a number of ways that had important implications for members of my generation when we hit the Sixties.

It meant, for a start, that much of our childhood iconography was British, rather than American or Australian. *British* seemed to carry with it implications of quality, gravitas and heritage, whereas *American* equated to crass, commercial and not quite right. *Australian* implied an inferior copy of whichever of the above we were imitating.

When the fifties' teenagers started down the road to rock'n'roll, the reactions were predictable. Given the fact that it wasn't *British*, it wasn't going to go down well with the authority figures Down Under, and that's without going into the themes of rebellion and wild abandon that brought their northern hemisphere equivalents to the point of apoplexy. Given Australia's place in the pecking order when we started producing our own rockers they were seen as pale imitations of the authentic American equivalent.

For a kid growing up in fifties' Australia most of the reference points were, predictably, British. The stories I read were almost invariably set in the suburbs of London or an English boarding school. There were Jennings and Darbyshire, the **Just William** stories, the quite wonderful semi-anarchy of **Down With Skool** and **How To Be Topp** and the whimsical skewering of history in **1066 And All That** and **And Now All This**.

As far as your actual history was concerned, it was hard to escape the implication that, basically, Australia didn't have any. There was the First Fleet, and under the benevolent Governor Arthur Philip the first settlers had a tough time in the early days. Dinner at Government House was, after all, a matter of *bring your own bread*. After a minor stoush around the time of the Rum Rebellion, Governor Macquarie appeared on the scene and there was disagreement over the relative social standings of the free-settler *Exclusives* and the ex-convict *Emancipists* which gave people something to do while Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson were crossing the Blue Mountains. From there, it was a matter of heroic explorers making their way across the continent and the odd gold rush here and there.

Aboriginal Australia may have gone back forty thousand years, but as I grew up it existed as a Namatjira watercolour or a side story to the epic journeys of Eyre, Kennedy or Burke and Wills.

There, apart from a bit about Federation, the Anzacs and the Kokoda Trail you had, more or less the whole sweep of Australian history.

British history, on the other hand, was crawling with mythic figures, going back to Boadicea, and taking in Alfred The Great, the battles of Hastings, Crecy and Agincourt, Good Queen Bess, the Spanish Armada and the other heroic figures that took us through the Napoleonic Wars, Crimea and Omdurman towards a glorious Empire on which the sun never set.

I suppose there was something comforting when you looked at your school atlas and gazed at all the red bits scattered across the globe. Australia, after all, was part of the greatest Empire the world had seen, a noble undertaking that brought light in to darkness and spread goodwill and civilization

across the globe. A decade later, much of that structure had been dismantled and that *Our (Glorious) British Heritage* version of history was history.

By contrast, *Our Christian Faith* operated in a subtle but more stultifying fashion. It had to, since there was a solid three-way divide between the Anglican nominally *CofE* majority, the Catholic minority and the substantial Methodist/Presbyterian grouping that ensured wowsers remained part and parcel of Australian life till well into the seventies. While that influence was mostly felt in the restriction of alcohol sales and sporting events on Sundays and the Days of Obligation where it was assumed that *everybody* would attend church, it was something you ignored at your peril.

While I grew up in an environment where church attendance was an accepted party of the religious cycle, looking back on it I suspect that most Australians filled in the *religious affiliation* part of the census form the way they did because it was part of the uniform, and *Our Christian Heritage* was something to be invoked in the hurly burly of electoral politics or the debate over some social issue rather than something that was religiously observed throughout the wider community.

An equally integral part of the landscape in fifties Australia, the White Australia Policy operated to reinforce *Our British Heritage* and *Our Christian Faith*. Regardless of reality or practicality, maintaining a *White Australia* appealed to politicians and spruikers from all points on the political spectrum.

While a union leader could invoke the fear of a flood of *coolie labour*, a conservative could refer to the danger of falling under the sway of the *godless hordes* emanating out of Red China.

In reality, of course, Australia has never really been *white*. Indeed, for a significant chunk of the country's colonial history the majority of the population would have been black, and right from the days of the First Fleet there had been significant numbers of non-white immigrants.

While the colonial gold rushes weren't the first time the *Yellow Peril* became an issue, they provided a classic expression of the insecurities of nineteenth century Australia. Throughout the gold rush era, news of a promising new field was enough to cause perfectly workable fields to be abandoned as the population *made the push* for the new rush that may or may not have been a thousand miles away.

All too often, those new discoveries were nowhere near as promising as they'd been painted and the same people who'd set off in search of the *will 'o' the wisp* returned to find their old claims being worked by Chinese miners who were more efficient and systematic than their European equivalents.

While it's quite possible to understand their anguish, it would have been pointless to remind the diggers that the decision to abandon a claim left it up for grabs, and that the majority of Chinese miners were exploited in a manner that most Europeans would have found totally reprehensible.

Away from the goldfields, such considerations became part of the folklore of colonial Australia. In reality, quite contrary to the claims of a *White Australia*, most of the tropical part of the continent was still a multicultural multi-ethnic society well into the thirties and forties.

Part of that was attributable to the belief that strenuous physical activity or manual labour in tropical climes was likely to prove fatal to those of northern European extraction. The need to find a labour force to work the sugar plantations of northern Queensland had produced the blackbirding trade that had formed one of the major obstacles to Federation.

Once Pacific Island labour had been removed from the equation their place was taken by labourers from southern Europe. These new arrivals were largely Italian and Sicilian but included a number of Spanish, Catalan and Basque workers who added their own communities to the growing ethnic mix on the cane-fields.

Such developments, however, took place comfortably away from the gaze of *White Australia*, as did the failure of the Aboriginal population to die out as expected.

As suggested above, for the majority of Australians in the fifties Aboriginal people were, more or less, a footnote or an aside that added a bit of colour to our very limited view of Australian history. They were spectators when the First Fleet arrived, occasional opponents who added a *frisson* of excitement to the otherwise uneventful expeditions of people like Sturt and Leichhardt, faithful companions to Eyre and Kennedy and the unsuccessful *could have been* saviours of Burke and Wills.

Nowhere in those stories was there a hint of the frontier violence, disease, dispossession, government policy and denialism that continued to be significant factors in Australia's history right up to the present.

In fact, it was the discovery that Australia and the Australian people weren't quite as wonderful as we'd been led to believe that fuelled much of the student activism of the sixties and early seventies.

In all these areas, of course, you could argue that *Consensus* wasn't the right descriptor for the orthodoxy that appeared to prevail. You might, for instance, be more inclined to go for *Conventionality and conformity* but in Hughesy's view of the fifties those two terms are more appropriately used to convey an overall sense of the way things were.

CONVENTIONALITY AND CONFORMITY

When you start talking about things like *conventionality* and *conformity* it's easy to assume that there's a single strand or entity that the individual is going to conform to, and whose conventions the members of the group will follow. The reality, predictably, was slightly different.

While it was possible to question *Our British Heritage* in fifties Australia the questioning was best done as a Catholic or a Communist, and if you were going to question *Our Christian Faith* as well, you were probably going to end up as a card-carrying Communist.

Nonconformity was, in other words, something best practised in the company of others with similar inclinations.

Within those overarching conventions there were a number of other reasons to conform.

For a start in a situation where your career prospects rested on seniority it made sense to fit into the expectations of those above you in the pecking order. That became even more important if your prospects were affected by numerical ratings. As a teacher, for example, the regular visit from the school inspector was a matter of life and death if you were interested in promotion. That also meant that there were obvious advantages in sharing, or making known your involvement with, some of that gentleman's interests.

After the Goss government was elected in Queensland, for instance, the Inspectorate was one of the first things to go because it was widely believed to be populated by National Party hacks, and the old numerical appraisements were replaced by merit-based appointments, a development that was largely promoted by those who felt they'd been overlooked under the old regime.

From personal experience I apparently attracted a two points better than usual rating from one school inspector because I'd gone quietly to Palm Island and had avoided anything major in the way of misbehaviour while I was there, and this result emanated from a ten-minute conversation over the roll book after the gentleman in question had spent a good day and a half putting the cleaners through a girl who'd applied for an advisory position.

After I'd moved back to the mainland, of the two inspectors who appraised my school over the next ten years one had been looking after a five-week inservice course I attended, and the other knew me as a beer-drinking punter with an interest in cricket. Had I been an open exponent of alternative lifestyles I doubt that gentleman's visits to my classroom would have been as short and cursory as they turned out to be.

That was twenty years after the fifties, and by that time matters had loosened up significantly.

How much loosening up had taken place, of course, depended on who you were, where you were, who was in charge at the time and how strong a tradition the forces of innovation and reform were up against.

If I seem to be drawing on examples from the world of education it's because that's where I spent my whole working life (except for a holiday stint in the post office) and because I landed on the teaching side of the fence at the time when education in Queensland was poised on the edge of the

abyss. That wasn't quite obvious at the time, and while everybody had a sense of things going somewhere it wasn't clear where that somewhere actually was.

I had a couple of stints doing relief work around schools in the western suburbs of Townsville through the seventies and the differences between individual schools were, even after the loosening up had kicked in, quite remarkable.

There was, for example, the school we at Aitkenvale referred to as *Stalag Luft 12*, where staff members were advised of incoming phone calls over the school-wide public address system. Years later a colleague described working there as interesting, and suggested that the principal and deputy were widely known among their subordinates as *Adolf* and *Il Duce*.

I had occasion to revisit another school a couple of years after a day spent visiting the place during a lengthy inservice activity. At that time the place seemed fairly relaxed under the benevolent dictatorship of the father of one of my social cricket playing mates. It seemed a fairly relaxed place, yet after a change of principal I went back to fill in for a day and found that there was a rigid seating regime in the staff room, the sort of arrangement that I figured would have applied in the primary schools I attended more than a dozen years earlier.

In that environment the presence of a longhaired pushbike riding local relief teacher who used somebody else's coffee cup and didn't sit in the designated spot at the foot of the table probably seemed like an omen of impending armageddon.

When I make those comments, of course, the reader's likely to presuppose my attitude to these matters, so a degree of clarification is in order.

For a start, looking at these matters from a twenty-first century perspective brings its own pitfalls with us. What's happened over the past fifty years has just about destroyed forever the notion that there's a single ideal way to do anything, but in the sixties and into the seventies those notions were still fairly strongly (and in some cases almost universally) held.

That's hardly surprising when you look at something like education where the existing school system had been in place for less than a century and was in the process of rapid expansion. Getting the thing up and running in the first place was no small achievement, and if there was an orthodoxy in the pedagogy used to teach different subjects it was there because that approach seemed to produce results and there were controlling factors there to ensure that things were done *this way*.

And the reasons for doing it *this way*? First, *because it works*. Second, *because that's what you've been trained to do*. Third, *because there's a structure in place to ensure that you actually do it that way*.

There's a degree of certainty underlying those statements that must seem attractive to some of us sitting in the increasingly uncertain twenty-first century. Given some of the current controversy around issues like global warming, the plain packaging of cigarettes, poker machine reform and binge drinking the prospect of an overweening Nanny State is frequently invoked, often by people who seem to be looking back to a sepia toned golden age.

While you can see where they're coming from they need to remember that the fondly-remembered fifties were, at least from where I'm sitting, a time of orthodoxy that was at least as stultifying as any incoming version. Much of the narrative of the last half century has involved the loosening of the boundaries that era of conventionality and conformity imposed on us.

There's no doubt that in a number of areas the boundaries have been relaxed a little too far, and there's no doubt a few of them could be rolled back somewhere between a little and a significant amount. However once the question becomes *which boundaries?* and *how far?* things start getting a little heated, and out come the special interest lobbies and the Nanny State accusations.

Given the fact that most of the narrative of the last fifty years has been the gradual unravelling of what I'm inclined to regard as the Wowser State, that sort of things is understandable.

Big Tobacco, for example, is in a fight for its survival and there's every chance that within a generation smoking will be virtually non-existent in the Western world. As an ex-smoker who'd have been much happier and considerably better off financially if he hadn't started but still finds his nose twitching when I pass within five metres of a burning cigarette I'd be quite happy if the habit died out tomorrow and took Big Tobacco with it, but I realize that a totally tobacco-free environment is years away and that the habit of governments to treat the poor old smoker as a cash cow isn't too much more reprehensible than Big Tobacco's *get 'em addicted and keep 'em smoking* approach.

Fifty years ago, on the other hand, the vast majority of the male population smoked, a substantial chunk of smokers rolled their own non-filtered cigarettes and cigarette commercials were one of the key revenue earners for the emerging television industry.

The Nanny State allegations also emerge when someone starts talking about restrictions on gambling, and, again, it's interesting to cast the mind back to the fifties and look at the way things were back in a time where a large portion of the population were confirmed gamblers.

Not that there was much they could (legally) gamble on, of course. It has frequently been alleged that Australians would bet on two flies crawling up a wall, but until fairly recently you couldn't do it legally. In fact, that might still be the case, but if you can't get a price about that fly you can get set for any number of exotic wagers through agencies that contribute substantially to government coffers.

Before the government-administered T.A.B. arrived on the scene, if you wanted to bet legally it was a case of going to the races to deal with the licensed on-course bookmakers. Off-course betting was possible through illegal starting price bookmakers, an arrangement that allowed plenty of scope for corruption among the sections of the police force that were entrusted with the responsibility of (theoretically) wiping the practice out or at least keeping it under control and away from the limelight.

Type *queensland totalisator agency* into your search engine and you'll find that the Totalisator Administration Board of Queensland apparently came into being on 15 February 1962, charged with providing, regulating and controlling betting off a racecourse on totalisators, though its charter was widened "to conduct gambling activities (whether in Queensland or elsewhere)" when the TAB Queensland Privatisation Act commenced on 31 August 1999.⁴⁶

Interestingly, as far as the T.A.B. agency is concerned, these places only existed, according to the official rhetoric, to provide an alternative to the illegal S.P. bookies, and while they were a necessary evil they weren't designed to attract customers or encourage them to stay on the premises.

Poker machines hit New South Wales in 1956, initially as a means of funding non-profit community, sporting and recreational clubs and were only introduced into Queensland in 1992. Along the way, of course, restrictions have been removed as various interested parties realised they were

⁴⁶ Queensland State Archives Agency ID1903, Totalisator Administration Board of Queensland

missing an income stream, though the usual justification for liberalization was that their economic survival was under threat.

Those threats were probably real enough, but were, at the same time, the result of things that didn't quite pan out the way they were supposed to.

Taking poker machines as an example, while they were supposedly going to fund the operations of non-profit sporting clubs the stream of poker machine revenues ended up being large enough to fund the construction of ever-larger palatial premises with heavily subsidized meals and entertainment in an ever-escalating spiral that clubs needed to undertake to hold their membership numbers in the face of competition from similar operations in neighbouring suburbs.

Such activity, of course, provided a justification for introducing the machines into hotels, who needed them to hold their declining clientele who were actively being wooed by the clubs. Protecting the pubs became a justification for extended trading hours and an argument against more liberal licensing laws that might encourage the development of smaller, intimate liquor outlets.

All this might seem to be heading almost directly away from Conventionality and Conformity, but each small step of liberalization was hammered out against a background of strong disapproval from the forces that wanted to *keep things the way they are, thank you very much*.

At least from where I was sitting much of the narrative of the past forty years has involved the interaction between those forces and whatever portion of the population that wanted to try something a little different. That fifties-style Conventionality and Conformity is now, of course, a thing of the distant past but its legacy lives on in a strange manner.

That process of liberalization, the interaction between *this is the way things are* and *why can't we do this?* between *no you can't* and *why not?* has produced a prevailing mindset of *try and stop us* and don't mess with my rights as what I've heard described as *Automatic Respect for Authority* was replaced by (close to) *Automatic Disrespect for Authority*.

Those changes were particularly brought to notice in the early nineties when traditional school disciplinary practices (including, but not limited to) corporal punishment) was replaced by behaviour management.

The first thing to remember, we were told in an inaugural session on the new regime, is that you can't make anyone do anything, which struck me at the time as, basically, an absurd proposition. My response to the concept, delivered as an aside to my neighbour at the cynics' table, was that for some reason most of us seem to fill in our income tax returns every year.

No, you mightn't be able to **force** everyone to behave in a particular manner but you can set things up so that most of them will travel down a particular behavioural path with a mixture of prohibition, constraints and consequences, which is what we saw, more or less, in that fifties era of Conventionality and Conformity.

For a start there weren't many options available on most issues in what amounted to a *here it is, take it or leave it* world, and if you chose to leave it there were plenty of avenues from discreet social pressure to persecution and prosecution to force anyone but the most determinedly recalcitrant back into line.

While those pressures were enough to keep the vast majority of the ordinary working and middle classes toeing the line, they didn't apply as strongly at the extremes of the social spectrum, and while things appeared fairly staid and settled on the surface you wouldn't have to dig too deep to find some significant undercurrents under the veneer of respectability that seemed to define the era.

At one extreme you had those who could afford to ignore the moral thought police or could afford to create an environment where their activities were less likely to attract scrutiny, the fifties' equivalent of the legendary Hellfire Club⁴⁷. Those activities came to light from time to time frequently in the pages of publications like the notorious Melbourne *Truth*,⁴⁸ where a working class delight in exposing the foibles of the supposedly well-heeled ensured a wide readership.

At the other extreme, most cities had their dens of iniquity where the same publications could reveal lurid details of the depths to which the respectable could plunge should they veer too far from the norms of respectable society. Most were located in parts of the city where housing was cheap and it was wise not to ask many questions, avoiding overt attentiveness to matters that didn't affect you, the back streets of Brisbane's old Fortitude Valley being a prime example.

Those areas were a haven for those inclined towards unconventional lifestyles, and over the years people operating on the margins of society had built up their own network of employment, housing and welfare opportunities. Many, of course, attracted the same opprobrium as well-known areas of vice and degeneracy. It possibly apocryphal, but as late as the early nineties I was hearing stories about the inadvisability of leaving your laundry on the line overnight while *the Show people* were in town.

Regardless of the veracity of those stories across the western world a travelling fun-fair or circus allegedly provided opportunities for those inclined to wandering to do so while pulling in something like a wage and when someone like Dylan needed a legend to disguise his actual family background, a stint travelling with a sideshow operation seemed perfectly plausible⁴⁹.

Given all of these considerations, the development of a society that emphasized conformity in the post-war years would have been understandable, but that would tend to downplay an even more important factor for my parents' and my grandparents' generations.

The experience of the Great Depression and, more particularly, the Second World War moulded the ways they viewed the world, and even before the Depression the rise of the union movement and the reactions to it underlined the necessity of, and the benefits to be gained by, joining together into larger aggregations.

⁴⁷ Regardless of whether such an organization existed, the Hellfire Club was the generic name for exclusive clubs established by high society British and Irish rakes in the 18th century, rumoured to be meeting places where leading political and social figures could take part in immoral acts. The club motto, *Fais ce que tu voudras* (*Do what thou wilt*) was associated with François Rabelais and, later, Aleister Crowley. In contemporary London there were a number of meeting places for gentlemen with shared interests such as poetry, philosophy or politics, and the Hellfire Club was allegedly a satirical version of religious practices intended to shock rather than a serious attack on religion or morality. Regardless of the veracity of the stories, by the late fifties and early sixties *The Hellfire Club* was a standard code in some elements of the press for situations where eminent figures indulged in illicit pleasures behind closed doors.

⁴⁸ Established in 1902 as a subsidiary of the Sydney *Truth*, the Melbourne *Truth* was a tabloid noted for high pitched sensationalist scandal, along with an excellent and thorough lift-out racing form guide. It was last published in 1995.

⁴⁹ Unravelling the details of Dylan's adolescence and life prior to arriving in New York takes the researcher through a veritable maze of myth and intentional deception. For a start I would point interested parties towards *The Lost Land* Chapter in Dylan's *Chronicles Volume One* or the early chapters of Clinton Heylin's *Bob Dylan: Behind The Shades Take Two* though there are plenty of other sources that could be cited in the cottage industry we've come to know as Dylanology.

In the realm of industrial relations from the time of the Tolpuddle Martyrs⁵⁰ although trade unionism in itself wasn't illegal, it was obvious attempts to organize workers would be stoutly resisted by governments, employers and other vested interests, and the secret to success, at least as far as the union movement was concerned, lay in maintaining solidarity and internal discipline. Within the movement there were a variety of conflicting forces and struggles between the Catholic, Communist and other factions underlined the need for the adherents of a particular viewpoint to stick together.

On the other side of the fence organization and coherence was equally important, since a crack in one section of the employer front would be ruthlessly exploited by union activists. It was a situation that produced the sort of *we put one over the bastards* mentality that saw the provision of covered car parking for workers as a major triumph and reduced negotiations over a Teachers' Award in Queensland to a question of who should wash Education Department towels.

While those experiences were undoubtedly a major factor in the mindset my generation found in their parents and grandparents, a more significant factor was the wartime experience. While the First World War was the first total war, the lessons that came out of it made the Second War an almost totalitarian war. The rise of the heavy bomber, for instance, produced the need for comprehensive blackouts of urban areas that hadn't previously been necessary. The ease with which strategic bombers could deliver widespread devastation meant that such regulations were unlikely to be questioned.

The need for coordinated large scale production and for discipline within the armed forces resulted, in large sections of the community, in an acceptance of authority that made sense at the time but didn't sit so well with those who didn't see things in quite the same light.

Faced with the ration book, the war effort and everything else that went with it, the aftermath of the war and the gradual relaxation of restriction and the return to normality would have been a huge relief, but it wasn't a feeling that was going to sit too easily on shoulders that hadn't experienced the hard times, and even among those on the front line there were moments of absurdity that influenced the way that those involved in the action saw things once they were back on *Civvy Street*.

For the majority of the population, however, there was a broad agreement about the way things were that brought with it a sense that there's one way to approach an issue and a *correct* or *appropriate* way to solve a problem, which is where the conventionality side of the equation kicks in.

⁵⁰The Tolpuddle Martyrs, six farm labourers from a village in Dorset, were transported to Australia in 1834 for forming a trade union, although the charge that resulted in their transportation involved swearing unlawful oaths. Their actual crime was to protesting against the lowering of agricultural wages in an era when mechanization was beginning to have an impact on agricultural working practices in areas where farmers did not have to compete with higher wages paid to workers in London and in the northern industrial centres. The English government, fearing rural unrest, set out to make an example of the six, but after nationwide protest they were released two years later, and returned home in 1838, though five of them subsequently migrated to Canada.

FROM HERE

While the previous chapters will probably seem simplistic a project like this needs some form of structure and from where I'm sitting there's a fair case for viewing events from around 1960 onwards through a prism of dissolving confidence, evaporating consensus, an increasing awareness that the conventional approach isn't always the appropriate one and a world where nonconformity was, increasingly, the norm.

The only one of the factors discussed in those chapters that wasn't substantially diminished was comfort, but, on the other hand you can see fifty years of consumerism as taking that side of things and extending them in ways that someone in 1960 would have seen as the stuff of science fiction. It happened, it was (largely) anticipated but the surprises involved the speed with which these things evolved.

If 1960 seems a fairly arbitrary starting point it's around the time when I first became aware of events in the outside world, though I have vague recollections of things that took place earlier, and the beginning of an era when things became very scary very rapidly.

The current project is, as outlined earlier, a blend of history and reminiscence concerning some of the key events of the past fifty years. It isn't intended as anything approximating an actual history of the times, since there were various events that slipped by unnoticed while I was preoccupied elsewhere and any number of things that wouldn't have attracted my attention in the first place.

Basically, it's an exercise in reminiscence with an attempt to dig around in the embers to see if things actually worked out the way I seem to remember them. If there's an event or theme that seems to have evaded my interest there's going to be an explanation for the situation, and there's always the possibility that there'll be an *Aha!* moment somewhere along the line as I make a connection between something that has evaded notice up to this point and a matter under consideration.

More than anything else I'm interested in using this as an exercise involving long-held reading interests as they intersect with titles that appear on the shelves of book shops or turn up in the Kindle Store or iBooks. A title, in this scenario, attracts my attention and this project gives me an opportunity to reflect on the reading and, possibly, fit it into a wider narrative.

Given my personality and historical inclination, I'm predisposed to possibly irrelevant background, so I find it difficult to examine, for example, events in Laos or the Malaysian Confrontation without delving into an extended history of Laos, Malaysia or Indonesia. Those histories, of course, make no claim to precision or authoritative detail. I'm interested in the background, and in how what I'm reading here ties into the narrative over there.

So, while the contents up to this point are reasonably settled, nothing from here onwards is ever likely to be *finished*, unless I manage to come across a series of titles that deliver the definitive take on a single topic and read them in rapid succession. The rest of the project, initially, will be a succession of chapters covering particular topics that either caught my attention at the time or seem, with the benefit of hindsight, to be significant factors in an emerging area of interest.

Given that scenario, the first priority will be to get an outline of what happened down on virtual paper, something that can be modified and expanded as I meet with something relevant during my reading. The plan is, assuming there's anyone actually interested, to advise of modifications and revisions through the website and the various other elements of my notional digital publishing enterprise.

In a project that's neither fish nor fowl, with elements of autobiography, reminiscence, and historical investigation with, in places, a dash of invective and a proportion of polemic thrown in for good measure it helps to have some sort of overarching structure, the sort of thing that towards the end of my teaching career might have been labelled a *top level structure*.

From the earliest stages of the project, the idea was always to explore various strands that ran through my life and times now that I have the time and the inclination to engage in an exercise in hindsight. The most obvious thematic organizer seemed to be an examination of the way things have changed during my lifetime, and it seemed logical to start with a stab at identifying the way things were in the fifties and then identifying the way that subsequent events reshaped and rearranged the deck chairs on the notional Titanic.

The course from this point onwards, of course, will largely involve exploring various strands in the light of the ways they undermined, modified or maintained those feelings of confidence, comfort, consensus, conventionality and conformity over the fifty-something years after about 1960.

Few of those strands, of course, actually have their origins in the period under discussion, and in each case I expect to be engaging in a fair degree of background research that will bring the story up to the point where I started to pay attention so that I can then start looking at the things I remember and fit them into that overarching structure.

None of those strands, however, exist (or existed) in a vacuum, so there's going to be a fair degree of leakage from one to another. You can't, for instance, look at the Vietnam War without cross-references to the colonial era, Vietnamese history, American and Australian politics, the rise of the anti-war moratorium movements, student radicalism, or, indeed, the conflict in Laos that was a key factor in shaping the way things subsequently shook themselves out.

Given the overall scope of the whole project, it seems logical to separate the strands and explore each of them in, more or less, the sequence I noticed them coming into play, running through each in turn and referring back to an earlier topic where necessary. At the same time there are some things that don't sit comfortably within a single strand but feed into the on-going considerations in a number of ways on a number of fronts.

It's also important to recognize that while I've gone to some lengths to explore the *Five Cs* concept there were significant cultural, political and social undercurrents operating in the background through the fifties and before the point where I started paying attention. Those matters will reemerge when, for example, I start to look at the underground movement in the late sixties. It's also important to stress that while there were those elements of consensus, conformity and conventionality in the lead-up to the sixties there were also significant elements of dissent that were lurking under the surface waiting to reemerge, and when things started to become interesting those elements fuelled much of what went down.

After that, I think, there's a case for exploring my own educational background given the way that much of my own experience was a reaction to those years I spent as a student in Queensland primary and secondary schools. *Reminiscing* is probably a better term than *exploring*, but much of my classroom experience through my career was shaped by the interaction between Queensland's educational past, the developing present and the notional future.

The sequencing of the following chapters may not actually reflect a strict chronology, but at this moment the starting points are chapters on Laos and the Malaysian Confrontation, to be followed by a consideration of postcolonial Africa and a look at the Cold War confrontations that brought us

perilously close (or at least that's the way it seemed to a ten-year-old boy) to the brink of nuclear Armageddon.

Given the fact that the conflict bestrode the American and Australian political landscape for much of the sixties and well into the seventies something about the Vietnam war is an inevitable inclusion, though the initial version will probably take the form of a strict chronology of what happened as a means of tying things that happened elsewhere into a broader context.

A sequence of Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam might seem odd, but I'm inclined to sequence things that way since Laos attracted my attention without bringing anything into question. Mileages may vary, but Malaysia was, in many ways a temporary reinforcement of that fifties sense of confidence.

The insurrection had been quelled through military action, and although there was a degree of nervousness about Indonesia, particularly after the move into the Dutch colony in western New Guinea, the course of events through Confrontation suggested that Australia was safe while the Mother Country had a presence in the neighbourhood.

That didn't last, of course, as the British military presence was rapidly scaled down in the late sixties and the course of events in Vietnam suggested that it wasn't always possible to counter a peasant-based guerilla insurgency through conventional military means.

It didn't take long to realize that the Vietnam war wasn't quite what it seemed on the surface either, and that while you might be able to counter a guerilla war by using the military it needed to be a committed military who were convinced that victory was possible rather than an army of conscripts who'd prefer to be somewhere else and seemed to want to avoid action wherever possible.⁵¹

Moving onto the cultural side of things, I've pencilled in, among other topics, chapters on American rock'n'roll up to the British invasion, and a similar exercise to run through the skiffle era in Britain because both were significant influences on what followed. The actual music of the sixties, from The Beatles onwards, will be explored in a variety of ways, probably in separate chapters about the British, American and Australian variations along with something on the rise of swinging London and the Summer of Love, along with a look at the multimedia global underground that kicked in around the same time and the student radicalism that went close to actually bringing down the French government in 1968.

Music and literature will continue to be explored through the seventies, particularly in the light of the so-called punk rock explosion, though I'm more inclined to see it as an era when the conventional wisdom of what constituted commercial viability was called into question and the ground rules were notionally rewritten and on to the present day.

The geopolitical side of things will include matters like Israel and the Palestinian question, the Biafran War and Bangladesh, though I haven't, at the time of writing, looked too far beyond that.

The scope of what I've outlined above, of course, means that I'll be flat out covering it all in whatever time I have left, but since those matters continue to be the major focus of my reading and listening they're likely to keep me occupied up to the point where things reach their inevitable conclusion and I'm not around to read or listen any more.

⁵¹ While it's not the work of an American, Roger McGough's *Why Patriots are a Bit Nuts in the Head* (<http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/jan2009/roger-mcgough-scaffold.html>) is the perfect example of the mindset of the conscript who, as Elvis Costello later put it, *would rather be anywhere else than here today*.

UNDERCURRENTS

While there was a range of possible alternatives, in many ways the fifties presented as, at least on the surface., a *one size fits all* decade. From everyday issues like the evening meal to more complex philosophical matters there was a standard way to approach the question and most people were happy to follow that route without asking questions as to the associated *whys* and *wherefores*.

That's, at least, the way things seemed on the surface, and I suspect a scan of the standard media outlets at the time would have reinforced the initial impression, and while there would have been the occasional reference to unconventional and nonconformist behaviour these would either have been variations on the theme of *those crazy beatniks and what they're getting up to now* or outright condemnation and predictions of *the end of the world as we know it*.

There's also the question of how far you go back looking for a beginning for those undercurrents. While the fifties poets cast their gaze back to Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge those figures formed part of the orthodox literary canon, and anyone who was likely to be included in the Queensland Secondary English curriculum could hardly be described as part of an undercurrent.

While there are any number of literary and artistic figures who could be seen as precursors of the twentieth century avant garde, the most logical starting point, at least as far as I can see coincides with the industrial-scale slaughter on First World War's Western Front as a group of like-minded individuals in Zurich founded a movement that was the harbinger of much of what was to come later.

When we talk about movements and historical eras we're usually attaching tags that come as the result of hindsight. I'm not sure that the people who were involved in, the Renaissance⁵² or the Enlightenment⁵³ saw themselves and their actions as part of a greater whole or process. Into the nineteenth century, however, individual artists, writers and performers came to see themselves as part of a wider movement. There were Romantics⁵⁴, Symbolists⁵⁵ and Expressionists⁵⁶, for example, but there had never been anything quite like Dadaism⁵⁷.

⁵² The Renaissance (Italian: *Rinascimento*) was a period, cultural and intellectual movement extending from the 14th to the 17th century, beginning in Florence and spreading to the rest of Europe. Traditionally, the Renaissance has been seen as a bridge between the Middle Ages and modern times. Although the Renaissance saw developments in many areas, it is best known for its artwork and the contributions of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

⁵³ The European intellectual movement that reached its peak in the late eighteenth century and was later referred to as the Enlightenment was an era in philosophy and intellectual, scientific and cultural life in which reason was seen as the primary source for legitimacy and authority. Based on a belief in social progress and developing simultaneously in countries across Europe. While the Enlightenment was not a single movement the era was characterized by a critical questioning of traditional institutions, customs, and morals, was critical of existing social norms and was buoyed by the success of the American Revolution. The authors of the American Declaration of Independence, the United States Bill of Rights, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen were motivated by Enlightenment principles.

⁵⁴ Revolting against the social and political norms of the Enlightenment the Romantics reasserted the primacy of the individual and his/her feelings about the natural and supernatural worlds in a mood that ranged from profound despair to dashing bravado.

⁵⁵ The late nineteenth century Symbolist painters, inspired by a similar trend in poetry, expressed individual emotional experience through mythological, mystical and fantastic themes rather than more straightforward aspects of reality.

⁵⁶ Expressionists produced a range of works that distorted or exaggerated nature to reflect an inner world.

⁵⁷ Founded in Zurich in 1916 the Dadaist movement grew out of rebellion against and disillusion with the events of World War I and subsequently spread to other centres, evolving into Surrealism along the way.

Actually, I doubt that there'd ever been anything *quite* like Zurich in 1916 as far as subsequent influence was concerned. Among those who found a degree of shelter there were figures like Lenin, James Joyce and a group of artists with iconoclastic tendencies lead by Tristan Tzara⁵⁸ who gathered at the Cabaret Voltaire⁵⁹.

Dada's mixture of visual arts and graphic design, literature, poetry, manifestoes, theory and theatre, may not have been completely new, and the movement could be shelved along with the other artistic *isms* that proliferated through the twentieth century except for one telling factor. The mixture of elements that ran together did so in a way that rippled down through the century in ways that futurism⁶⁰, for example, didn't, and a bunch of art school types playing their warped version of traditional jazz and twenties ephemera morphed from the Bonzo Dog Dada Band to the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band⁶¹, etching themselves firmly into Hughesy's personal musical iconography.

Looking beyond the Bonzos you can also spot Dada's mixture of art and anti-art, antiwar sentiments, ridicule of the meaninglessness of the modern world, antibourgeois and anarchist tendencies in any number of performers from the late fifties onwards (personally I'd be inclined to start with The Goons⁶² and Spike Jones⁶³, but your mileage may vary) up to, including and following in the wake of punk rock in the seventies and the post-punk eighties.

A glance at a [gallery displaying dadaist artworks](#) reveal a number of images that went on to become part of the backdrop to later expressions of individuality, in much the same way as poster

⁵⁸ Romanian-born French avant-garde poet, essayist and performance artist Tristan Tzara (born Samuel/Samy Rosenstock/Rosenstein in Moinesti, Romania on 16 April 1896 - 25 December 1963), best known as one of the founders of the Dada movement. During World War I, Tzara's shows at the Cabaret Voltaire, along with his poetry and art manifestos represented Dada's nihilistic side. After moving to Paris in 1919, Tzara engaged in activities to shock the public and disintegrate the structures of language as Dada evolved into Surrealism before joining the French Communist Party, fighting with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and the French Resistance during World War II, and serving a term in the National Assembly. He left the Communist Party in 1956, in protest against the Soviet quelling of the Hungarian Revolution and in 1960 was one of the intellectuals who protested against French actions in the Algerian War.

⁵⁹ Founded as an artistic and political performance space on 5 February 1916, Cabaret Voltaire was the birthplace of Dada, but featured artists from every sector of the avant-garde.

⁶⁰ Launched when Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his *Futurist Manifesto* on 5 February 1909, Futurism was a predominantly Italian artistic and social movement, though there were similar movements elsewhere. Futurists eulogized the modern world and the 'beauty of speed and energy', working in painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphic, industrial and interior design, theatre, film, fashion, textiles, literature, music, architecture and even gastronomy. Marinetti condemned all political, literary and artistic tradition, decried the eating of pasta and by 1919 had become a Fascist.

⁶¹ Yet another product of the British art school, the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band blended varying amounts elements of music hall vaudeville, trad jazz, psychedelic rock, avant-garde art and general weirdness after initial exposure through television appearing in the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour* and *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, one of the precursors of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Bonzos albums included *Gorilla* (1967), *The Doughnut in Granny's Greenhouse* (1968), *Tadpoles* and *Keynsham* (both 1969) and the contractual obligation *Let's Make Up And Be Friendly* (1972). Although arch-eccentric Vivian Stanshall died in 1995, the surviving Bonzos reunited in 2006 for a concert tour documented by the live album *Wrestle Poodles... And Win!* and released a studio album *Pour l'Amour des Chiens* in 2007.

⁶² The Goon Show, originally broadcast by the BBC from 1951 to 1960 was a British radio programme largely written by Spike Milligan featuring ludicrous plots with surreal humour and bizarre sound effects that was an influence on later British comedy and popular culture, including the Beatles and Monty Python. See <http://www.thegoonshow.net/>, <http://www.shutupeccles.com/> and the internet Goon Show Radio <http://goons.fabcat.org/>

⁶³ Bandleader Lindley Armstrong "Spike" Jones (14 December 1911 – 1 May 1965) specialized in satirical rearrangements of popular songs punctuated by gunshots, whistles, cowbells, and erratic vocals performed through the 1940s and early 1950s with his City Slickers and The Musical Depreciation Revue. The band's repertoire included humorous takes on the classics such as Rossini's *William Tell Overture*, *Pal-Yat-Chee (I Pagliacci)*, Bizet's *Carmen* and Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*.

images of paintings by Picasso⁶⁴ (*Guernica*⁶⁵ in particular) or Salvador Dali's melting clocks. From Dadaism onwards there's a gradual accumulation of such material that the would-be hip could use to establish and maintain their countercultural credibility.

In the age of Google, Facebook, Amazon and eBay where it's possible to connect with people whose artistic, literary and musical tastes match your own with the click of a mouse and most of what you're likely to be interested in is out there to download or have delivered to wherever you happen to be it must be hard to imagine a time when things away from the mainstream were difficult, and in some cases almost impossible, to find.

Looking at these things the context is, of course, vitally important.

While much of what's under examination here started out as undercurrents in the fifties by some point in the sixties they'd bubbled up sufficiently close to the surface to be noticed by aspirationally hip seventeen-year-olds in the relative remoteness of northern Queensland, and somewhere after that some of these elements reached the point where people acquired them as a means of demonstrating their hip credentials.

Of course, it wouldn't have started that way. Admittedly, there's a fair amount of guesswork here, and I'm drawing extrapolating from my own experience a decade later, but when it came to tracking down the equivalent material in the late sixties I think the same principles applied.

For a start, there's no doubt that for most people who embarked on such a journey the starting point was somewhere in the mainstream. Not quite the middle of the mainstream, perhaps, but the mainstream nonetheless. While the odd kid may have had parents with bohemian or *avant garde* leanings, I suspect that most of those who were caught in the undercurrent started from the fringe of the mainstream in one area of the arts.

What motivated that involvement would, predictably have varied. Someone studying Art at High School would find any number of avenues that could lead them towards emerging themes in painting, sculpture or multi-media. An interest in literature offered obvious diversions even if the starting point was grabbing a couple of volumes of verse in order to impress *that girl over there*, and there are any number of examples that could be cited where an interest in off-beat music was sparked by something heard on one of the high-powered radio stations that broadcast rhythm and blues, rock and jazz across large sections of the United States and into Canada.

In almost every case you'd expect something caught the imagination. *This is interesting, I need to explore this further. How much more of this stuff is there?* would have been the motivation, with the actual avenues being largely determined by what the aspiring hipster was able to find, whether there was anyone in the vicinity with similar leanings, and which direction those leanings pointed towards.

⁶⁴ Spanish painter, draughtsman, and sculptor Pablo Picasso (25 October 1881 – 8 April 1973) demonstrated extraordinary talent in his youth, painting and drawing in a realistic manner through his adolescence before moving on to experiment with different theories, techniques, and ideas in a variety of styles, a process that brought him fame and fortune and made him arguably the best-known figure in 20th century art.

⁶⁵ Picasso's response to the bombing of the Basque city of Guernica by German and Italian warplanes associated with the Nationalist side in the Spanish Civil War on 26 April 1937 was commissioned by Spanish Republican government as a mural for the Spanish display at the 1937 Paris International Exposition is probably his best known work and is seen as expressing the inhumanity, brutality tragedy and hopelessness of war, particularly its effect on innocent civilians.

It's probably worth stressing that while there wasn't a great deal that was actually *new* in some of these matters, but until this point the bohemian or *avant garde* lifestyle was largely confined to particular enclaves within major urban centres. Now, through the late fifties and into the sixties the paperback, the news magazine and high-powered radio transmitters spread the material that made much of what followed in the sixties possible.

As that shift occurred, the starting point for would-be hipsters increasingly veered towards the music rather than art, drama, film or literature. While those other areas were still significant the pervasiveness of pop music through the mid-sixties meant that there was always music in the background, and the music in the background increasingly reflected the geographic spread of those cultural influences.

Anybody looking for an example of the way these undercurrents spread through the western world only needs to look as far as the man who probably did more than any other individual to shape the musical landscape when my peers and I started paying attention in the mid- to late-sixties.

Robert (or Bobby) Zimmerman certainly wasn't the only kid from his generation harbouring beatnik or bohemian tendencies, a taste for rock'n'roll, and an interest in literature, and you'd guess that many of them grew up in out of the way places like Hibbing, Minnesota (2010 population 16,000) tucked away in the Mesabi Range on the edge of the world's largest open-cut iron mine.

Not, you'd tend to think, an ideal location for a would-be angel-headed hipster; but there was always the radio, and he wasn't the only kid listening to high-powered blues and country stations⁶⁶ who went on to form a high school rock'n'roll band, aiming to emulate Little Richard. He spent time in Denver, Colorado, an early centre of Beat activity stretching back past Kerouac's **On The Road**, before he ended up in New York via the Dinkytown⁶⁷ folk music circuit in downtown Minneapolis, becoming a folk singer because, much as he liked his rock'n'roll, folk music was *more serious*⁶⁸.

It's possible to ascribe much of the reaction to Dylan's subsequent activities to the fact that he wasn't the only one with those leanings, with his peers reacting on the basis of where they thought he was coming from and what they imagined they'd do in those circumstances. None of *them*, however,

⁶⁶ Operating out of Nashville WLAC's daytime playlist was aimed at white audiences, but after dark the station's 50,000 watt clear channel transmitter beamed rhythm and blues heard in thirty states (Nadine Cohodas [Spinning Blues Into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records](#) p.61) "as far south as the Gulf of Mexico, way up north in Buffalo, New York, across the Caribbean in Jamaica and as far west as the states at the foot of the Rockies" (Charlie Gillett [The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll](#) p. 39). For Dylan's reminiscences about his youthful listening and how it influenced him see [Chronicles Volume One](#) pp. 32-35. The Band's Robbie Robertson was another listener (Barney Hoskyns [Across The Great Divide: The Band and America](#) pp. 12-13) as were Rick Danko ([ibid.](#) p. 18), Richard Manuel ([ibid.](#) p. 19) and, closer to the source in Arkansas, Levon Helm ([ibid.](#) p.23). Mother Earth singer Tracy Nelson, growing up in Madison WI was another listener.

⁶⁷ Located on the north side of the University of Minnesota campus Dinkytown, is a four block area in Minneapolis occupied by small businesses, restaurants, bars, and apartment buildings housing university students. The young Robert Zimmerman (he adopted the Bob Dylan moniker while he was there) lived above Gray's Drug Store until he moved to New York in January 1961. Musicians on the local folk scene included Eric Von Schmidt, Spider John Koerner, Dave 'Snaker' Ray and Tony 'Little Sun' Glover (the folk/blues trio Koerner, Ray & Glover) and it also spawned the **Little Sandy Review**, a magazine about folk music edited by Paul Nelson,

⁶⁸ For a concise and remarkably thorough account of the factors that lead to Dylan's rise to prominence see Charlie Gillett [op.cit.](#) pp. 297-9.

attracted the attention of Columbia Records producer John Hammond⁶⁹ or ended up with a manipulative manager like Albert Grossman⁷⁰, who happened to have a ready made platform for topical protest songs in the form of the carefully cultivated commercial potential of Peter, Paul and Mary⁷¹.

Having start as a folk artist, he encounters four rockers from Liverpool, some of whom have literary or artistic pretensions after exposure to existentialist bohemians during stints playing all-nighters in Hamburg, introduces them to marijuana and influences the future directions of their song-writing. Then, after hearing an organ-driven cover of *House of the Rising Sun*⁷² from his first album by five rhythm and blues fans from Newcastle-on-Tyne, he goes on to tour in front of a rock band made up of four Canadians and a drummer from Helena, Arkansas who'd cut their musical teeth playing bars and clubs across the back blocks of the U.S.A. and Canada. That outfit, once Dylan's found an excuse to escape from the grind of touring, collaborate with him on what later became known as **The Basement Tapes** and go on to set out the blueprint for the genre that came to be known as Americana with **Music From Big Pink**.

That's not to downplay the influence of artists who rose to prominence in major centres. There were plenty of would-be beats and hipsters in the suburbs of London, New York and Los Angeles as well but it does underline how far the undercurrents had reached in a relatively short space of time. In twenty-first century terms, where a global social networking phenomenon like Facebook can shoot to prominence in a matter of months, the twenty years between the end of World War Two and Dylan's *Like a Rolling Stone* is almost an eternity, but the emergence of another avenue for internet users to interconnect is hardly a cultural quantum leap to match what happened when the undercurrents that ran through the late forties and the fifties came perilously close to the surface in the years between Beatlemania, the Summer of Love, Woodstock, Altamont and the Manson murders.

⁶⁹ Record producer and critic John Hammond (15 December 1910 – 10 July 10, 1987), one of the most influential figures in 20th century music, was instrumental in developing the musical careers of Benny Goodman, Charlie Christian, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Big Joe Turner, Pete Seeger, Aretha Franklin, George Benson, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Bruce Springsteen and Stevie Ray Vaughan and supervised the posthumous reissues of Robert Johnson's recordings.

⁷⁰ Entrepreneur Albert Grossman (21 May 1926 - 25 January 1986) was most famous as Bob Dylan's manager from 1962 to 1970, but his list of clients included Odetta, Peter, Paul and Mary, John Lee Hooker, Ian and Sylvia, Phil Ochs, Gordon Lightfoot, Richie Havens, The Band, the Electric Flag, Jesse Winchester, Janis Joplin and Todd Rundgren. After founding the Gate of Horn club in Chicago he moved into artist management and, with George Wein, founder of the Newport Jazz Festival, started the Newport Folk Festival and later went on to found Bearsville Records, operating out of the eponymous recording studio near Woodstock.

⁷¹ Folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary (Peter Yarrow, Paul Stookey and Mary Travers) were created by Albert Grossman in 1961, after auditioning singers from the New York folk scene, , rehearsed in Boston and Miami, then made their debut at The Bitter End in New York's Greenwich Village. Their first album, which included *500 Miles*, *Lemon Tree*, *If I Had a Hammer* and *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* spent seven weeks at #1 in the Billboard album charts, eventually earning Double Platinum certification. After *Puff the Magic Dragon*, about the loss of childhood innocence, one of their biggest hits was Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind* and they also recorded *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right*, and *When the Ship Comes In*. Their only #1 hit was *Leaving On A Jet Plane*, written by John Denver.

⁷² The story of a *life of sin and misery* in New Orleans, *House of the Rising Sun* as recorded by The Animals topped the pop charts in a number of countries and on both sides of the Atlantic. Although versions were recorded in eastern Kentucky for the Library of Congress by Alan Lomax the song may well have originated in England, possibly based on a sixteenth century Soho brothel, crossing the Atlantic with English emigrants with the setting adapted as part of the folk process. Prior to The Animals' version, the song (or variations on the theme) was recorded by Roy Acuff, Woody Guthrie, Josh White, Lead Belly, Glenn Yarbrough, Frankie Laine, Joan Baez, Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba. The version Dylan recorded for his first album had been learnt from Dave Van Ronk. According to The Animals' Eric Burdon he first heard the song sung by folk singer Johnny Handle in a club in Newcastle.

It's safe to assume that people still set out to establish their street credibility through the contents of their music collection or what's on the book shelves or the walls, though these things are increasingly digital rather than hard copies but going back fifty years a Beardsley⁷³ print, a Kerouac novel or a Muddy Waters LP said more than *this dude has taste*. In a world where these things weren't easy to find, possession indicated not only knowledge but an interest and ability to find them.

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards may have known each other at school, but it was a chance encounter in a train compartment that started things moving towards the Rolling Stones, not just because Jagger was carrying a bundle of Chess LPs but, more significantly, because he was able to get more by mail order from Chicago., with his orders probably being processed by the Marshall Chess who went on to head the Rolling Stones record label in the seventies.

It's possible to cite any number of examples of the way these things worked, but my favourite is the story of Bill Payne's introduction to Lowell George that resulted in the formation of a band called Little Feat. After hearing that Lowell was in the process of putting a band together, Bill arrived on the doorstep to learn George wasn't home, but was ushered indoors where he had time to peruse the book shelves and album collection. In [Bill's own words](#) at that point "I didn't know who Lowell George was, but I admired his taste in women, books, and music".

The contents? Poetry by Carl Sandburg, Dylan Thomas and Allen Ginsberg⁷⁴ and albums by Lenny Bruce, John Coltrane, the Smithsonian blues collection, The Band, The Fugs, the Holy Modal Rounders and Howlin' Wolf.⁷⁵ You pick up some more of the familiar iconography in the monologue in David Bromberg's live version of *Bullfrog Blues*⁷⁶ and there are any number of other examples that could be

⁷³ English artist and author Aubrey Beardsley (21 August 1872 – 16 March 1898), the most controversial artist of the Art Nouveau era, heavily influenced by Japanese woodcuts, produced illustrations for books and magazines with significant grotesque, decadent, and erotic elements. His most famous illustrations drew from history and mythology including Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and he produced drawings for Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and a deluxe edition of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. He was a leading figure in the Aesthetic movement which included Oscar Wilde and James A. McNeill Whistler before his early death from tuberculosis.

⁷⁴ Allen Ginsberg (3 June 1926 – 5 April 1997) son of a Jewish teacher and poet and his Russian emigrant wife was, arguably, the best-known poet of his generation, due to the notoriety he gained through *Howl*, which decries capitalism and conformity in the United States and their effect on "the best minds of my generation". Ginsberg entered Columbia University on a scholarship and in 1945,. At Columbia he met Lucien Carr, who introduced him to Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, John Clellon Holmes and Neal Cassady. In 1954, in San Francisco, Ginsberg met life-long partner Peter Orlovsky, members of the San Francisco Renaissance and other poets associated with the Beat Generation, including Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Lew Welch. A reading at the Six Gallery on 7 October 1955 was the first public reading of *Howl*, recounting of Ginsberg's experiences and a history of the Beat Generation, published in 1956 by San Francisco's City Lights Bookstore, banned for obscenity but later deemed poem to possess redeeming artistic value. In 1957, Ginsberg abandoned San Francisco, moving to Morocco and on to Paris, where he and Orlovsky were joined by Corso, Burroughs and others in a lodging house that became known as the Beat Hotel. During 1962-3, Ginsberg and Orlovsky traveled across India, and in May, 1965 arrived in London, becoming involved with the International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall on 11 June 1965 with readings by Ginsberg, Adrian Mitchell, Alexander Trocchi, Harry Fainlight, Anselm Hollo, Christopher Logue, George Macbeth, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael Horovitz, Simon Vinkenoog, Spike Hawkins, Tom McGrath and William S. Burroughs. Ginsberg formed a bridge between the beat movement and hippie era figures including Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey, and Bob Dylan. talked openly about homosexuality, drug use, Communism and his admiration for Castro and many other Marxist figures at a time when the Red Scare and McCarthyism were raging and continued to broach controversial subjects into the '90s.

⁷⁵ *Mojo* #198 May 2010 p. 70; also http://www.littlefeat.net/index.php?page=blogs&b_id=402 and Brend, M. *Rock and Roll Doctor: Lowell George: guitarist, songwriter and founder of Little Feat* p. 25

⁷⁶ From the 1976 live album *How Late 'll Ya Play Till?* (<http://www.wirz.de/music/brombfrm.htm>). Also a number of live recordings at bt.etree.org.

cited. By that stage, of course, these things had moved past undercurrent and bubbling under to verging right on the edge of the mainstream.

The examples from Lowell George's album collection contain a couple of the most likely late-sixties suspects, but ten years earlier the equivalent would have been drawn from different and mostly quite separate sources. One would have been the European art music equivalent of experimental art, a genre that I've never explored. The other four, however, are inextricably intertwined with the social changes and other developments that followed the First World War.

The first of them, predictably, was jazz, which made its way up the Mississippi from its birthplace in New Orleans, taking root along the way in riverside cities along the way and hitting the big time when it reached Chicago and New York⁷⁷. Along the way the original version changed as players from outside New Orleans clambered aboard, but as that happened the quest for the authentic version gave would-be hipsters room to explore his or her individuality in the search for the genuine article.

Given its origins as dance music, the way jazz evolved into the big band era was hardly a surprising development, and as it became an avenue for mass entertainment significant chunks of jazz fans hived off as traditionalists, seeking to get the music back to its New Orleans roots, or modernist bebop fans, looking to explore improvisation, rhythmic complexity and instrumental virtuosity

Blues, at least in its earliest incarnations, came from the same sources, and it's often forgotten that the first major commercial blues artists were female singers like Bessie Smith⁷⁸ and Ma Rainey. Later, as the phonograph spread through the sharecroppers living in the back blocks of Mississippi and

⁷⁷ For an interesting, if excessively musicological at times, discussion of the New Orleans origins of jazz see Thomas Brothers Louis Armstrong's New Orleans Norton 2006

⁷⁸ Bessie Smith (15 April 1894 – 26 September 1937) "The Empress of the Blues," the greatest of the blues singers in an era when the genre was dominated by female singers was the highest-paid black performer of her day, She started as a street musician in Chattanooga, joined the vaudeville circuit and gradually built a following in the south and along the eastern coast. She made around 160 recordings for Columbia, some of which sold 100,000 copies in a week, accompanied by great Jazz musicians of the era including Louis Armstrong, James P. Johnson, Coleman Hawkins, Benny Goodman and Fletcher Henderson but her career was cut short by the Great Depression (which affected the recording industry) and the "talkies" in movie theatres, which effectively killed off vaudeville. Critically injured in a car accident on U.S. Route 61 between Memphis and Clarksdale, Mississippi, Smith was taken to Clarksdale's Afro-American Hospital where her right arm was amputated and she died without regaining consciousness. After her death, various stories were circulated, one claiming she was refused admittance to a whites-only hospital and died as a result of the delay in treatment.

Alabama, more familiar figures in the blues pantheon, the likes of Charley Patton⁷⁹, Son House⁸⁰, Robert Johnson⁸¹, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf started to emerge. In many ways, at least as far as the record-collecting hipster was concerned, these artists were the genuine article, in the same way as the old New Orleans jazz men and their successors were, and you can see some of that attitude in the conscious marketing of various Chess Records artists through *The Real Folk Blues* series⁸².

In practice, however, as Elijah Wald points out, what came to be known as blues was probably a part, admittedly a *significant* part, of a wider repertoire, since the likes of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf started as sharecroppers playing music on the side, playing what people in their local community wanted to hear. Itinerant bluesmen like Johnson would have needed a similarly wider repertoire if they

⁷⁹ Charley Patton (? – 28 April 1934), considered by many to be the "Father of the Delta Blues" lived most of his life in the Mississippi Delta. Notorious for his showmanship, he was known to play the guitar between his legs, behind his head, or behind his back, and possessed a voice that could allegedly carry 500 yards without amplification. Patton is almost universally regarded as the source of the musical lineage that runs through Tommy and Robert Johnson, Son House, Willie Brown, and Howlin' Wolf, through the Chicago masters and on to virtually everything now labelled blues.

⁸⁰ Eddie James "Son" House, Jr. (21 March 1902 – 19 October 1988) pioneered a guitar style based on repetitive rhythms played with a bottleneck, while his singing incorporated elements of gospel and spiritual music as well as chain gang hollers. He was an influence on later performers including Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. Born near Clarksdale, House began a career as a Baptist preacher aged 15, before being drawn into the blues, playing alongside Charley Patton, Willie Brown, Robert Johnson and Fiddlin' Joe Martin. House spent 1928 and 1929 in Parchman Farm after a killing at a house party, and after his release recorded for Paramount Records in 1930 (*My Black Mama* (1 & 2), *Preachin' The Blues* (1 & 2), *Dry Spell Blues* (1 & 2) as well as an unreleased version of *Walking Blues*). Sessions for Alan Lomax from the Library of Congress in 1941 and 1942 preceded a move to Rochester, New York, where he worked for the New York Central Railroad unaware of rising interest in country blues. Rediscovered by Nick Perls, Dick Waterman and Phil Spiro in June 1964, House played the Newport Folk Festival in 1964, the New York Folk Festival in July 1965, and an October 1967 European tour as part of the American Folk Festival after Canned Heat's Al Wilson was hired to *teach Son House how to play like Son House* prior to recording 1965's *The Father of Delta Blues*. Illness plagued his later years and in 1974 he moved to Detroit, where he remained until his death.

⁸¹ Recordings by Robert Johnson (8 May 1911 – 16 August 1938) from 1936 and 1937 display a combination of vocal and instrumental skill, and songwriting talent that influenced generations of musicians, most notably Eric Clapton. Born in Hazlehurst, Mississippi to Julia Major Dodds (married to a landowner and furniture maker forced to leave Hazlehurst by a lynch mob) and Noah Johnson, baby Robert, aged two, was sent to live with Dodds in Memphis, rejoining his mother in Mississippi in 1919. He married sixteen-year-old Virginia Travis in February 1929, but after Virginia died in childbirth Johnson came under the influence of unrecorded blues man Ike Zinnerman in an environment that allowed him almost unlimited time to practise, acquiring an encyclopedic knowledge of his instrument, and an ability to sing and play in a variety of styles over a relatively short period of time. At the time these developments were attributed to a deal in which Johnson allegedly sold his soul to the Devil at a crossroad near Dockery's plantation rather than talent, lessons from other players and time spent honing his skills. Alongside an ability to play in a variety of styles and to pick up guitar parts almost instantly, Johnson had an uncanny rapport with his audience, an important skill for an itinerant musician moving between the Mississippi Delta, Memphis, Arkansas, St. Louis and Illinois. At Johnson's first recording session on 23 November, 1936 in San Antonio he reportedly performed facing the wall, an act cited as evidence of a shy and reserved performer, but probably stemmed from a desire to prevent rivals from stealing his instrumental tricks. Sixteen songs, with alternate takes for most, were recorded including *Come On In My Kitchen*, *Kind Hearted Woman Blues*, *Dust My Broom*, *Cross Road Blues*, *Terraplane Blues* and *Last Fair Deal Gone Down*. *Terraplane Blues* became a moderate regional hit, and in 1937, Johnson traveled to Dallas for another session. Eleven sides from this session were released the following year. Accounts of Johnson's death on 16 August 1938 vary, but the most widely accepted cause of death involves a bottle of whiskey laced with strychnine by a jealous husband or girlfriend. The precise location of his grave is unknown with three markers erected at supposed burial sites. Given his status as an itinerant performer, playing an undervalued style of music on street corners, juke joints, and Saturday night dances and died young after recording a handful of songs Johnson had an enormous impact on musicians that came after him. The album *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, a compilation of Johnson's recordings, introduced his work to a wider audience—fame and was followed by various reissues and *The Complete Recordings*, a double-disc box set released in 1990.

⁸² Albums billed as *The Real Folk Blues* and *More Real Folk Blues* were released by Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson II, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf and Memphis Slim.

were going to survive on the proceeds of live performances⁸³. When the man with the recording machine came around, however, he was interested in the blues, probably didn't want to record anything else that might be in the artist's repertoire and wasn't necessarily concerned with minor issues like royalties⁸⁴.

In the years that followed those initial recording excursions, of course, internal migration within the United States took those performers into new, predominantly urban, environments and the music changed as electricity entered the equation. Again, there was room for debate about the authenticity of the new forms among blues aficionados, but as a rule possession of a selection of these recordings was enough to establish the owner as someone with tastes beyond the *commercial*.

Things were much the same when it came to folk music, though there was a much more significant element of commerciality through the fifties, and a subsequent emphasis on purity that proved controversial when a certain tousle-headed voice of his generation *went electric* in 1965, though, of course, these issues had reared their heads repeatedly over preceding years.

Jazz, blues and folk were all seen as areas where authenticity was a key consideration as far as quality was concerned, and quality wasn't necessarily an issue where more popular forms of music and the emerging force of rock'n'roll was concerned. What appeared on discerning record shelves from those genres varied, but one suspects that what was there tended to come from what was later labelled the *old weird America* and eccentric British ephemera.

The world of literature, on the other hand, was more diverse, hardly a surprising development when you consider that the printed word had been round since the days of Gutenberg, even if books and quality literature only became available to the unwashed masses with the emergence of the paperback and publishing houses like Penguin Books, which started publishing high quality cheap paperback editions of literary works in 1935. It was an imprint that would have provided many of the titles on the discerning young hipster's bookshelves in the postwar years, particularly when the range was expanded to include *Penguin Classics* and *Penguin Modern Classics* with distinctive black spines.

Alongside the almost-ubiquitous Penguins there were a number of fairly standard titles you could expect to find on the aspiring hipster's shelves, largely poetry alongside a range of exotica, more than likely including something concerning Eastern mysticism, or Zen Buddhism and, if some happened to sneak past the authorities, a sampling of exotic erotica.

By the late fifties and early sixties, many of these currents were starting to coalesce, and while most of them were the latest adaptations of preexisting art forms there were two significant new factors that laid much of the groundwork for later developments in the sixties and beyond.

⁸³ "You had to be prepared to play what your audience wanted you to play, since you were being paid not by salary but by tips. You might be engaged to play all night at a juke joint for a dollar and a half but you were liable to make your real money by filling a request for Leroy Carr's latest release or a Duke Ellington tune. By Johnny Shines's account Robert Johnson was as likely to perform *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* or the latest Bing Crosby hit as one of his own compositions." Peter Guralnick *Searching For Robert Johnson* pp. 21-22

⁸⁴ There's a wonderful example of these attitudes in Dick Waterman's *Between Midnight and Day: The Last Unpublished Blues Archive* (Thunder's Mouth 2003) where he quotes a conversation where Alan Lomax, who recorded Son House for the Library of Congress in the early 1940s is quoted as stating "After I recorded him it wasn't any of my business what he did with his life. My job was to record him for the Library of Congress. I didn't care what he did after that."

Son House: "He came down and recorded me and Willie Brown back then and he didn't give us but one Coca-Cola. Willie grabbed up the Coca-Cola first and I didn't get nothing." (both quotes *ibid.*, p. 37)

The first of these was, as discussed earlier, the rise of the teenager and, more specifically, the teenage quest for identity and the second arrived with the new forms of the mass media through which that quest could be conducted. Again, this idea of the teenager as a new phenomenon might seem odd, but there's no doubt that until the postwar years a teenager's identity was something shaped by his or her social background and, most specifically, who the parents were and where they came from.

Novels like J.D. Salinger's **Catcher in the Rye**, films like *The Wild Bunch* and *Blackboard Jungle* and the emergence of rock'n'roll marked the emergence of the teenager as a separate identifiable entity, and weekly or monthly news magazines, radio and television and new literary movements provided the means by which these developments could spread around the country and across the globe.

Until this point, artistic and social rebellion was something that was best practised in the relatively safe havens provided by student and bohemian quarters of the major cities but as these factors came into play the fact that you could see these trends and related events portrayed in newsreels at the local cinema or read about them in the daily newspaper or in magazines like *Time* and *Life* meant that potentially subversive ideas spread far beyond the range that had previously been possible. More specifically, the rise of the news magazine photo essay provided visual cues that could be employed when seeking like-minded individuals.

That question of uniforms to display individuality has, of course, attracted more than its share of ridicule over the years, and rightly so when it comes to the question of the uniform as an expression of the wearer's individuality. If, on the other hand, the uniform allows the wearer to identify and be identified by like minded individuals that's another matter entirely.

Alongside the emergence of the teenager a new literary movement provided a road map for some of those seeking their own identity suggesting what was possible and some of the ways you might get there. The emergence of the Beat Generation, Ginsberg's *Howl*, Kerouac's⁸⁵ **On The Road** and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookshop and associated publishing business all provided pointers towards future developments, but it was also the era of Senator MacCarthy, the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee, and the Hollywood blacklists.

Reading any of Kerouac's substantial oeuvre, it's hard to avoid the feeling that these people lived in a world that existed in a parallel dimension to the rest of American society. As Kerouac and his associated crisscrossed the United States they tended to follow clearly defined routes between regular refuges, with San Francisco's North Beach as a regular destination, and once they were there it was a case of finding some form of paid employment to replenish the financial resources that would then fund another but of wanderlust.

On The Road, written in 1951 and chronicling Kerouac's wanderings before that didn't appear in print until 1957, by which time many of the events in the next couple of titles had already taken

⁸⁵ Novelist and poet Jack Kerouac (12 March 1922 – 21 October 1969) along with William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg was one of the leaders of the Beat Generation. Dealing with, among other subjects, sex, drugs and jazz (rather than rock'n'roll, which Kerouac never seems to have 'got') his writings have had a strong and continuing influence on subsequent generations of writers, including Dylan, Ken Kesey and Hunter S. Thompson. Reflecting the spontaneous creation of jazz rather than the conscious creation of literature, Kerouac's style has more than its share of detractors ("that's not writing, that's typing" being Truman Capote's memorable put-down), and that's before you get to the predictable condemnation of his work on moral grounds through the later part of the Eisenhower years. On the other hand, while Kerouac was claimed as one of the leading influences on the emerging hippie movement ten years later, by that time things had moved so rapidly that his work almost seemed alarmingly conservative. His alcohol-related death at the age of 47 seemed, at the time to reinforce that image.

place, and Kerouac's subsequent experiences as a successful author weren't entirely happy ones. The story begins with Dean Moriarty (the Neal Cassady character) arriving in New York, where he meets narrator Sal Paradise (Kerouac) and Carlo Marx (Allen Ginsberg), sharing stories of friends and acquaintances and their adventures across the country. In July 1947, Sal starts his first journey to the West Coast with fifty dollars in his pocket after a friend has sent an invitation to join him, with hints of worldwide travel to follow.

In San Francisco, Sal takes a job as a security guard but before long is on the road again, and on the bus to Los Angeles he meets Mexican Terry, who has run away from her husband. After a stint in a migrant worker's camp and further travels Sal ends up in Denver, Colorado, reuniting with Dean, before a trip to Mexico City, where Sal develops dysentery, and Dean leaves him behind. The novel ends in New York City with Dean arranging for Sal and his girlfriend to move to San Francisco, a plan that fails to happen.

It's easy to see how the story could tip young and impressionable seekers onto a similar path, and subsequent volumes, in particular **The Dharma Bums** and **Desolation Angels** throw an element of Zen mysticism into the mix.

After the travels described in **The Dharma Bums**, Kerouac's next effort, **Desolation Angels**, takes the reader through a summer spent as a fire observer in the northwest, the sort of employment that might have seemed ideal at the start of the season, and those adventures acted as a road map for the next wave of seekers, and it's hard to imagine the emergence of the hippie movement in the mid-sixties without the preceding Beat enclaves in San Francisco.

It wasn't just North Beach and Greenwich Village. As the Beats and their acolytes, would-be writers and poets found like-minded individuals, new enclaves like Perry Lane, the bohemian quarter next to Stanford University where Ken Kesey wrote **One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest** and **Sometimes A Great Notion** in between working on the night shift at the Menlo Park Veterans' Hospital and ingesting his legendary LSD-laced venison chilli and a variety of other mind-altering substances.

All these developments, of course, attracted considerable negative coverage in the press. There was plenty of tut-tutting, quite a bit of outrage and a zest for reporting the progress of obscenity trials that rather suggested that some of the reporters involved were getting their jollies from the gory details. When something appeared in a newsreel or on television the commentary was almost invariably unfavourable, and was presumably intended to provide these rash young fools a chance to see the error of their ways and to deter any who harboured ambitions in such directions from exploring same.

In reality, of course, that publicity merely enabled the disaffected to shout **Hey! Found some more! It's over here!**

A FIFTIES QUEENSLAND EDUCATION

While confidence in the future, a rising level of comfortable living and a broad sense of consensus on important issues were significant factors, it was clear, through the fifties that there was a correct and appropriate way to do things, and one of the best examples of this sense of conventionality lay in the education system I grew up in.

The education system in Queensland during the fifties was, in many ways, a logical extension of the original premise of public education which was, as far as I can make out, to provide something to occupy the kids once restrictions on childhood labour were in place and, at the same time deliver a certain degree of basic literacy and numeracy.

On that basis, it wasn't meant to be anything flash, and, once a kid had completed his or her primary education, anything further would supposedly have to be earned by merit. While there were private schools that provided secondary education, given their perceived status as bastions of social privilege and respectability, there would need to be a certain number of State High Schools to provide an option for children whose parents lacked the wherewithal to send them to one of the Grammar Schools or religious-based Colleges.

At the same time, it wasn't going to be possible to let just any Thomas, Richard or Harold loose in the halls of secondary, and possibly tertiary, education.

Controlling the flow of students into secondary was largely achieved through the Scholarship exam, which kids sat at the end of Grade Eight. My understanding is that a pass in the examination delivered a government scholarship, which supposedly enabled the lucky winner to attend secondary school without the parents having to pay enrolment fees.

In practice, however Scholarship became something else as more and more kids were being channelled into the High Schools. It became the first filter in a developing educational hierarchy.

Couldn't pass Scholarship? Simple, lad. Two choices. Have another go, and perhaps a third until you finally do, or quietly disappear into the work force.

Employment prospects for those who failed Scholarship weren't, of course, anything flash, and largely took the form of a lifetime of unskilled manual labour for the blokes and something along the same lines for the little shielas until they married, and disappeared into the ranks of home duties.

Technically, since Scholarship was a check to see whether the kid in question had what it takes to achieve at the next level, the exams were based around English and Maths with enough additional content from the other subject areas to ensure that when the kids hit their High School History, Geography and Science classes they had the prerequisite background knowledge.

Now, for the vast majority of parents and regardless of the feelings of the kids who had to sit for the thing, Scholarship was something that you needed to pass, and any questions about why we needed to learn this stuff was answered with the news that you might need it to pass the dreaded exam at the end of Grade Eight.

Given recent research into the development of the human brain, the restrictions this environment placed on kids arguably helped to keep most manifestations of what we've come to know as 'teenage mayhem' under a fairly tight rein.

Having used the external examination to separate the wheat and chaff at the end of Grade Eight, a second filter came in at the end of Year Ten as the old Junior exam, typically taken over eight subjects, including some, like Technical Drawing, Woodwork, Metalwork, Bookkeeping, Shorthand and Accounting, that had obvious implications for future employment opportunities.

Passing Junior opened access to a range of 'better' employment prospects. There was the possibility of an apprenticeship, for a start, and the level of academic achievement meant that the kids could probably meet the requirements at the lowest level of work in an office or bank, and a good Junior pass provided the prospect of finding a position in the State public service.

A 'good' Junior pass, of course, also suggested that the kids in question might just have the intellectual capacity to go on to tackle Senior at the end of Grade Twelve, with the heady prospect of University after that if you were good enough or your parents could afford to send you there.

If you didn't rate highly enough in your six Senior subjects to gain access to tertiary education, there were likely to be positions, for example, in the Commonwealth Public Service that were commensurate with the student's presumably greater intellectual ability.

While the system wouldn't have gone anywhere near the rigours of the Japanese 'exam hell' this system of external assessment was plenty nerve-wracking, though for most of my school life it was accepted that this was the way things were, and it was something that you had to endure rather than avoid.

The first sign that the kingdom was crumbling came with the abolition of the Scholarship exam, and the subsequent move of Grade Eight into the High Schools. Fortunately, that happened the year before I would have sat the thing, which may or may not have been a good thing, given Hughesy's subsequent less than stellar academic record.

Looking around me at through my Junior and Senior years it was fairly obvious that there was an emerging pecking order, based on when you finally knuckled under and started preparing seriously for the exam. When I started Grade Nine, or Sub-Junior as it was otherwise known, I was probably still too wet behind the ears to notice when the academic leaders really started working towards the dreaded exam.

My own start in August of my Junior Year was enough to secure 6As and 2 Bs which was enough to ensure that I headed through to the next stage, and a bit of familiarity with the format meant that you noticed that there were some kids who hit the ground running in Sub-Senior and maintained the same pace for the next two years.

Now, for all its failings, this system of external exams with the presence of the one big threat at the end of the two years meant that you didn't have to start working all that hard from the get-go, and you could cruise along and devote plenty of time to other interests before settling down to cram for the exam.

If you had ambitions, of course, you hit the ground running and kept up that pace. That probably also meant that you probably had a good idea of where you were headed, and were probably subject to a considerable weight of Parental Expectation as well.

So, presuming you saw your career path in Medicine or Law or one of the other faculties that were notoriously hard to get into, you started strong and kept it up. If you weren't quite that ambitious, you cruised through Sub-Senior and got down to it at the start of the final year. Others waited till May, August, or whenever the fact that everybody else in your peer group had started on the swot trail left you without much choice other than joining them.

Some of us never started at all.

By contrast, primary education at the time was reasonably straightforward, though it was a straightforwardness that would have been unrecognizable to anybody familiar with the education system from the eighties onwards.

Again, more by good luck than good management, I managed to avoid the worst of the bad old days when I started teaching but there were enough traces of the old system in place to remind me about what I'd been lucky enough to miss.

In any case, I finished Senior, picked enough points to matriculate, but not enough to land a Commonwealth Government scholarship, and ended up at University on the expectation I'd be able to pick up a scholarship when someone else dropped out at the end of first year. As it turned out I was the one doing the dropping out, and I was presented with a straight ultimatum: *You're going to Teachers' College.*

Eighteen months earlier I'd delivered a flat rejection of teaching as a career path. I don't recall the exact thought processes that produced that response at the time, but I suspect that my experiences through my school years played a major part in the *no thanks*.

In any case (or so I thought) while I went to College I could also do some University subjects part-time to extend an emerging interest in history, and that once I'd done a bit of teaching I'd be able to step into some form of academic existence.

When I arrived there, Townsville Teachers' College was embarking on its second year of existence, and I was one of four separate cohorts. There were a group of second-year students, who were going to graduate at the end of 1970, another group of kids who would be going on to a third year, a horde of first year students and another group of University dropouts which might've included me had I managed to pass a third *teaching* subject the previous year.

On the basis that a University dropout wasn't likely to be an entirely reliable academic conveyance Hughesy wasn't going to be offered a three-year scholarship, so I was down for the soon-to-be obsolete two-year course.

There had, over the years, been a gradual lengthening of the teacher training process, and the seventies and eighties were to see the disappearance of the dedicated teacher-training institutions, resulting in a further shift in educational emphasis.

Initially, as far as I can make out, there was no formal training process for Queensland teachers. You took someone and stuck them in a classroom to be supervised by the Head Master if the school boasted more than a single classroom, while the Inspector of Schools made his way around the schools to ensure that everybody was doing what they were supposed to be doing.

From that point there had been various systems put in place to deliver trained teachers into the classroom, and by the early sixties this was done by taking University graduates, getting them to do a

one-year Diploma of Education and sending them into a High School or sending someone whose Senior pass wouldn't get them into University on a one- or two-year Primary education course.

The two-year course I set out on wasn't, however much the authorities tried to gild the lily, a robust example of academic rigour. With ten subjects per semester, there's no way it could have been. Apart from Education, Physical Education, Art, Music and Speech and Drama you had a couple of 'academic' subjects (History, for example) and other 'method' subjects, which let you know how you were supposed to go about teaching each area of the curriculum.

Teachers' College lecturers were, on the whole, experienced teachers with a Bachelor degree, which was, of course, about all you'd need to run a History course that covered the contemporary world or Australian history in a six-month semester.

Now, I hadn't done very well in my year at the old University College of Townsville, but I had managed a Credit for History I, with a course description of The Contemporary World 1890 - 1960. I was mildly bemused to discover that first-year history at College came with the same descriptor, one lecture and one seminar per week over about twenty weeks.

That was, effectively, one-twentieth of a year's workload. The previous year, I'd pulled in a Credit for a course that involved two lectures and a seminar each week for thirty-something weeks and represented a quarter of a year's workload. That should have been, at least as far as I was concerned, enough to excuse me from the College version.

We were, however, only on the cusp of the big changes that were about to hit Education, so there was no way I was going to be able to escape doing the course. Having enjoyed the debates that characterized some of the previous year's seminars if I was going to have to do this course, I thought, I was going to argue.

I had all last year's seminar papers, a reasonable library and an inclination to pick nits, which wasn't too difficult when presented with a thousand-word paper written by someone who may not have studied the subject after Grade Eight and used the World Book as their sole reference source.

As far as the authorities were concerned, what was being delivered was probably enough to ensure that College graduates knew enough to teach the current curriculum. Looking back on it, there was enough content in the 'academic' courses to cover the content in most subject areas, and the graduate could always go back to their Earth Science College text if they needed a little more understanding of some geological question asked by a bright student.

If a two-year trained teacher wanted to upgrade, he or she could do so through part-time or external study at University. Completing the equivalent of first-year University was enough to move from the two-year-trained pay scale to the three-year tier, and when the teacher in question completed their Bachelor degree, that raised them to four-year status.

In any case, that was the way the landscape looked when I graduated from College at the end of 1971 and headed off to a first year appointment at Townsville's Heatley Primary. What I found when I got there is a different kettle of fish that needs to be investigated a bit further along the way.

THE WHEELS START TO FALL OFF

I was nearing the end of my primary school education when I first got the sense of impending doom that continued on and off for most of my adult life. That's not to suggest that I'm permanently looking back over the shoulder for signs of impending Armageddon, but ever since about 1961 I've had a feeling that *this thing may not last too much longer*.

That may seem like an extreme reaction, but if you lived through the events I'm about to reflect on you were probably very scared at the time. I'm not exaggerating when I say that for a fair while I went to bed every night believing that the world might not be there in the morning.

So, what were the global crises that brought this on? Readers might suggest I'm overdoing the 'c' theme, but (in no particular order) we're looking at the Cold War, the legacy of colonialism in Indochina and the (formerly Belgian) Congo, the Malaysian Confrontation, the Cuban Missile Crisis and Christine Keeler.

Oh, and conscription fits in there as well, though it was a couple more years before that little issue started scaring the crap out of me.

Now, in many ways, these issues were intertwined. You can't look at Christine Keeler and the Profumo Affair without delving into the politics of the Cold War for example, and conscription is inextricably linked to the Vietnam War, relations between Malaysia and Indonesia and the Cold War implications of the Domino Principle.

Now, you may wonder what a ten- or eleven-year-old boy is doing getting himself concerned about these matters, and I'd explain much of it on a combination of some lurid press coverage and the fact that many of the people and places involved had exotic or interesting names.

In the big picture, when you look at what happened in Indochina after World War Two, the events in Laos are very much a sideshow and most people's attention turns directly to Vietnam, Cambodia, the Viet Cong and the Khmer Rouge.

Hughesy's earliest recollections of events in Indochina, however, are based around a political and administrative capital (Vientiane), a royal capital (Luang Prabang), the 'strategic' Plain of Jars⁸⁶ and two princely siblings named Souphanouvong and Souvanna Phouma.

⁸⁶ The Plain of Jars, the name often given to an Iron Age landscape, arguably the most dangerous archaeological site, in the world containing thousands of stone jars. The Plain of Jars is usually used to refer to Xieng Khouang plain rather than the archaeological sites themselves. Lao legends tell of a ruler called Khun Cheung, who created the jars to store rice wine to celebrate victory after a long battle, but the first Westerner to study the Plain of Jars, French archaeologist Madeleine Colan, believed the jars were used in ancient funeral ceremonies. The area was a Pathet Lao stronghold and the jars now lie amidst thousands of unexploded bombs, the legacy of massive bombardment during the Secret War that turned Laos into the most bombed country in history. The town of Xieng Khouang was destroyed during the fighting and a new town, Phonsavan, was built in the mid 1970s.