

## A Trip to the Manor

by  
*James R Warren*

When my Mother died, nearly sixteen years before, I sought solace in Coventry Cathedral.

What is it to me? I am not a Coventry man. My Mother was a Ladywood woman, born to a Heath Town man and a Spetchley woman.

The city and its old cathedral were burnt by the Nazis. So what house in England is more apt of Resurrection than The House of the Cross of Nails? But this is rationalisation. Post facto. Spurious.

*We are impelled to positions by agencies unrecognised whose motives we do not even acknowledge.*

circa 1145 Thursday 7 January 2016

I walked eastbound along Gosford Street, Coventry. At Gosford Street's junction with the semi-pedestrianised White Friar's Lane, a portable road sign lay folded flat, grey back uppermost on a wet grey pavement outside The Phoenix Cafe Bar.

The road was very busy with pedestrians.

I could not and did not see the collapsed sign. I tripped on the sign that did not move. I fell forward. My glasses flew off and scratched upon the pavement. My face was felt to contact the ground. Amongst minor lesions I sustained were a graze to the left knee; bruising of the right knee; a right pelvic sprain and bruising of the right rib cage. My right arm absorbed the major force. The right humerus and scapular bones shattered, and the acromial ( glenohumeral ) joint dislocated trapping the right axillary artery and several arm nerves.

A lady and a separate gentleman picked me off the ground. Both were well-spoken, both in their forties: Possible university staff. The gentleman lifted the road sign and placed it against the wall of The Phoenix Bar. I noted that the face of the sign was painted yellow and black and bore the caption "Access Denied to All HGVs" or very similar wording.

The lady and the gentleman helped me into the cafe, who gave me a glass of water at my request. The lady and gentlemen bought me a cup of coffee, and left about their business.

At about 1215 I left The Phoenix, hailed a taxi to Coventry rail station, and returned home by public transport.

circa 1500 Thursday 7 January 2016

From my Bloxwich address I rang 999 to summon an ambulance to take me to Walsall Manor Hospital.

1400-1830 Saturday 9 January 2016

I underwent restorative surgery at The Manor Hospital, led by Mr M Shah and Mr Z Khan.

In the course of the operation the axillary artery tore and I lost four liters of blood. Transfusions substituted this loss at once.

On termination of surgery I was transferred to the High Dependency Unit where I was given three additional transfusions.

Monday 11 January 2016

I suffered a major NSTMI heart attack whilst in High Dependency.

2100-2230 Tuesday 12 January 2016

I was given a further blood transfusion whilst at Surgical Ward 20B.

OUTLOOK:

Mr Shah estimates that I should recover 80% of right-arm function after five years. Mr Khan forecasts that hand numbness shall fade by March 2016.

I don't know how to say this.

I lay there. I closed my eyes. A strange space frame of white ankylosed ossiform struts appeared, modelled by grey shading as if directionally illuminated. Between these members were black interstices.

"Is this the face of death?" I wondered. I was not afraid. I was only mildly curious.

I opened my eyes. The interior of the High Dependency Unit looked utterly normal.

I closed my eyes again. Now a field of broken crystals appeared, sort of formless milky white like microcrystalline calcite, maybe gypsum, transmitting unpolarised light. Disseminated here and there stumpy black acicules of rutile, portals to a void?

I realise this is unhelpful to non-geologists, or to generations unfamiliar with optical microscopy.

Like all existentialists I grope to describe the indescribable.

I opened my eyes. The ward looked normal.

What is life? Life is the glow of gold in the evening sun; walking with my Wife through a wheat field; the night sister writing at her desk beneath a solitary lamp in a calm dark ward; a symbolic structure of balanced elegance.

Sometime in the early hours of Tuesday morning I was wheeled into the surgical ward, bed and all.

I dozed and as I awoke I became aware that a gaunt septuagenarian was quizzically smiling at me from his bed opposite.

Conrad continued to stare. Suddenly he rapped his knuckles twice on his bed-table and averred "I am a Newtonian!"

The gesture was as succinct and unambiguous as it was unlooked for and unforeseeable.

Conrad introduced the topic of Lorentz Contraction. I did not want to discuss that or any aspect of Special Relativity. I made polite noises. Conrad asked if I was interested in astronomy. I had to answer in the negative.

Conrad spoke very softly. I am hard of hearing. By now I could rise without assistance. I rose and approached his bedside.

Conrad said that he had worked as a research technician in assorted Black Country factories. At the age of seventy he had re-trained as a bereavement counsellor. Our conversation drifted around various scientific topics. Somehow the subject of civil engineering came up. I remarked that my higher degrees were in civil engineering ( excluding the 21st-century masters which is in computer telegraphy ).

Conrad asked what I had researched. I said I had used computational Fourier Analysis to resolve the periodic components of river meander planforms. "It is difficult to explain in words". ( Indeed it is easier in algebra or FORTRAN ).

Conrad said that he had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. I remarked tactlessly that fifty years ago they did not stick labels on people, they would just have accepted that he "was the way he was". Conrad asked why I went to Coventry. I said I went to search for old mathematics books. I mused that it would have been cheaper and easier to stay in my study and use the Internet but that I desperately wanted exercise, and its pretext. Conrad remarked that it is easy to rationalise our motivations in retrospect. I had, silently, to agree.

Conrad was reading some books. He recommended several to me, writing titles and authors on a scrap of paper.

By now both of us had tired and I returned to my bed. We dozed.

Philip had the slim and swarthy good looks of the pure Romany, something rare in England, at least until the Balkan Accessions.

Conrad made some inaudible comment as Phillip walked by.

Philip replied, "People say I look Italian".

Philip retired to his bed beside me, and propping himself on his elbows addressed Conrad across the diagonal:-

"I don't know how to say this. No offence mate. I loved my grandad. I am thirty-two. My grandad loved me. He would give me anything he could. He would do anything for me. I did not appreciate him. I did not say good-bye to him properly. No offence mate".

I was rapt.

To me this might have been the consolation of some extraterrestrial visitant: Simultaneously diffident, inarticulate, tentative, grand.

Or the Teaching of an Agent of God, maybe Gabriel in Person speaking through the tongue of Man.

I have tried, and I try, to present Philip's words verbatim. Any errors are mine. Please accept that I intend no mockery or traducement: The very contrary.

Philip repeated this formation four or five times with little variation, except that on one occasion he added:-

"No disrespect to my mum, but my grandad got up at five-thirty and always had her salmon sandwich on the table before she went to work. My grandad was a scrap metal dealer and my dad and me. I don't know how to say this. I put my dad on an iron pedestal. What can be more important than family? I loved my grandad. The only important thing is love, and to be honest, and not to thief".

So said Philip, sometime totter of Ryecroft, a humble man of unrecognised lineage in one of Europe's poorest towns.

Philip's father did not visit him. My Father did not visit me, but to be fair he was an eighty-six-year-old in snowbound Inverurie.

Philip knew what he wanted to say, but thought he did not know how to say it.

I rang my Father to update him on my progress. My Father could have said "Live two more years to get your papers in order: A large but select posterity awaits your observations". My Father could have said "You were the delight of my wife and you have carried my name with honour". My Father could have said "You are a disappointment to me, with your insubordinate ways, your liberal views, your Christianity and your disapprovals". My Father could have said "I love you. Get well

soon". Any or all of this would have been reasonable. But Man is an unreasonable animal. My Father said, "Well, Jim. I don't know what to say".

What Philip said would have rightly passed for Ministry in any Quaker meeting, and the clerk would have thanked him for it.

I, too, failed to console my Late Mother's Father in his last days. I surveyed rivers of Britain as part of my doctoral research. Mother asked me to see Grandad as I crossed Birmingham. I drove around the city to save time. As I reached to River Allan at Kinbuck my Grandad died. My Grandad loved me.

I do not know how to say this. I am not a Newtonian. I have delighted in applying Newton's physics and his mathematical methods without embarrassment, and, I hope, without hypocrisy. Søren Kierkegaard, who was much more intelligent than I, also failed to analyse the grief and guilt of existence, and indeed its glory, his life's work after his only mortal love eloped to the then Danish Virgin Islands with another man. But, using Latin, Kierkegaard could paint you a picture as good as any Pasolini. I can't.

I lay there knowing. Knowing that all men err; knowing that tiny things move without mass; knowing ( with very great respect to Euclid ) that parallels meet; knowing that some tiny things do not exist until they move, and then helpfully donate their mass to their little neighbors ( with great respect to Newton ). Knowing that if God does not exist then nothing else can.

Knowing that, not merely some contrivance or this-or-that fact is impossible, but that mortal knowledge is itself impossible, because knowledge, is the Prerogative of God, the seemingly impossible certainty, and Author of conjecture.

What is truth? With great respect to Bacon, Pilate jested not. No man knows, and the Son of Man did not answer.

I fell asleep. When I woke up it was around two-thirty on the Thursday morning. I pondered Philip's Ministry in the half-lit silence. Suddenly, unaccountably, I was aware of a wakeful pellucidity of mind. Not merely the state before the accident: More like the cool freshness of my boyhood brain awaking. More like my youth when I thought much more and knew much less.

I was conscious, as never before, not of mere epiphany, but of surpassing serenity, of ecstasy, not of a state near death, but a state near life: Real life. I did not want to pray, or to think, much less to judge. Only to be and bask content in the presence of God. I felt cleansed. Redeemed. For the first and only time I knew and know a little of the joy of the prophets and The Holy Martyrs: The little portion this very fallen man can cope with.

Of course, the great artists can only suggest this type of thing with swoons and arrows, and visions of celestial fire. But such was ever allegory. And metaphor is something alien to most moderns. For certain, I saw only the acoustic tiles and their aluminum retaining strips, and the plastic air conditioning louvers. For sure, I heard only the harl of the forced ventilation.

This lasted ten minutes or an hour. I felt like urinating. I rose and walked into the corridor. It was in semi-darkness. The nurses were not at their duty desk, and neither the guards, who there loitered in daylight hours, to chat up the women. It was as eerie as any moonlit ruin, but not minatory.

I turned the corner and paused with my good hand on the lever of the lavatory door. In the distance of the long modern corridor, in the chiaroscuro of the partial illumination, and in the harsh perspective of the vanishing lines, the slight form of a uniformed woman glided from one wall to the other. I was not alarmed. I was reassured. I continued.

I have used correct names throughout. I intend no offense to anyone, and I apologise for any given. I have endeavored to quote verbatim, and faithfully to report. But errors and omissions are possible. They are all mine.

During a progress consultation of 7 February Mr Shah remarked that it was one of the worst fractures he had dealt with and that it was remarkable that I had not died where I fell.

I owe my life to the skill and audacity of my surgeons; to the mercy of my friends and the forbearance of my foes; and to the angel who sheathed his sword.