

My Shoreditch Days.

It was largely due to the headmaster of my school, Charlton Central School, that I trained at Shoreditch and became a Craft teacher. I had passed the School Certificate exam with good grades including those of metalwork and technical drawing. However, I really wanted to work in the film making industry behind the camera, but discovered at the interview at the Youth Employment Bureau that at that time it was a "closed shop" and I did not have any "connections". I was offered a vacancy in one of the local factories as a capstan lathe operator. Both my Dad and my headmaster thought this was a waste of my talents and I was persuaded to attend an interview at Pitfield Street. The 1944 Education Act was being implemented and there was an urgent need for more specialist subject teachers. Thus in September 1950 I became a student in the Prep department, City and Guilds Course and then on to the S.T.C. for specialist Handicrafts Teacher training following National Service. It was here that I made friends with Charlie Wheeler, who came from a similar educational background as myself and lived at Fulham. His father operated a wedding and funeral car hire company. Unfortunately the Prep dept. Closed after a year and the college moved to Coopers Hill. We were all guaranteed a place there following completion of our two years National Service. I spent a short period of time as a teaching assistant(teaching practice), arranged by one of the Shoreditch tutors, at an E.S.N. school in Greenwich, spending much of the time making, sorting and repairing teaching aids but also some 1 to 1 teaching. I then worked in the general office of the town clerks department of Woolwich Town Hall until "called up" in August 1950. I had applied for an early call up as I wanted to be able to start at S.T.C. in September 1954.

I spent the first year in "the Huts" luxurious compared to the ones at Catterick!! For the second year I had a room on the second floor of the main building sharing with a fellow student. I have forgotten his name but the surname like mine, began with an F. Charlie Wheeler also returned the same year as a day student, arriving each day in "Genevieve" his restored Austin 7, parking with other car owners in Chestnut walk? Now and again he would arrive in his father's Roll Royce Hearse. Charlie and I kept in touch for a number of years. He married, had children, lived and taught at a school in the Kent mining area but died many years ago. He was like myself, a member of the Kent branch of the I.C.ed.

I also became re-acquainted with tutors from my "prep" days and was able to kit myself out with tools at discounted prices from Tyzaks in Old Street. I well remember Mr Thomas from my prep days because of his repertoire of jokes. He was still trotting the same ones outwith his lectures at Coopers Hill. Charlie and I would wait for the "punch lines" and then say them with him. It was a while before he realised we had heard them all before. I remember a Mr Sawdy – woodwork. "Slip" Adams-pottery. Mr Kynaston- metalwork. He had a hand tremor and we were amazed that he never missed when demonstrating centre punching. Mr Joy-history. I well remember a quotation on the wall of the history room, "All power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely". How true!! I vaguely also remember a Mr Oliver? but this may also have been Mr Joy and am getting mixed up with someone else, who lectured on child development "nature and nurture" in the history room.

Other stunts of my year group I remember were Don Foot who drove an old Lanchester with a pre selective gearbox. He acted as "taxi driver" on many occasions to Royal Holloway and East Hampstead Park, as well as trips to Staines and Egham. These trips would often also include Ken Fell. We shared one of the teaching practice assignments with me which was a very memorable event. I travelled to the school with him on the back of his motor bike. One icy morning we came off while negotiating Egham roundabout and skidded round it on our

backsides. Fortunately there was no damage done to us or the bike and we were able to continue, but with a hole in the seat of my trousers!! I stood with my back to the wall while giving lessons. Fortunately they were in a classroom and not workshops that day.

I took advantage of the discounted driving lessons offer during my first year, and passed the driving test in the driving school car, an Austin A40 in Slough "the safety town". This enabled me to make more use of "Rachel" my 1930 Model "M" M.G.midget, to go home weekends etc. I also met a girl from East Hampstead Park at one of their dances in my final year and like many others, eventually married her in 1959. I discovered she lived near me at Barnehurst and we were able to go home together at weekends and term ends etc.

Also towards the end of the first year and having more mobility I had teaching practice at Dormers Wells School in Southall. By sheer coincidence I had relatives living there and was able to stay with them. I had two female cousins there and they sometimes came with me to some of the college functions.

I made a short film on 9.5mm of the 1955 River Carnival at Runnymede which included a re-enactment of the signing of the Magna Carta. This was later shown on a 6ft screen in the college chapel using my Pathoscope 200B Plus projector. I have been a "cinemaniac" since the age of 14!! And still have a lot of equipment and private cinema. Shoreditch training has other advantages besides teaching!!

Another notable event took place when Marilyn Monroe was in temporary residence along the road from the college whilst filming over here together with her new husband. A group of us having visited The barley Mow, decided we would entertain her with a few songs. She quite enjoyed our performance and was very pleased to talk to us, but not so her husband. Our "Choir" was depicted in the film "My week with Marilyn" which was made a few years ago. Our group being depicted as a local Choir.

I retired from teaching in 1990 at the age of 56 being fortunate to be able to take voluntary redundancy with enhanced retirement pension. I watch "The Repair Shop" and the craftsmen there, now a rare breed. To think I used to teach kids to do what they do!! How times have changed. I still have some of the things I have made at S.T.C. and after, including my lapel badge and college scarf, which like me is a little moth eaten and showing signs of wear and tear. Ken Finch, ex S.T.C. 1956 year.