

Recollections of Roger Brian

I may now be someone who knew him longer than anyone else, for we were in the same primary school together and I succeeded him as Head Boy [at Mottram St. Michael's C.E. School] when he left for William Hulme's. And it was only natural that I should follow him there. Or so it appeared to my mother, who was anxious that I should be educated in better (less Northern!) surroundings than Hyde Grammar. Tuition would be needed to get over this hurdle and who better to provide it than Sophia [Alistair's mother]. It worked too and with her help I got into William Hulme's.

Harold [Alistair's father] kindly offered transport to a nearby station from which we went some distance to a station close to William Hulme's. However, I did not stay on the train after my first year. Instead I used the buses and later joined Alistair on our racing bikes for the 10 mile journey to School. The acquisition of his Ellis Briggs bike prompted me to upgrade, and I benefited from acquiring a 10 gear Carlton. We then ventured out into the Pennines together and I recall a trip to the Snake Pass where we explored a culvert under the road. Also an ascent of Holme Moss, (later used by the Tour de France from the Holmfirth side). Later on, I used both hill climbs for training runs before school. This led in time to a bike trip with him to York, time trials with Ian Case and others in the lanes south of Stockport and in 1957 to a mammoth Youth Hostelling trip to Lands End...

Alistair also introduced me to the pleasures of Christmas Post. We both had rounds in different parts of Mottram, and later we both worked in the post Office in Hyde where overtime was available. The downside was the Manchester smog and I remember walking 3 miles back to Mottram, because the buses had been cancelled. A hanky over my mouth was black when I got home. Up in Mottram you could look down on that lot.

On the Rugby field, at William Hulme's, he excelled as a scrum-half and I think that he was fortunate not to have been injured in that dangerous position, where the pack could collapse on top of him...

But William Hulme's did leave

its mark on him in a beneficial way, by leading him into geomorphology, which he enriched by producing several textbooks and making him an expert to be sought out,



when ground conditions needed scientific assessments outside of the field of engineering geology.

We were again together in the 6th form, I in the Lower 6th and he in the 3rd year, when we both went on a Research Scientists Christian Fellowship geology week on Raasay. Neither of us were particularly taken with the evening religious discussions, but Alistair found comfort in meeting Martha Jenson from York and then the wee housemaid, whose previous highlight was the annual dance in the barn! I joined the other heathens in the bar!



Alistair



Roger



Martha

Raasay offered some varied geology to the 1958 Research Scientists Christian Fellowship, ranging from Pre-Cambrian gneiss through Jurassic Ironstones to Tertiary intrusions. No doubt that was why it was a chosen for the meeting.

The biologists were well served too with many easily accessible coastal and inland locations. Ours were more remote, so the island's only lorry was hired to transport us. We then hiked to Dun Caan, the highest point of the island, to examine its capping of Tertiary dolerite. And admire the views westwards to Skye and eastwards to the Applecross peninsula and the Torridon mountains.

This strenuous exercise was enlivened by a rendition of "At the hop" recently recorded by Danny and the Juniors. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEPvoNA1OGw>

Bah-bah-bah-bah, bah-bah-bah-bah

Bah-bah-bah-bah, bah-bah-bah-bah, at the hop

Well, you can rock it you can roll it
You can stop and you can stroll it at the hop
When the record starts spinnin'
You calypso with your chicken at the hop
Do the dance sensation that is sweepin' the nation at the hop

Let's go to the hop
Let's go to the hop (oh baby)
Let's go to the hop (oh baby)
Let's go to the hop
Come on, let's go to the hop

But much altered by Alistair as follows:-

*Let's go to Dun Caan, oh baby,
Let's go to Dun Caan*

*You can run it, you can walk it,
You can get on your knees and crawl it.
Up Dun Caan, Caan, Caan. Caan,
When the hill is getting steeper
and your legs are getting weaker
Its Dun Caan, Caan, Caan, Caan
It's the highest hill,
It's a dolerite sill
Its Dun Caan.*

Now imagine a truckload of geologists singing this.
You did not know he was a lyricist.

But we paid a heavy price. As members of the Christian Fellowship we felt obliged/nay encouraged to go to the island church on the Sunday

Now the church in Scotland is, like their clans, riddled with sects. And we were lucky enough to find the Wee Frees, a particularly devout branch. For half an hour, we were eaten alive by the minister, who denounced us all for our many sins. Even those who had not gone to the hotel bar were chastised.

I am sure that we all then led Godly lives, though I am perhaps less sure about the one who lived in Godley.* But we will pray for him.

Roger Brian

* Godley is the name of the village that Alistair lived in as a teenager.