

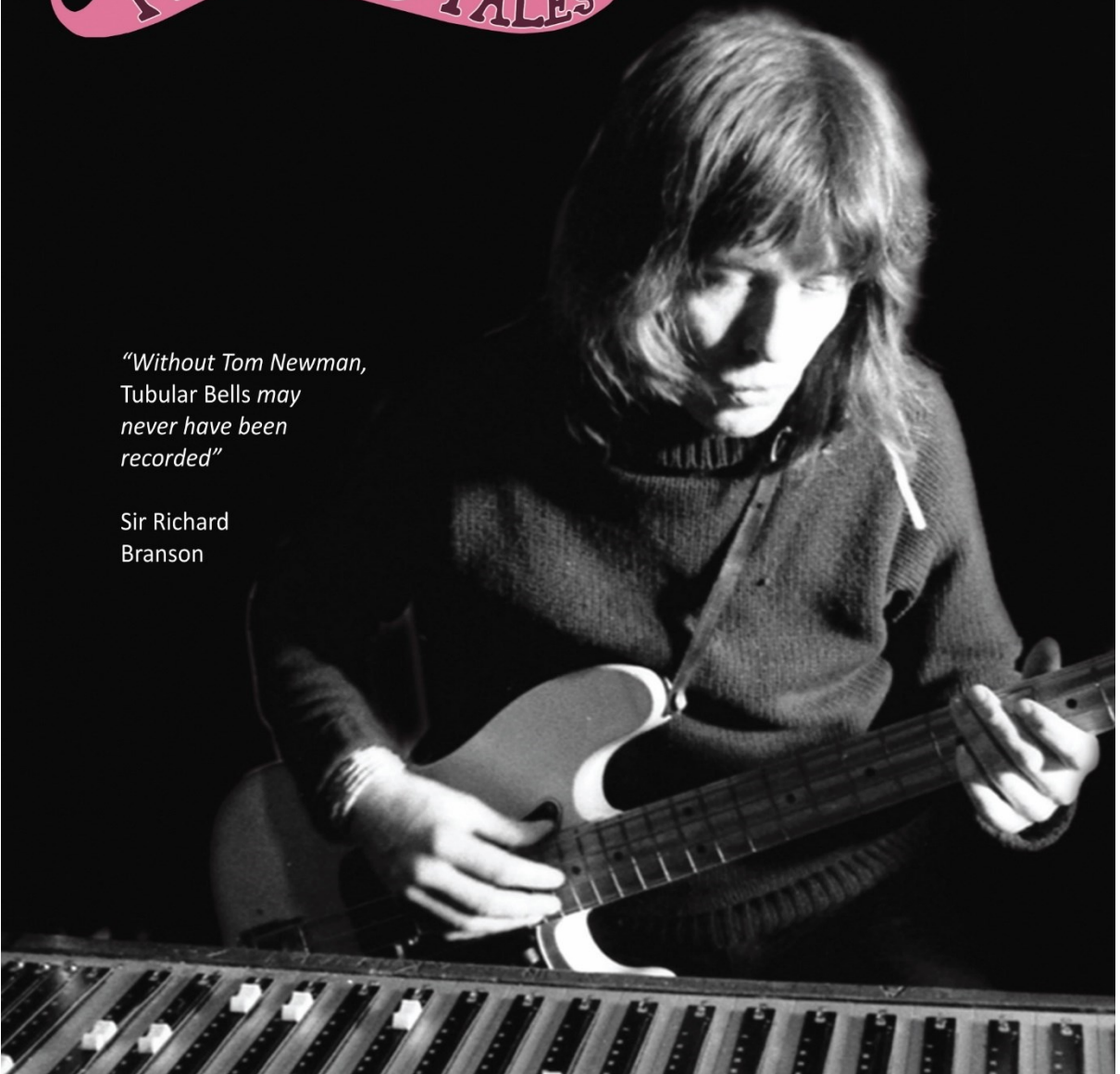
TOM NEWMAN

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

FINE OLD TALES

*"Without Tom Newman,
Tubular Bells may
never have been
recorded"*

Sir Richard
Branson



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Tom Newman

Fine Old Tales

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First Words

These memoirs were begun on February 5th 2012, and initially as a desperate attempt to stave off a sudden need to commit suicide.

This occasional impulse seems to crop up mostly when urgent problems connected with money have become gloomily insolvable. Being already aware, and oft reminded of the reasons – never having had a long term ‘proper job’ to warrant a proper pension for example – it is still always totally unhelpful, practically speaking, especially with the head in a black cloud.

Winning the lottery is the only pragmatic cure of course, and one that I’ve tried hard to do, with prayer, and all manner of diverse appeasements, to every god in my considerable Pantheon. Even to the extreme of having bought a ticket once or twice.

The same ones who oft remind me of my misspent youth, pension-wise, have for many years also beseeched, nay cajoled me to auto-biographise, this usually to silence the whining over some now long forgotten impending penury.

This always seemed such a monumental commitment it left me in horror of the work required. The excuse was always the same, and to hand, “I can’t write, I’m a musician”.

It’s not fully yet understood why, but on the 5th of Feb none of these tired responses surfaced, and well, I just opened a ‘Word doc.’ and started.

It can only have been a peculiar astrological cusp, or more likely a spectacularly outrageous galactic alignment of significant influence on humanity that was happening on the 4th.

It took several weeks before the enormity of the task dawned, and by then I had started to enjoy a strangely revitalising feeling – cathartic yet therapeutic, and possibly connected with trying to be completely honest.

If a person is to be bold enough to take their history and lay it out for global perusal, what would be the sense in it being based on how one thought one appeared, or how one wanted to appear. Writing about a person’s life achievements makes a person consider what these achievements may have signified to others, and even how much, truly, one actually had achieved, and how much these apparent achievements, such as they may have been, affected

history in general, or even history on a local level. Or even a personal level.

Are they, in fact, even achievements at all? They may be just the pathetic mitherings of a boring weak person, buffeted by the winds of random circumstance, the whinings of a man of straw, unable to hold down a paltry but at least pension-worthy day job...

These things I wondered.

“Sure – and I’ll do it anyway, and the Devil take the hindermost!”
- to quote me ‘auld Mum.

What becomes apparent is the more a person self-analyses as they go, every sentence and adjective and adverb and all the other thingies I can’t remember the names of, but I knew at school, the more the actual size of an achievement or action ceases to be relevant, and the more the truth of the motive becomes the object of the job. Even if this seems to reduce a person’s status and grandeur in their own eyes, at the least a truth is being told.

And, by God, I would venture, modern biographies would generally tend to spread truths in a way akin to the butter spread in a greasy-spoon sarnie.

Where was I?

So, excuse me reader, if these pages appear somewhat disjointed to the ear, (rather like my music), and lack the polished flow of the experienced writer. If you would indulge me, reside for a while in a space free of the preconceptions and the corraling influence of accepted literary genres, and trust I will take you nowhere too scary. Perhaps.

My great friend Sea, an admitted American, but, despite this pitiful and terminal disadvantage, a woman of true grit and literary integrity, has become a guiding light in this opus. She just wrote me a few lines of critique from horseback on the Mogollon Rim (somewhere on Mars I think), on the first draughts.

Her comments framed perfectly the quiescent unease I have been feeling, yet unable till now to interpret – how to find and express again that feeling of excitement and discovery without tainting the words with the dark matter of age cynicism and irony, how to retain the sense of adolescent beauty and innocence that made magical the world of childhood.

In Autumn 2023, a stroke robbed me of some of my memories, and although the old noggin is still sharp, it's become frustrating to write at length. I'd already written much of this book, but thankfully, much of the rest of my story was captured in long interviews with Paul Harris and Rob Reed for a DVD documentary in 2020, *From The Manor Born*, and some earlier interviews with David Porter and Hector Campos. Further interviews over a number of days at my home on the Isle of Wight (as pictured below, with Dave Gilmour's guitar) with Chris Dewey in 2025 helped finally fill the remaining gaps. Some of the content, particularly beyond my childhood and into my working life have therefore been reworked from the transcripts from those recordings, but everything is in my own words. For this reason, you may notice a change in style as the book changes from my earlier carefully crafted written words to transcripts of my spoken words. I'd also like to thank my good friends Philip Newell and Alan Perkins for their work on proof-reading and fact checking the final draft.



Prams, Bombs & Cockerel Blood

Glennis Dance was my pram-bound arch nemesis. A bespectacled future bride planned for me by my mum and hers, who surreptitiously took over and dominated MY pram! I was already starting to develop an understanding of 'pique' at having to share my pram with strange unstable yet unmovable brown paper bags of what was called 'shopping', but the imposition of this other small creature was the last straw. I didn't hate her, or even dislike her, I just failed to comprehend anything about her. For some reason she didn't seem to be of my genus. It was like having to be in one's pram with a kind of humanoid, but a not very convincing one. I also think that I had become slightly disturbed by the getting married words that kept being repeated. I had no idea, of course what most words meant yet, it was 1944, and I was under two, but I was starting to pick up a 'gist' occasionally.

The war was still on when I lost my pram to Glennis, and one of the only compensations was being prammed – albeit with her, to a place I was highly impressed by, Horsenden Hill, in Perivale, a high place where I saw a dogfight over a flying bomb, and a fantastic explosion as it blew up a something in the distance which became known in family history as 'The V-1 on the Aladdin Factory'.

I had never been to a high place. It made a strange and scary impression on me. I was told I screamed about it at the time, but settled down when my dad picked me up, as that was rare, but supremely comforting. The Spitfires and the bomb failed to impress till much later.

Other odd occurrences of note were sirens, which I still love – one got me into my first scary interview with the police of the '50s, and the sense of indignity on being thrust unceremoniously under the dining room table at the onset of air-raids, which, despite their terminal ferocity, became such a norm that they were taken in one's stride. I liked the earthy smell of the Anderson shelter, too. Really cosy! I also remember being rushed into an underground station on the way back from a visit to the dreaded Auntie Minnie – her of the lipstick and perfume and fags! I wonder would the same attitudes prevail today... sing-songs in the underground, and bombs overhead?

The only other thing that happened during the war, which I now believe also had a strange effect on my future, was that it ended on my birthday. My second birthday.

That one was the first that I was aware of, and though I didn't know what 'birthday' was, I knew it was very important, and so was I, because the whole street set out tables and celebrated my birthday all day long. I was inconsolable the next year, when no one set out tables in the street and not a soul turned up but Aunt Minnie the lipstick kisser and the two mad sisters Joan and Philomena, drunken uncle Paddy, and Uncle Dennis, the Navy sailor Magician, who had been in the 'Far East', and in front of my eyes, he took Aunt Minnie's long hat pin and pushed it right through his forearm and pulled it out again, without any blood, or apparent pain.

Glennis, being bigger, managed to throw me out of MY pram a week or so after my birthday, I have no idea why to this day (must go on my bucket list), but after the stitches were removed, I was strapped into my own pram with an industrial leather harness, in powder blue, with a sleigh bell in the middle, and though indignant at the time, it shaped, I'm sure, yet another aspect of my future erotic responses. Glennis, of course, got off scot-free.

I was apparently born in the upstairs back room of No 53 Rydal Crescent, Perivale, and had I the inclination, I could have appreciated from the back bay window the Art Déco splendour of the back of the Hoover building. I have only the vaguest recollection of living there, as we moved when I was one and a bit, to No 143, same street, same side further up the hill, and backing onto the railway line serving the industrial estate.

This was the house where conscious life began, the chicken shed dive occurred, and my wonderfully attentive and overworked Guardian Angel was entrusted with my future safety.

As a small person, I seemed to have made a habit of either falling or being thrown from high places. It wasn't long before I developed considerable prowess in the running and climbing department. A neighbour's son, my first 'friend,' Johnny Palmer, also a climber, found his way up onto the top of the chicken shed and encouraged me to prove my worth and follow. Having got up he then pushed me off for some reason, and though I had proved my climbing ability,

unfortunately, I was completely ignorant of 'landing and rolling' skills at that time – my parachute training being still fifty years away – so I landed on my forehead, and the spurting blood just reminded me of the pram debacle, bringing on another round of screaming, and running for my mum. After the stitches were removed it, all went quite calm for a while.

The kitchen at 143 had a Belfast sink, and a potty was kept under it when I was a toddler, in the hope that, having been occasionally caught at the right moment and plonked on it in time to save a nappy, I would twig eventually, to what to do when a peristaltic movement was recognised. I can clearly remember a feeling of pride when I did, and I got picked up and cuddled – hard! My mum was probably thinking; 'Tank feck, d' nappy washin's over!' Nappies weren't thrown away, in fact nothing was in those days of naturally 'Big Society', re-cycling was second nature, a lot more so than today – nappies were two-foot square white towels, washed and ironed after every soiling, and a treat for the wet sore and squidgy rear end... aah. Little wonder there is apparently a fetish for them among portly and confused old gentlemen.

The Belfast sink was supported by two beautiful cast iron brackets, all curlicues, and one day, a little later on, when I was becoming a fairly confident biped, I stood up suddenly under the sink to show off my peeing, without having thought about the relative position, standing, of my head in relation to the iron bracket's curlicues. After the screaming abated, and the stitches were removed, so was the potty, and my vertical awareness was born. Strange that growing thing, one is not conscious of it actually happening unless it creates a shock.

The only other thing of note that I remember from 143 was being in trouble over the drilling of the flowerbed, which to be fair was partly due to my dad introducing me arguably too early to the wonders of mechanical engineering in general, and specifically, hand tools. I found a simple hand drill and bit both easy to use and enormously fulfilling. I must have seen my mum planting seeds, and wanted to find them for her... Thought she'd be pleased...

Aah, just remembered another slight heart stopper (for my mum of course – not me) Somehow, I managed, maybe with the help of

Johnny Palmer, though he was conspicuously absent during the fallout, to get through the chain-link fencing at the end of the garden, down the 30' x 45-degree embankment and onto the railway line. What joy! From up in the garden the tracks looked tiny, but down there they were enormous! I remember the metal being hot, so it must have been summer. I saw the train of course, that's why I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Although I must admit I had misjudged the approach speed marginally, and, like with the tracks, I was bewildered by the size! And noise! And apparently it was only a tiny shunting engine too. I was sitting happily on a sleeper at least a foot from the rail, when suddenly I was rudely swept up, to lots of screaming and ranting...

Wartime meant shop-bought toys were non-existent for working classes, but my dad was an ingenious and practical Jew and a precision engineer, working as a cam designer in a communist owned and run engineering factory, Davall & Co., that before the war made clocks, (Perivale Clocks Co.) so it was nothing to him to make Well! In the other shed next to the chickens, there was a pedal racing car, there is a photo of it somewhere, it was based on a '30s Brooklands ERA racing car, and the body also served time as a bicycle sidecar that took me around the Welsh hills at the age of three. It was made of fine bent-ash framing covered in doped canvas, bound to a steel chassis and pedal assembly. Health and Safety would have been apoplectic, but it was a thing of great beauty and ingenious simplicity. I was reminded of it when I recently visited for the first time the wonderful 'Museum of Childhood' in Bethnal Green, where there are similarly improvised toys – made now in Africa and other so called 'third world' countries – loathsome patronising Imperialist condescension...

My mum took on a whole new light for me after my first cockerel fight. Our cockerel, though aloof, was never a threat. To me he was just a big chicken with 'bling'... I was very happy about the chickens, they chatted away to themselves every day as I amused myself drilling things and screwdrivering imaginary stuff to imaginary stuff etc. and they were great company, I actually got quite good at chicken, but only colloquially, too young for the grammar...

One day, I looked up from some important task and the cock was

up on the back of a chicken, who seemed to be protesting vigorously, and my first glimmer of chivalrous bravado took me over. Rushing down the path with righteous fury, I brandished my hand drill at the inflamed poseur, who in response, flew, (I didn't know they could fly) at me, and pecked me about the head and shoulders, promoting another two new responses – 'stark fear' and 'run away.' Fortunately, but not for the unfortunate cockerel, my mum, observing the contretemps from the back door, and, brandishing the family carving knife, to my horror, showed me what a mum being protective is capable of.

In a brace of shakes the cockerels head was in the dirt at my feet, and the rest of the cockerel was running way up the garden path, a fountain of red leading the way. I found out later it was nearing Christmas anyway, so the poor auld randy sod's days were already numbered. I would for the rest of my life be shit scared of my, and anyone else's – especially Irish, mum.

143 Rydal Crescent was a three-bedroom semi-detached suburban house, split into an upstairs flat and a downstairs flat. We lived downstairs and had the garden. A row apparently had been brewing with the upstairsers over something, probably the garden, or the chickens, or the regular letting of blood, I never knew for sure, but the upshot was we moved. Most people would imagine a young family would move somewhere else with a similarity to where they came from. Just out of a sense of security? A major world war just finished, rationing, deprivation etc? Mmmm...

My mum was an Irish woman. A real no feckin' holds barred Coleen. Beautiful, street wise, and always, always, up for 'the Craic'. She was of Traveller stock, County Kerry. My Irish Grandad was an ardent drunken republican poacher from Listowel, one Denny Cronin, who had been subject to regular and vicious beatings in his youth by the noble 'black and tans' – English dregs from the prisons of blighty, charged with keeping 'law and order' in the soon to be fledgling Republic of Ireland. Get the DNA?

My dad was from second-generation Jewish immigrants fleeing Europe at the turn of the 1900s, from where I'm not sure, I think Georgia... on my bucket list to find out. His dad looked, to me at least, anyway, identical to my mum's dad. Both giants, of course,

mighty handlebar moustaches, with waistcoats and watches on a chain, baggy trousers supported by wide leather belt, working man's boots, shirts collared only on a Sunday, and scary, furious temperaments, I was never allowed to speak in their presence unless spoken to, and in the Russian house I was placed on a stool just under the stairs, and sat there, silent till beckoned or spoken to.

Reading this back, it sounds unbelievably Dickensian, but don't forget the human world has changed unbelievably rapidly since the war. So, to my dad, with his background and abilities, it would seem obvious that the next place to call home would be an empty ex-Admiralty landing craft hull, LCA 392, still armour-plated but engineless, straight from the Allied landings in Europe, moored on a trot of decommissioned minor warships at Isleworth, on the River Thames, just downstream of Richmond Lock. We went and lived on that. Starting in the spring of 1948 – the one after the Thames had frozen over, I think... The mini-ice age it became known as.

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Eliot & The Pan

The third bike had a very temporary tenure in the backwoods of Perivale. I can't remember what happened to Ariel 600vb, and though I was still reasonably enchanted with Indian, after ignominiously dropping it on the Richmond roundabout and flinging Ann Martin off down the road on her backside, there was a nagging dissatisfaction creeping in... read on!

Mick Taylor and I had a habit of midnight wandering, and it was quite normal for us to stride off after supper up the Western Avenue, past Acton, White City, Shepherds Bush, then maybe on up Holland Park and into the West End, or maybe down Park Lane, round Knightsbridge, and back: Fulham Road, Chiswick, Ealing to where Mick lived.

These wanderings were just to chat and practice Everly songs, and dream about what we would do with our money when we 'made it'...

I'm amazed now at the distances involved, but at the time it was nothing, and though we might get back at three, we were up at eight for work at nine.

Wandering round Lowndes Square off Knightsbridge one night, we stopped agape at a beautiful Harley left apparently derelict in the gutter on the square side, a Pan head 74 cu.in. Hydra-Glide – with a siren!

My mouth watered with desire! The absolute peak of cool! The same model that the fabulous Julie from the Ace had, and of course, the same as the Police ones pictured on the sleeve of the best record in the world at the time – *They're Off and Rolling*, by The Everly Brothers – and with the ultimate refinement: a siren!

We examined it closely all over, praising and discussing in detail all the things that made it 'American' – the essential differences between Brit bikes and Yank road-eaters... the giant, low-slung V-twin engine, the giant buddy seat (pivoted from halfway up the gas tank and sprung on a piston in the frame), the speedo and switch in a console on the tank, the wide cow-horn handlebars and the footboards instead of foot pegs. And of course, the great fat 16" wheels and balloon whitewall tyres... all leading ultimately to the dream of driving across America on Route 66, meeting the Everlys,

Duane Eddy and Chet Atkins in Nashville, and singing with them round a campfire in the Appalachian Mountains, with a Kentucky Blue Moon shining, and wolves howling in the distance... (All the names and places in no particular order, as we had no idea where these places were in relation to each other, but it all made perfect, romantic sense at the time.) All this triggered by a scruffy and neglected motorcycle, which we later discovered was an ex-Belgian Police bike – imported and ‘civilianised’ by Freddie Warr’s Harley Shop on the Kings Road, in Chelsea.

The walk home was quiet for a while, but we wondered and mused on why and how this heavenly machine could be displaying these obvious signs of abandonment... Then, slowly at first, but with mounting enthusiasm, the evil plan took form. Although innocently at first, the concept of restoring it was introduced. We began to admonish the present owner for the blatant vandalism of its neglect, which easily led to the idea that whoever was responsible for it didn’t deserve it, and from there to, he should be punished for the sin of abandonment, the obvious punishment being he must be deprived of his plainly unloved asset, and it should be taken into the care of those who would love and appreciate it... Heh heh heh!

Mick had a job with the Rank Organisation, delivering movie films in a 15 cwt Thames van...

The plan that was gestating ensured that the next few nights stomping took us directly to Lowndes Square. A flat tyre needed pumping, and measurements had to be made. Yes, it would fit in the works van, and yes, a scaffold plank was found nearby and secreted in the bushes of the square.

Dad was an unwitting accomplice when he agreed to let me restore a bike of Fred Warr’s in the shed because he was so busy, and it could be I may earn extra cash – always a concept Mum was in favour of.

A Saturday night was selected to liberate the dream machine, based on the shaky presumption that The Bill would be too busy in the West End with the drunks and black boys at the Flamingo to be cruising a quiet posh street in Knightsbridge.

My first premeditated law break was a real struggle, however. I had been instilled with the perfect logic of Dad – don’t do anything

to anyone you wouldn't like done to yourself, and let Conscience be your guide. Mick and I had plomossed that all away with the righteous indignation of the Harley enthusiast, together with a smattering of - 'If he can afford that bike, he won't miss it anyway'.

The hot excitement of banditry was in the air that Saturday, together with a frisson of fear of discovery and retribution.

I felt physically sick, but like a poor squaddie in the trenches of Ypres, about to be whistled up over the top and into oblivion, you can't not go. The shame of cowardice drives you to your useless senseless death. It has nothing to do with logical thought and all about your own weakness – the inability to backpedal in the face of peer pressure, or to ignore an order from a 'superior' that will obviously lead directly to your death.

In the twilight of a late summer evening, and dressed somewhat self-consciously in our white overalls (yes - we had thought it through like pro's! Sean Connery had recently personified another hero), we loaded the machine coolly into the J. Arthur Rankmobile, and just like a movie plot, a beat bobby wandered over to offer us a hand, saying it was about time that piece of junk was removed, and where was it going...

"We're pickin' it up for Fred Warr officer"

"Oh yes, Kings Road, OK, 'night lads"

Drive away very slowly and deliberately, no fear, no panic, no rush.

We were invincible on the road home!

We seemed to have had the tacit approval of the constabulary, how could this be a bad thing we were engaged in. This lovely thing was going to be nurtured, all had gone well, and we had acquitted ourselves, Bond-like, in the face of real police intervention! It was a rite of passage achieved with flying colours! We were men!

The restoration went quickly and full of wonder, my early Harleys and the Indian seemed like kids' toys compared to this mighty beast.

The day came when the last bits were re-attached, the tank and mudguards, now in deep polished black enamel, with off white valances and tank flash. Time to start her. Fresh petrol, (at 1/10d a gallon – about 9 pence nowadays) bit of choke, gentle push down

on the kickstart, retard the ignition on the left twistgrip, bit of throttle and a decisive prod on the kickstart...

Bodom Bodonbodom bodon bodom.....

Yes! Leave her running, tidy up, open the gates... get on!

The most exciting thing I had done so far in my life – straddling a Hydra-Glide. More exciting than Ann Martin, and maybe even Mavis Roberts or Hazel McKay...

Down the alley and into the street, open her up? Aaaah – the noise! A great un-silenced tractor, all macho, but no one to see me – it was a boring weekday afternoon, kids at school, roads empty.

Down Bilton Road, wind in hair, no need for crash helmets, never had one, left onto the Bridgewater Road, and hammering up to Sudbury, up to sixty! (previous side-valve Harleys topped out at fifty!)

Turned round at Sudbury roundabout and back towards home, rear cylinder hydraulic tappet not filled, a bit knocky, disappointing, more work to do – but first, one thing must be experienced.

The Siren!

A heel pedal behind the left footboard pushes the siren shaft onto the rear wheel, simple....

WHooooooooooooooooHHooooooooHHooooooooHHooooo
oooooooooooo

Aaaah, the volume was stupendous, Instant Panic! This could be heard clearly in Glasgow, every Police force in Europe would be summoned!

As the squad car drew alongside, the siren was un-abating, and it dawned on me there was no way to stop the wail in an emergency, it had to die down by itself, and it was taking its time spooling down.

As luck would have it, or not, the officer recognised me as one of the Perivale Boys – we had gained a modicum of notoriety last Guy Fawkes night by being directly responsible, but not prosecutable, for the tumbling of a ‘Noddy-bike’ officer into the premature snowfall, with the help of a finely judged and well fused Standard threepenny. ‘Thunderflash’.

“Well”, he began, “what have we here... this is a bit flash for you isn’t it?”

His voice was loud at the beginning – to rise above the spooling down siren, but got comparatively gentle as the psychological panic effect died with the volume, to a surprisingly soothing low hummmmm.

I used the parent's story, to keep it all above board.

"I'm just road testing it; I've just been restoring it for Fred Warr..."

"So, you are not the owner, who is?"

"I Dunno"

"You don't know"

"No, I got it from Fred to help him out, he's very busy"

"Oh, he is, is he, and who may I ask is this busy Fred"

"He's got the Harley shop in Chelsea; I'm just helping him out"

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. So, it won't be a problem for you to bring a letter of authority covering today's date, and re-assuring me and my colleagues that this fine, if noisy motorcycle is indeed in your legal care?"

"Er, no, of course, yes I mean, I'll try..."

"Well, you 'ad better do more than try, I know where you live, I was at the Shepherds Bush nick when you 'erberts were playin' silly buggers last Christmas, and I know you were the cause of young PC Whetherby's unfortunate tumble in November, so you got five days to squirm out o' this or you're nicked sunshine! Now bugger off and take this Yankee shitbox with yer!"

"Yes OFFicer, thank you OFFicer"

I was sorely tempted to pedal the siren again as I 'earholed round into Bilton, but thought better of it, and was panicking as to how the hell I would 'squirm out' of this new and exciting predicament.

Three days passed in sleepless anticipation of a term in Borstal at the very least, as I was still too young for Wormwood Scrubs!

Mick and I thought through all sorts of silly scenarios, none of which felt in the least convincing.

Then, in the words of Sherlock, "when all options have been exhausted, what remains, regardless of its likelihood, must be the truth".

What remained was, 'Fess-up' and beg for mercy...

The one hope was the word chalked on the battery – 'Perry'.

I made a very uncomfortable call from the red phone-box at the

corner, costing about a bob in pennies, to Fred Warr's. As luck would have it, the guy who answered wasn't Fred, but Jim Dowdall, a mechanic who worked there and who later became a famous film stunt man. I told him the truth with suitable humiliation, and he helped by seeing humour where I couldn't. Eventually, but nevertheless reluctantly, he gave me the name of the owner, one Peregrine Eliot, although he refused me the phone number.

"Look it up, it's in the directory." Mmm – thanks Jim!

And so it was, twice, one with an address in Cornwall, and one a 'Regent' number (phones had three letters then four numbers in those days, much nicer, and easy to remember).

'Regent' was posh, turned out to be in the Kings Road, Chelsea, five hundred yards from Fred Warr's!

"Hallo, er, is that Perry Eliot?"

"Yeeas."

"Erm, I think I have, er, kind of stolen your Harley Davidson."

"Oh really?"

"Erm, and er, I have a problem..."

"Oh really."

"Er, I got stopped by the police."

"Oh really."

"Erm, I've done it up really well, as I thought it was abandoned."

"Oh really."

"Yes, and so, 'cos I really like Panheads, I thought it would be better to – er, take it and – er, do it up!"

"Oh really."

"Yes, and then I took it out for a test ride after I'd finished it, and er, accidentally, er, pressed the siren pedal, and there was this cop car behind me, I would have seen it, but I hadn't put the mirrors back yet."

"Oh really."

"Yes, and then, so they stopped me and erm... didn't exactly nick me, but will do if I can't prove I had it kind of – erm, legally."

"Oh really."

"So erm, I wonder if – er - I need you to give me a kind of er, letter?"

"Oh really."

I was gaining confidence, he hadn't put the phone down, he seemed to at least believe some of it so far... but the 'Oh reallys' were a bit un-nerving...

"Just a kind of letter to say I've got your permission to have been er, doing it up?"

"Mmmm, and er, why would I do that, pray?"

"Erm, oh well, I'll give it back to you."

"Really? But surely, you'll give it back anyway, you'll have no choice, you'll be in prison."

"Well, I'm only sixteen and a half, so it'll be Borstal, but you see I've done it all up for you, it was in a right state."

"Mmmm."

(long silence)

"Hallo?"

"Bring it for me to see."

"Where?"

"Here, Kings Road."

"How do I know you won't 'ave me nicked."

"You don't, but I give you my word."

And so he did, and I went, and he invited me in, didn't even look at the Harley, lived in a giant apartment over a new Safeway store. Everything was posh and beautiful in his world, including a beautiful woman in a negligee, who entirely ignored all the proceedings, but lay just like a film star, on a real leather giant sofa. Everything was also expensive looking, and unlike anything I'd ever seen before – except a few things in Sylvia Lightoller's boat – but it was like a tip! Dishes unwashed, dirty clothes all around, fag-ends, empty cups, glasses, wine stains on the deepest carpet on the planet. (It was a Monday, and it occurred to me years later, after I too had lived like that, that it was simply the aftermath of a weekend party).

He told me he'd lent the Harley 'to a friend' who had dumped it because the hydraulic tappet had emptied, and was knocking, he didn't even know where it had been left and I don't think he was particularly concerned, so I reckon he found the whole incident mildly amusing...

I got my letter, Hand written on a single quarto sheet, signed just 'Eliot.'

I thought he must be takin' the piss, why would the cops take this unofficial looking note as anything? I could have written it myself! But I didn't question it, I was far too impressed by the Alien World I had peeked into... 'I Want All This' was suddenly burnt into me.

The cops at Wembley nick took it without question. I was free, sadly Pan-less, but amazed, no nick of any kind, though I'm sure I could have had several books thrown at me.

About two years ago (2009-ish), I got a call from Jenny Keeling, my second serious girlfriend at the age of 17/18 and now partners with Willie Wilson, and living in Cornwall.

"You'll never guess what Tommo!"

"What Jens."

We just been to tea with Perry Eliot, and he's got your Harley in his living room."

If this book brings in a few bob, I'm gonna go see him and make an offer, I thought at the time...

21st July 2016: Sadly, I just read in the Obituaries in The Times, whilst sitting in the coffee shop in Richmond, of the passing of Peregrine Eliot, of St. Germans, just days after Jen told me... erstwhile fairly rebellious Peer of the Realm, who was still in apparently proud possession of my Hydra-Glide, as it still had pride of place in his country seat...

I now find it strange that at that age we forget so instantly what adventures we have had – I suppose it's because every day is potentially a new adventure, possibly even greater than the one yesterday. It's been so many years since I have had need to recall Perry Eliot and the Pan. I struggled at first to recall the details, oddly they came back in a dream, but I really wished I could have met him again before he died, for no particular reason – maybe just to see the Pan again, sitting in one of his living rooms in Cornwall!

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This brutally honest life story begins with pre-school memories, through teenage dreams of being a rock star and ultimately to becoming best known as a talented music producer.



*Tom Newman is a renowned English record producer and musician, most celebrated for his work on Mike Oldfield's groundbreaking **Tubular Bells**. Originally a guitarist in 1960s bands like The Tomcats and July, Newman shifted into music production after a fateful introduction to Richard Branson, going on to play a pivotal role in founding Virgin Records. His knack for capturing deeply emotive performances, despite having little formal technical training, became a defining hallmark of his production style. Newman also released several solo albums and remained active in the studio well into his Eighties.*

"If a person is to be bold enough to take their history and lay it out for global perusal, what would be the sense in it being based on how one thought one appeared, or how one wanted to appear. Writing about a person's life achievements makes a person consider what these achievements may have signified to others, and even how much, truly, one actually had achieved, and how much these apparent achievements, such as they may have been, affected history in general, or even history on a local level. Or even a personal level. Are they, in fact, even achievements at all? They may be just the pathetic mitherings of a boring weak person, buffeted by the winds of random circumstance, the whinings of a man of straw, unable to hold down a paltry but at least pension-worthy day job..."

A red ink signature of Tom Newman, written in a stylized, cursive script.

"I asked Tom to help with [Hergest Ridge] again because we had got on so well with Tubular Bells"

Mike Oldfield

