

The Publisher

[There is a chronology problem which my diaries must resolve. Photo date suggests my German-interviews tour was April 1961. Late in 1961 I was living at No. 114 Holland Road, in a large room which in theory I shared with Michael Banks, a student friend from that preliminary year at Imperial College; he now worked as an engineer in Northampton and used the room just as a London *pied à terre*. Official history was published October 1961. Our *Neue Illustrierte* series on the air war started at that time. I married (London) October 1961, and Madrid (January 1962). I visited Maurice Smith and showed him Hahn's Dresden pyre photos in March 1962. So I must have first visited Dresden before then. When?]

DESPITE what my enemies have often stated, I was never a member of any party; nor even a hanger on.¹ Perhaps "an interested observer" would describe it better; yes, that is what I have always been.

Something about political parties must however have flickered through my mind at Brentwood School. I was nationalist-inclined. I had stood as the Labour candidate in the school's mock election at the time of the 1955 General Election, but in fact disliked both the main parties.

A Mr White invited me to help canvassing during the local elections; he seemed friendly enough – he was standing for the Union

¹ The Board of Deputies claimed in one secret report on me (see page 000 below) that I had spoken "at an Oswald Mosley rally at Imperial College in 1959." There was no such event.

movement, earlier known as British Union, Sir Oswald Mosley's organisation. I had no idea of its aims or purposes, but I willingly traipsed from door-to-door stuffing leaflets through letterboxes. When the county newspaper doorstepped me a few weeks later, I backed away, saying I would have no dealings with somebody like Mosley, after all – referring to his internment in May 1940 – he had been inside. So *The Essex Chronicle* reported my remarks.

His career should have been a warning to me. In the 1930s he had been a wealthy and promising Labour Cabinet minister, married to Diana Mitford, most beautiful of Lord Redesdale's fabled daughters. She was a sister of Unity Mitford, the crazed pre-war admirer of Adolf Hitler, who attempted suicide when our country declared war on Germany, by shooting herself in the head. This is a manner of death, necessarily unpracticed, which is harder to perform than one would think, as Generaloberst Ludwig Beck discovered in July 1944 (the gun kicks upwards).

I heard Mosley speak in my last year at Imperial College. He was standing in the 1959 election in the increasingly Black constituency of North Kensington, against Labour's George Rogers, who had held the seat since 1945.²

Night after night, we students from Imperial College, half a dozen of us perhaps, went down the road to Notting Hill to watch these skilled orators, Mosley and his men, at work, and to enjoy the drama of the late evening public meetings in these poor streets. The loudspeakers on the platform truck were angled upward towards the upper windows, the better to bounce their harsh metallic sound off the tenement walls. Mosley's permanent wingman, the intrepid, gaunt, veteran fascist Jeffrey Hamm, national director of the Union Movement, warmed up the working-class street crowd each night, before the arrival of "The Leader" himself, Sir Oswald, cruising in a large black Daimler through the crowd – one evening another black limousine mistakenly passed down the same street, accommodating what the raucous crowd took to be a Black pimp and his young White hooker. The treatment they were accorded was unlikely to have won the vote of either.¹

2 George Rogers held North Kensington for Labour from 1945 to 1970.

Mosley was a tall, heavily built, ugly man, with his face blotched with penny-sized brown spots; but he was an inspirational speaker, as others before me have remarked. The high point each evening, as I told Mosley's son Nicholas a few years later when he was writing a biography of his father, came when he scoffed at the eating habits of the immigrants now crowding into this Kensington constituency. He declared that their needs were after all most simple – "They can survive on a tin of Kit-E-Kat a day!"

The albatross around Mosley's neck was his pre-war flirtation with Hitler and Mussolini. He always denied having received financial support from either, but his denials were untrue. Twenty years later, in 1981, researching European archives for my biography of Adolf Hitler, I found myself holding in my hands in the Secret State Archives in Rome copies of the documents which Mosley and his henchmen had signed for the clandestine payments, packets of various currencies, that they had received from Mussolini's London diplomats in the 1930s. I published them in my newsletter in 1981, and I made them available to his biographers.²

Later still, I found proof in the Goebbels Diaries that Sir Oswald had also wooed the Nazis for cash; against Goebbels's advice, Hitler authorised payments to Mosley too. My admiration for Lady Mosley remained undimmed, particularly after she ran the most shameless rings around one television interviewer, the hapless Russell Harty. Her replies to my inquiries were always genteel and forthcoming; she commented helpfully on my manuscript description of her wedding Mosley in the Goebbels villa in Berlin. For some reason the London newspapers treated her far more chivalrously than they treated Sir Oswald until she died in 2003: "*The Daily Telegraph*," I recorded then, "gloats and jeers with all the mannerless verve of street urchins standing at the railings of a society church wedding, or of mudlarks at Cowes Week. They are aware that no matter how hard they scrabble and scribble, they will never achieve the fragrance, wit, and grace of this charming old lady."

Our orbits intersected only once, in 1962, after I had resumed my studying at University College London. The debating society had failed to find a student willing to second him in debating the

motion, “This House would Restrict Commonwealth Immigration” – a motion long overtaken by Parliamentary events. I too demurred, and suggested they look elsewhere, but finally agreed to oblige. The debate was held on November 29 that year in the UCL Assembly Hall. He was a brilliant, seasoned, and impassionate speaker, and he held the student audience in rapt silence as he argued that the legislation was necessary to preserve our culture and traditions. The students accorded him a standing ovation, and tipped their entire prepared vitriol over me. I had had no experience of public speaking; I spoke appallingly, I stalled repeatedly, and I was demolished by very clever heckling from the audience. I sat down beetroot-red, having undoubtedly dragged defeat into the jaws of his victory and firmly wedged it there. The debate ended in an annihilating vote. Mosley’s face was black with rage, as he rightly blamed me. He protested noisily afterwards that he had wanted his other son Max to second him, which was not permitted under the society’s rules.³

Sir Oswald Mosley was of value more as an exemplary orator than for the substance he wanted to convey. Any speaker could learn from him. In 1990 (••), when I had a speech to deliver in Bavaria, I slotted into the car radio a tape I had made of him speaking in Kensington Town Hall: I studied the timbre, the carefully calculated rise and fall, the changing intonations, the switching between abrasive, declamatory, personal, and intimate; all of these were useful lessons on how to hold large audiences. He was no Goebbels, Hitler, or Churchill; but he knew how to rouse an audience to a fever all the same. [*repetition:*] The only other who came close was Aneurin Bevan. At the height of the Suez crisis in October 1956 I stood at the back of a packed Trafalgar Square, near the eastern end of the National Gallery steps, and heard the Labour firebrand deriding

3 Years later I encountered Max Mosley, by then a Formula One racing expert, when I translated the memoirs of racing driver Andreas Nikolaus “Niki” Lauda. With journalist Herbert Volker, Lauda (born Feb 22, 1949) wrote four books – *The Art and Science of Grand Prix Driving* (1975), *My Years With Ferrari* (1977), *The New Formula One: A Turbo Age* (1984), and *Meine Story* (1986).

the prime minister Anthony Eden for his “police action”. With jabbing finger and mocking tongue, spinning out his gibes out in his lilting Welsh accent, he had the [audience] of thousands hooting with laughter. I wished that one day I could do the same.

As I had faced the prospect of returning to university in 1961 (••) I was once again without a scholarship or private means. Much of my brainpower was spent over these final summer months trying to devise Bertie Woosterish schemes to rectify that doleful situation. (Having used which word, doleful, I might mention that I never drew the dole; frowned on those of my children who did; and in a foolish rush of civic responsibility made no attempt to draw a state pension or free bus pass until years beyond the qualifying age.)

John Laing, Ltd. was still rebuilding Imperial College, but working on a construction site fulltime while studying had proved too tough once before. I wrote to the company and Maurice, later Sir Maurice, Laing invited me to come and see him.

“We know you, Irving,” he said, “and we’re sure you’re too proud to accept a cash handout from us. So here’s what we’ll do...”

I barely heard the rest. I am not that proud, I was thinking. Their alternative offer had its attractions too – they were opening up a new site opposite the Odeon cinema in Kensington High Street, erecting a New Commonwealth Institute. They needed a night watchman living on site. It was an unusual solution, but it promised to provide a modest income for the 100-plus hours a week that I would technically be on call, and a roof over my head.

I went to view the location. It was a very large hole, an excavation which seemed at little risk of being stolen; some earth-moving equipment had gathered at its rim, and two wooden huts near the street completed the amenities.

“I’ll take the job,” I told the company.

Discreet trials showed that I could sleep on the table in the paymaster’s hut at night, with my left arm crooked out of the window slit and resting on my card in the time clock. With practice, I perfected the art of waking up every two hours, on the hour, as required by the insurers, two minutes before clocking-in time. Wak-

ing every two hours became a habit which lasted for many years, to the later dismay of my wife.

Behind the hut, out of street view, was a standpipe with a cold-water tap. In short it was student heaven, and my new postal address, "David Irving, New Commonwealth Institute, Kensington W8," was not without a certain cachet either. The Air Ministry wrote me a hurt and somewhat humourless letter six months later suggesting that in future I avoid possible misunderstandings about my address.

I jotted down ways of repairing my balance at the National Provincial Bank opposite South Kensington Tube station. Relations with this branch had remained distant since my voluntary exile in the Ruhr. A Brentwood School bursary fund provided me with a small and unexpected sum to start. What else? I jotted down several ideas; one was, Write a newspaper article about the Dresden Raids. The working title I carried around in my head was *Something They Never Told You*.

From the other wooden hut, the site agent's hut, to which I had the keys, I carried over each night the secretary's manual typewriter, and I began writing letters. Investing small sums I advertised in German veterans' newspapers like the *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung*, asking for airmen who had flown missions that night in February 1945 and for survivors of the inferno to contact me. I placed a similar advert in the personal column on the front page of *The Times*, of DATE (••), and in an American air force magazine, because the US Eighth Air Force had bombed the same German city a few hours after the British.

I dutifully attended my first lectures at University College, but my heart and mind were now in that German city and the terrible events of February 1945. With the exception of Professor William Rose's German-language course at the London School of Economics (L.S.E.), through which of course I now waltzed with no difficulty, I found that the adolescent eagerness to learn was missing.³ I had followed the careers of my comrades of Imperial College days, and was not encouraged by where their degrees had landed them – Michael Banks was a roller-bearing engineer with British Tim-

ken, Roger Loveman a secondary school teacher, and the like. I had the clear sense that while a degree might be something amusing to possess, and useful to fall back upon if all else failed, in the same sense that *faute de mieux, on couche avec sa femme*, my real career, that of a writer, had already begun.

The first replies to my letters began to trickle in, the postman wading through the mud past the heavy machinery now pouring concrete into the Institute's foundations.

I soon realized, as the material came in, that what I had was too large for a mere newspaper article. I approached Victor Gollancz, owner of a leftwing publishing house, or he approached me – I can no longer recall. Or perhaps I had first contacted the well-known literary agency A. D. Peters in the Strand. Mr Gollancz certainly informed the agency that he liked the subject. He had always had, we now know, something of an obsession with Mr Churchill's saturation bombing strategy.⁴

He asked for a synopsis, which I provided, though against my own better instincts – how can an author provide a genuine synopsis until he has completed his researches, let alone begun writing the book? Wiser by many years, I now know that authors do this all the time. I later watched Ladislav Farago, commissioned to write a biography of J. Edgar Hoover, sitting down at a borrowed typewriter and dashing off a list of fetching chapter-titles for the entire book within ten minutes or so.

Gollancz liked my synopsis, and told the agency he wanted the book. The young editor at A. D. Peters was Michael Sissons, the kind of soft-complexioned, pink-shirted pansy that I cannot really be expected to take to, even if laws were to be introduced; Sissons flapped a flabby hand and asked for a brief résumé of my own life to submit with the synopsis.

"Right ho," I said, "I'll have it on your desk in the morning."

No, he said, he wanted it now. When I expostulated, Sissons whinnied that he could write a resume of his own life in five minutes if asked.

I made the obvious reply. Sissons' retort included the word "fas-

cist” and we parted on terms that were less than even, indeed such that I wrote to his agency A. D. Peters that same evening a letter not only severing all relations but also violating an important unwritten rule of correspondence: Never mail a letter without first considering how it will sound read out by an opposing barrister in open court.⁴

For an unpublished author to turn down a deal with a well-known publisher, let alone to snub London’s leading literary agency, must in retrospect seem suicidal, but I was too arrogant and cocksure to know better; besides, I was very sure that I had a sensational theme on my hands.

My advert in *The Times* attracted attention from one unexpected quarter (and, as the files now show, from the authorities). Within days, a direct approach had come from another publisher, William Kimber, a gentleman publisher of Belgravia. He had seen my advert, he wrote, and he asked me – if I had no publisher yet – to come in and see him.

I went. His publishing offices, now the site of the Berkeley Hotel, were in a turn-of-the century house just next to the church in Wilton Place.

For some obscure reason, others called him “Peter”; I never did. He had, he now explained to me, once been thrown out of a cocktail party for ventilating the subject of Dresden; in publishing my book he saw a means of revenge.

He became a very good friend and yet another mentor: when I later saw and heard the suave, ultra-English actor Dennis Price who played the butler Jeeves in the 1965 BBC television series, *The World of Wooster*, I knew who would have to play Kimber in any film of his life. There was now forged between this dapper, most English of small publishers and myself a friendship that survived any number of disagreements, all of which seemed mortal at the time, including his testifying against me in the famous PQ.17 libel

4 I am indebted to historian David Kahn (*The Codebreakers*) for this advice; he first heard it from his father, a well-known U.S. trial lawyer.

trial; I was very pleased when, thirty years later, in April 1991 *The Daily Telegraph* invited me to contribute to his obituary.

As I recalled in that, when The Society of Authors once polled its membership about the publisher they most trusted, little William Kimber Ltd. scored far and away the highest rating, and for one reason alone: every quarter, Kimber's royalty cheque arrived in the first post of the due date. Financial punctuality matters a lot to authors. Years later Macmillan Ltd., about whom we shall read more later, mindlessly delayed mailing a large cheque to me for weeks after they had claimed they had already "raised it", causing financial chaos which resulted in the permanent cancellation of my credit cards and much other collateral damage besides.

Some time in September 1961 Pilar informed me that the Home Office had given her a few days to leave the country as her visa had expired. There was no alternative, she said – unless of course we got married now. That seemed not unreasonable. We tied the knot at Kensington Registry Office a few days later, on October 12, 1961. Roger Loveman – a good friend who would die of cancer far too young – and Michael Banks acted as witnesses, and Pilar wore a smart red hound's-tooth suit which we had bought for the occasion out of my wages from the site. I remember seeing Christa, the comely manageress at Hades coffee bar in Exhibition Road, looking unexpectedly crestfallen when we all went for a celebratory coffee afterwards.

Being married brought with it an oddly comforting sense of end-of-the-rat-race relief; the snag was that in Catholic eyes nothing changed, because this piece of paper was worthless and this funny little ceremony at Kensington meant nothing at all (except that I was no longer permitted to ogle Christa). Pilar announced that she would return to Madrid forthwith, as she said with a light laugh, to arrange "the real wedding" – a big affair at the cathedral in the main street, Goya.

During the months of separation which now followed I stayed in touch with her by mail – telephoning was more complicated, and overseas phone calls had to be booked a day or two in advance. I

had dabbled in Pitman's shorthand when I was younger and picked up a Gregg American shorthand manual while working in Spain, and we wrote to each other in shorthand as an exercise; I doubt that I could read those letters now.

By late 1961 (••), I had a file of letters and addresses and the beginnings of research for the Dresden study. I had signed an agreement with Kimber. Being what is known as a gentleman publisher, he had not raised the subject of money with me, and as I was unaware that authors get advances, he was happy to leave me in ignorance in this respect.

This did raise a problem. Somehow I had to visit survivors in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. I decided to finance the trip from TV interview fees. I typed letters to a dozen regional stations. Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) in Cologne wrote back to me at the construction site, agreeing that I should appear on their evening chat show from Cologne, *Zwischen Rhein und Ruhr*. My stammering, halting school German, now flecked with colour from the Ruhr valley, and my youthful eagerness went down better than I expected. The programme announcer invited viewers who had been in Dresden during the raids to write in to me at their address. In fact the whole programme went far too well; appearing on the other regional stations was essential to my crude financial strategy, but back in the green room after the WDR programme the producer announced, "Great news, Herr Irving – the segment is being aired again this evening by every station in Berlin and West Germany."

WDR were sympathetic when I explained, and arranged for me to take part in North German TV's chat show *Die Aktuelle Schau-bude* [Live from the Showroom] in Hamburg next morning [*negatives suggest this was April 21, 1961*]. It turned out to be filmed live in a motor showroom, with crowds goggling through the showcase windows, which explained the title; but Hamburg was the end of my little television tour. I had virtually no money. I had no alternative but to cover the entire two thousand mile circuit by hitchhiking. Grimly clutching my small typewriter case, which was again my only luggage, I stood at the edge of autobahn entrances for

hours on end, and I slept at least twice under bridges; but in the end I managed to visit all the most important survivors that I had so far found.

Suddenly my luck changed although I did not yet know it. A wealthy Mercedes driver took me most of the way down to Frankfurt. He advised me to write to a weekly magazine about my Dresden project – he suggested *Neue Illustrierte* in Cologne, and I should address my letter to the editor Mr Höfer. I posted a handwritten letter that day and gave the address of WDR for any reply.

The rest of the road tour lasted two weeks (•• *check diary*). With only a few deutschmark coins left, and a return ticket to London in my pocket for that night's ferry, I arrived back in Cologne.

Before going to the station, I had a couple of hours to kill. I called at WDR, a few hundred yards away. They handed me a mail-bag crammed with letters, and a telegram marked urgent. With hours still to go, I sat in a café near the station and ordered a coffee with my last coins.

The telegram was a reply from Werner Höfer at *Neue Illustrierte*. I learned later that he was also a nationally known television commentator (the compère of the Sunday *Frühshoppen* programme) as well as editor in chief of this mass circulation magazine. He asked me to drop in and see him the next day – just that, no indication of what might be on his mind: another survivor story? He liked my article idea? A brief interview, or what?

My train to the Hoek was due to leave around eight p.m. Was this really going to become one of those awful turning points in life, invisible as such when first encountered, yet rearing up stark and disapproving in life's rear-view mirror once they are passed and the opportunity is missed?

I had no money left, not even coins, and nowhere to stay. It would not be the first time I had slept rough that month. Taking a decision, or perhaps allowing the decision to take me, I walked over to the Central Station and cashed in my return ticket to London.

That gave me enough money to telephone Adolf Saxler, my old foreman at the Thyssen steel plant, in the Ruhr. He lived in a mod-

est workers' cottage there. Saxler said I could sleep on his sofa.

I bought a return ticket over to Mülheim for the night, and was back at the gleaming chromium and plate-glass offices of *Neue Illustrierte* in Cologne the next morning, slightly disheveled, and not certain of anything at all.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Hamm died in 1994 and earned several large obituaries. I described these adventures also in <http://www.fpp.co.uk/docs/Irving/RadDi/2003/130803.html>.
- 2 Diary, Oct 30, 1981: "The Times ran lead story in its Diary column on the Mussolini–Mosley money link." The Times diarist then was Michael Horsnell.
- 3 Professor William Rose, born 1894, scholar, editor, translator and critic, died in 1961. In 1935 he became the Sir Ernest Cassel Reader in German in the University of London and Head of the Department of Modern Languages at the LSE. He was a Bletchley Park veteran, but at that time I did not know it.
- 4 See Gollancz's correspondence with Churchill in my *Churchill's War*, vol. iii: *The Sundered Dream* (••).