A CELEBRATION OF
BATH ACADEMY OF ART
AT CORSHAM

Edited by Derek Pope
This celebration of a unique residential art school is dedicated to the memory of

CLIFFORD ELLIS AND LORD METHUEN R.A.
CONTENTS

Note: Where possible we have listed here the married name of the female contributors but headed the pieces using their maiden names.

Introduction ......................................................... 1
Acknowledgements .................................................. 2
History of the Academy ........................................... 3
Portrait of a residential art school ....................... Clifford Ellis ....................................................... 5
Lord Methuen ...................................................... James Methuen-Campbell ................................ 7
A new journey ...................................................... The Hon. Mrs Elizabeth Fraser ................................ 9
A great change ...................................................... Paul, Lord Methuen ........................................ 9
Incidental reminiscences ......................................... Gulie Maw ...................................................... 10
In the beginning ..................................................... Kate Fryer ...................................................... 11
Extracts from a 1942 diary ........................................ Barbara Thursfield ........................................ 17
The Corsham experience as seen from the outside .... Peter Cox ....................................................... 18
Ten years at Bath Academy of Art ......................... Christian, Lady Innes ....................................... 19
Conventional and unconventional ......................... Kenneth Garlick ............................................. 20
Corsham, as I remember ........................................ Margaret Birtles ............................................. 21
The Corsham experience ......................................... Eileen Webb ................................................... 22
Memories of Bath Academy .................................... Irene Campbell .............................................. 23
A superb opportunity ............................................. Paul Rudall ................................................... 25
Warts and all ......................................................... Reg. Boulton ............................................... 25
Peac-o-ck, Peaco-ck! .............................................. Adrian Campbell ............................................. 27
The Corsham experience, what was the magic? ...... Bobbie Cox ..................................................... 28
Almost half a century ago ....................................... Mo and Ivor Weekes ....................................... 29
A shock to the system ............................................ Margaret Morgan .......................................... 30
The focus and mainspring ....................................... John Eaves .................................................. 35
Seriousness of purpose .......................................... Anthony Curtis ............................................... 35
Cheap day return .................................................. Keith Fair ..................................................... 37
Corsham - "Jo" and Stanley Edge ......................... Keith Fair ..................................................... 39
Forging a dubious reputation ............................... Colin Walker .................................................. 40
A blast from the past ............................................ Maureen Baker ............................................ 42
Free-wheeling ....................................................... Thelma Beswick .......................................... 43
A profound influence ........................................... Dorr Evans ................................................... 44
A unity of contrasts .............................................. Michael Johnson .......................................... 47
The Corsham crucible ............................................ Bob Clement ............................................... 47
Live chickens, hedgehogs, cats and dogs ............... Esther Johnson ............................................... 51
Absorbing something of the atmosphere ............... Peter Lane .................................................... 52
Letters home ....................................................... Jean Lane ..................................................... 54
The list is endless ............................................... Janet Brown ................................................... 55
Endless possibilities. ........................................ Joyce Curtis. ........................................ 55
No easy answers. ........................................ Sue Varley. ........................................ 57
A variety of pathways. ..................................... Peter Jackson. ..................................... 58
Three years later, a painter. ............................... Angela Hoppe-Kingston. ......................... 60
Impressions and contradictions. ......................... John Boswick. ................................... 61
A Saturday morning start. ................................ Joe Hope. ........................................ 62
Fifty years of Corsham. ...................................... Emeritus Professor Martin Froy. ............... 63
A sure ideology. ........................................... Marjorie Mackenzie ............................... 63
Pedals, padlocks and punctures. ......................... Beth Williams. ..................................... 64
The pre-protest generation. .............................. Pam Guy. .......................................... 65
The experience of a lifetime. ............................. Bobbie Walkington. ............................... 66
Special years. ............................................. Pam Charlesworth. ................................. 67
Sickert's ball. ............................................ Tony Benge. ......................................... 68
Corsham – the shorthand mnemonic for art. .......... Brian Maycock. ................................... 68
Dundee Seville orange marmalade. ...................... Sue Sloman. ....................................... 70
B.A.A. gets the blame. ..................................... Kate Pope. .......................................... 70
From temp. to Principal's secretary. ................... Doris Durrant. ..................................... 71
Bath Academy of Art in Corsham. ....................... Julia Garratt. ...................................... 71
A Corsham experience. ................................... Michael Finn. ...................................... 73
Postscript .................................................. Alan Carter. .......................................... 75

APPENDICES
I  C & RE and the New Naturalist jackets. ............ Peter Marren. ..................................... 79
II  Preparing art educators. .............................. Clifford Ellis. ...................................... 84
III Questionnaire for tutors. .............................. Joyce Curtis. ...................................... 88
IV Clifford Ellis. .......................................... Colin Thompson. .................................... 89
V  The Unesco article. ................................... James Tower. ...................................... 91
VI The Unesco article. ................................... Henry Boys. ....................................... 92
VII Personal experience at Corsham. .................... Henry Boys. ...................................... 94
VIII Extracts from taped interview with Clifford Ellis 1981 .............................................. 96
IX List of staff and governors. ........................... .................................................. 104
This publication is a celebration of the foundation, fifty years ago, of a unique residential art school. For a number of years, and certainly since Bath Academy of Art moved from Corsham, I have been asked on many occasions to make some kind of historical record. For many reasons this was, and to a large extent still is, an impractical and inappropriate project.

Of paramount importance are the philosophies and contexts which made the foundation of the institution possible, and the effect on the lives of ex-students and staff which the experience of being at Corsham allowed. As someone very recently said to me, "Most of us ex-students know all about when and where, but it was much more about what we did in our learning and what we have all done since that is important." 

Therefore this book whilst having some historical and chronological limitations and also inevitable omissions, does provide a celebration of a remarkable achievement. That the college was established in a neighbouring county, validated by the University of Bristol, received new course approval from central government and all of this centred on a private stately home, are extraordinary in themselves. As many contributors acknowledge the Academy was also in the right place and at the right time for them, and as many people testify inside and outside the confines of the book "It changed my life."

Because of all the circumstances surrounding the collection, editing and publishing this material, it is unavoidable that much of the commentary is from the earlier years. Although it was never intended to be an exclusive celebration of the Institute Course for the training of teachers, this is clearly where much of the emphasis was placed by contributors and where much of the evidence had its origins.

I repeat my gratitude for all the help received from so many people and hope you have considerable pleasure in being reminded, if you were a student, of these Corsham Experiences, and if not a student perhaps discovering something about this unique experiment in art education.

One definition of 'celebrate' is to acknowledge and honour a special event in public, and to make it widely known. I am trying to do exactly that.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all the people who offered advice and help in the planning and preparation of this celebratory publication:

CHRISTIAN LADY INNES for constant support and enthusiasm throughout.

JAMES METHUEN-CAMPBELL for writing about Paul Lord Methuen.

THE HON. MRS ELIZABETH FRASER for her comments on the Academy's establishment at Corsham Court.

COLIN THOMPSON for permission to include his earlier paper about Clifford Ellis.

PETER MARREN for his specially prepared piece on the book-jacket design of C & R E.

KATE FRYER for her lucid accounts of connections with Bath Art School in wartime Bath.

MRS G. MAW for her contribution about the Ellises and the developments from the early days of the Academy through to the merger with Bath College of Higher Education.

JOYCE CURTIS for allowing me to use some of her extensive thesis, Bath Academy of Art - An alternative in Art Teacher Training, completed 1986.

THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM SOUND ARCHIVES for the taped interview with Clifford Ellis 4836/4 1981 and permission to include extracts from a transcript.

ALAN CARTER for his postscript from Bath College of Higher Education.

my wife MARGARET and to PETER CRAY for editorial advice and assistance.

BRIDGET FIDO for her patience in typing difficult texts and transcribing tapes.

ADDKEY PRINT for sound advice and the eventual production of the book.

the people who through financial donations made the preparation possible.

Finally, and certainly not least, thanks to all other contributors and those giving permission to reproduce photographs, without whom none of it would have happened.
HISTORY OF THE ACADEMY

This account of the Academy's history is from a prospectus of the early 1970's. Although it has a couple of slight inaccuracies now, owing to the fact that Bath Academy no longer exists as such e.g. para 4 opening and end of para 5, it seems sensible and proper to include this piece of history without editing. The developments which occurred after this account are mentioned in other places, and it may be helpful to comment on the repetition of some small details of text throughout. This is not oversight, but done in the hope that reference will be more convenient in different contexts and sometimes will support a different view, but also to retain contributions in a form as near to the originals as possible and if practical in their entirety...Ed.

History of the Academy

Bath Academy of Art was established at Corsham in 1946, four years after the buildings of the ninety year old Bath School of Art had been destroyed by bombing.

The new Academy was designed as a comprehensive vehicle for education in and through the arts "With the intention of developing a more liberal form of art education than had been possible previously." It combined two functions. As a school of visual art it was successor to the School in Bath; at the same time the concern of the Principal, Clifford Ellis, for school age as well as post-school art education was given incomparably more far-reaching scope by a radically new departure; the foundation of the first English residential college for teachers of art in the field of general education, with departments of drama and music. This met an urgent need and has had wide influence.

The initiative for such an Academy and the ability to bring it into effect belong primarily to two men, both closely connected with Sickert: Clifford Ellis, Principal from its inception until he retired in 1972, and the late Lord Methuen R.A. who, sympathetic to Ellis's original and far-sighted educational ideas, offered to share with the Academy the ideal setting of his historic home, Corsham Court. They had encouragement and backing from Bath Corporation and Bristol University.

Through the generosity of the late Lord Methuen Corsham Court is held on a ninety-nine year lease and was the centre of the Academy. The present house was built in 1582 on a site which had been Royal Estates from Saxon times. In the 18th Century the State Rooms were added by Sir Paul Methuen to contain the Methuen collection of pictures and furniture. They were designed by Capability Brown who also redesigned the Park.

During Clifford Ellis's twenty-six years as Principal certain aims, interests, and key ideas underlay the work through all changes and developments. A sense of these motifs, aspects of the first aim or means to achieve it, cannot be conveyed better than by quoting some passages of his (those in inverted commas) from former Prospectuses. The approach they express continues to inform the Academy as the motifs are shared by Michael Finn, the present Principal.

"The first aim of the Academy is to provide opportunities whereby each student, whatever his future career, may enlarge and deepen his experience through the practice of the arts. There is need also for other kinds of experience and some of them may be found by living and working as a member of a community."

Students were exposed in a variety of ways to a great wealth of visual experience and techniques and were given the help necessary to find their own way, develop their own judgment, forge their own style through a process of gradual assimilation. That practising artists of distinction, of other countries as well as England, were always on hand would counteract tendencies of a doctrinaire, stereotyped, narrowly insular nature; "A tradition that has brought students into direct touch with the art of their own time has lifted the horizon beyond Wiltshire and beyond England." Their reciprocal relationships in teaching and learning both here and abroad with artists and students of other countries and continents continued to be highly valued by members of the Academy.

From 1946 to 1968 the Academy ran two courses: Teacher Training and a small N.D.D. course. If the courses were necessarily separate as such, yet in important parts of the Teacher's course, in their own work as painters or sculptors, in lectures and other academic and social events, student teachers shared the same influences, absorbed the same atmosphere as their fellow N.D.D. students.
The courses were not doctrinaire (and are therefore difficult to describe), but were intended to develop talent and human sympathies in each individual. Sickert had visited the studios in Bath regularly each week, and from the first decade at Corsham (Kenneth Armitage, William Scott, the late Peter Lanyon and Peter Potworowski) there was a tradition of teaching by practising artists and designers. This, because of the aims and nature of the course, was associated with a serious concern for professional and complementary studies.

"After the publication of the Robbins Report in 1963, more standardised arrangements for the training of teachers prevented the continuation, in its initial form, of the course for art teachers at Corsham. In the meanwhile, it had provided the basis for proposals made by the Academy in 1962 for the first courses leading to the new Diplomas in Art and Design. These were approved by the National Council." The Teacher Training Course came to an end in 1968.

In 1962 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation made a grant of £10,500 for a research centre in art education. And in 1966 a fruitful co-operation with the University of Bath began. Students of the Academy have co-operated in valuable projects with the School of Education, and with several other Schools of the University.

Two administrative changes took place in 1974. The first was the reorganisation of Local Government under which responsibility for the Academy passed to the County of Avon Education Committee. The second was the amalgamation of a National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design and the Council for National Academic Awards.

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**PORTRAIT OF A RESIDENTIAL ART SCHOOL**

This account of Bath Academy is by Clifford Ellis himself, as Principal, and was published in the Times Education Supplement on Friday May 27th 1949...Ed.

Bath Academy of Art, officially, is an art school associated with a training college. I would like to think, however, that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Perhaps the training college provides the breadth of view, and the art school a focus, but the Academy is, in practice, one institution and sets itself a common aim for all its students. This aim is first and foremost to provide opportunities for each student to find a liberal education. The training of the future art teacher, designer, illustrator or craftsman should develop from a broad educational scheme. If art is a means of expression, of communication, then the techniques of any art training will be of value only when the individual is developed as a personality and as a member of a community.

The Academy is, therefore, residential, and it attempts to provide a full community life. The syllabus includes music, dancing, and drama, as well as the visual arts. Various branches of science and technology are associated with the arts in courses conducted by teams of lecturers. A biologist, a dancer, and a draughtsman, for example, work together in the studying of movement. It is hoped that in this way there will be a simultaneous development of intelligence and emotion, "of play disciplined by intellectual effort."

Courses are provided for men and women art teachers in schools of general education. A two year course which leads to the award of the University of Bristol Institute of Education Teacher’s Certificate and third year courses in art and crafts, and in art, music, and drama, are open to outstanding students who have already completed a two year course at the Academy or another recognised institution. There is also a four year course of preparation for the Ministry of Education’s National Diploma in Design. Advanced students may specialise in painting, illustration or sculpture.

Corsham, as an important stone centre, provides unusual opportunities for the study of sculpture.

Though the Academy does not pretend to train architects, some study of architecture is undertaken by each student. There is no need to describe the unique opportunities for such studies at Bath. Corsham, Lacock, Bowood, Bradford-on-Avon, Malmesbury, and many other nearby places also have much to teach students, some of whom make a special study of the design of the gardens and parks in which the district abounds. The Academy is specially interested in the imaginative design of schools, and new schemes of colour treatment for several classrooms in or near Bath have been planned by the staff of the Academy.

The Academy has grown out of Bath School of Art, which was one of the seventeen art schools founded in England in 1852. It provided "Classes in
the Afternoon for Ladies and in the Mornings for Females of the Families of Mechanics.” The latter classes, obviously enough, were intended to train recruits for industry and so to “improve Manufactures.” By the 1930’s these classes had become a Junior Art Department, and because the pupils were below school-leaving age humane regulations insisted that they should be given some general education as well as instruction in trade subjects. The department was unhampered by external examinations; The school certificate was for Grammar Schools, and the Board’s Art Examinations were for older art students. There was an exciting opportunity for making an art school a place of liberal education, with art no longer an isolated "subject" but something giving vitality and unity to a whole curriculum.

I had been a pupil of Marion Richardson. She held a passionate conviction that drawing is an activity natural to all children, “one through which a child grows and develops most surely.” I hoped to be able to show that the work of adolescents might still reveal the creative power we had come to expect from younger children. So I came to Bath. There followed ten years of experiment, mistakes, set backs (including the destruction of the school buildings by bombing), encouragements and lucky guesses, and the growth of a team of colleagues whose work forms the foundation on which the Academy is being built.

There had also been in 1652 “Classes for Ladies.” In a city with the traditions of Bath there had long been drawing masters teaching individual pupils or small classes supported by private subscription. Some of these classes were incorporated in the new school. We can now see that they had a remarkable function. Such classes were the only provision made in national education for the practise of the visual arts as a part of a liberal education. It was as though the literature of humanism was to be studied only in afternoon classes in schools whose first official duty was instruction in the three R’s. But perhaps it was not yet the literature of a dead tongue. The ladies themselves, though a long way from Castiglione, were perhaps still genuinely concerned with the arts as a way of living. Are we in fact still using up what is left of inherited capital? Do not many of the better art teachers owe their sensibility more to their great-grandmothers than to their official education? What can be done in the contemporary world? So developed the idea of a residential art school with its increased opportunities for working for a living as a civilised community. What was wanted was an environment in which students might develop as persons. Professional training would grow - and grow healthily - from the education of the individual.

This was one approach to the idea. There was another which, in an extraordinary way, converged with it at several points. Lord Methuen wanted his home, Corsham Court, to remain intact as a national monument. He is himself, of course, a distinguished painter, and his public spirit and personal sympathies were both expressed when in 1946 he offered Corsham Court on very generous terms to Bath education committee as a home for the new Academy.

Corsham Court was originally built in 1582. In the mid 18th Century Capability Brown designed the State Suite containing the magnificent Picture Gallery, and also the Park. The view from each window takes in part of the park with the lake gleaming in the middle-distance, a view as contrived, as self-contained and serene as a painting - a peculiarly English work of art.

The Academy’s use of Corsham Court is not a matter of large empty rooms being taken over for some alien purpose. Students live and work together in a Great House where the tradition of a civilised way of living has never been broken. It will be interesting to see how far this tradition can become the tradition of the Academy and the future.
LORD METHUEN
James Methuen-Campbell

It may be of interest to note that when the Academy of Art came to Corsham Court in 1946 my great-uncle, Lord Methuen, was already a man of sixty. Hardly, one might have thought, someone particularly sympathetic to the idea of having a group of young art students and teaching staff making use of the family home. But, as things turned out, the arrangement proved to be fairly congenial to him and his wife, Norah. Firstly, they had no children of their own, and secondly, they had already decamped to the west wing during the last War, as the Westonbirt Girls' School had been evacuated to the Court and had taken over a large portion of the house. The original link of the family occupying the whole building had been broken, and therefore it did not seem too great an encumbrance for the arrangement to be made more permanent.

What is more, Uncle Paul, as I shall refer to him (he was my grandfather's elder brother), liked young people and was himself an artist of distinction; indeed an Academician. His own talent had begun to develop whilst he was a pupil at Eton, and even before he left the school he had some academic drawings accepted by the Royal Zoological Society for its Journal. The First World War had, of course, interrupted his artistic career, and it was only in the 1920s that he came into contact with and took lessons from Walter Richard Sickert, who was by then the doyen of English artists. Sickert was to be the formative influence on Uncle Paul's style. He even followed Sickert's practice of working from photographs on occasion, and at the Court there exists a fine portrait of the second Lord Methuen (Uncle Paul's grandfather), which is copied from a photo, and this is so similar to Sickert both in the handling of paint and in the general atmosphere and effects of light, that one feels it would be perfectly feasible to alter the signature without anyone being the wiser!

I was used to seeing Uncle Paul's paintings and drawings in the homes of various relations, and very early on could recognise his style, whether in landscapes, flowers, buildings or nude studies. What is more, he did sign nearly all of his work, often adding inscriptions in a seemingly illegible hand. When I was at boarding school I recall receiving the odd letter from him - frequently somewhat terse - and having the greatest difficulty in deciphering what was actually written.

It was he who introduced me to the world of art history and of going to exhibitions. There was the Summer Exhibition at The Academy one year, Roualt exhibition another time and also a wonderful John Everett Millais retrospective. Uncle Paul's knowledge was immense and he was a man of very catholic tastes. Natural history, horticulture, music, the Kennet and Avon Canal, freemasonry and, above all, architecture and the history of art, were all interests that occupied his time and thought. This extensive list underlines the fact that he was an impressively cultured person.

With age his appearance became a little hawk-like (this was perhaps heightened by the cloak that he frequently wore), but in his youth he had been strikingly handsome, as can be seen in the wonderful portrait of him by de Laszlo that hangs in the main hall. There are countless photographs of him at the Court: in children's clothes, playing cricket with his brother Anthony on the East Front, of him resting in a wicker chair under a verandah in the Transvaal, where he had lived prior to the First World War, and of him smiling affectionately at his wife Norah in the comfort of the library at Corsham. Uncle Paul had a definite presence, and I know that this was felt as much by the art students as it was by his family and wide circle of friends.

Uncle Paul added immeasurably to the standing of Corsham Court as a house of notable art treasures. He was an able propagandist and was very generous in giving of his time to show visitors around. He was never biased about the contents of the house, and saw to it that each and every item was well-documented and, finances permitting, kept in good order. It was, I suspect, largely through his benign and enthusiastic interest in the arts that the Court became such a perfect centre for the Academy - here was a place where the love of art could be seen to transcend the generation gap and inspire real creativity and a sense of purpose.
A NEW JOURNEY
The Hon. Mrs Elizabeth Fraser

Fifty years have passed since the Bath Academy of Art came to Corsham Court. I was a teenager but very aware of the anxieties that hung over the family after the war about the future of the family home, Westonbirt School, and then a Convalescent Hospital for Officers had kept it heated and lived in from 1939-1945. My Uncle, the artist Lord Methuen R.A. had obviously thought long and hard over the problem, and so had the rest of the family - one was aware of the consultations going on with various people, both at Bristol University and those in the world of the arts.

The problem was resolved and in 1946 Bath Academy of Art became the tenant - the joy and relief for my Uncle and for the family was tremendous - the house would be lived in, there would be young people about, hopefully as students of art benefiting from the wonderful paintings in the State Rooms - the Music Room would resound to music - the Dining Room would be filled at mealtimes - the State Rooms would be open on certain days to the public - my Uncle and Aunt had a wing for them to live in - the house would be looked after and not fall into disrepair - a truly marvellous solution for both the Academy and for the family.

It was indeed an Academy of Arts - I attended for two years 1948-1950 - there were wonderful lectures given in the Hall in the evenings though it must have been disconcerting for the lecturer when the numerous clocks chimed the hours - the lecturer was silenced! We did a century a term on artists, musicians and authors of that period. Music - some of us were lucky enough to have piano lessons with William Glock when he came to lecture.

Our tutors and instructors were all distinguished in their different fields - we learnt a lot, and had a great deal of fun - 1949 June 22nd - I wrote “I helped cut 600 sandwiches and serve 200 teas for the Production.” I cannot remember what we did but I wrote, “It was a huge success.” Then one evening some of us put a sculpture of a woman on the swimming pool steps - people going early to take a swim next morning got quite a shock! So did we as we were well reprimanded! High spirits but fun!

Corsham benefitted from having the Academy at Corsham - Monks Park and Beechfield became part of the campus, Parkside and Ethelred House were halls of residence.

The old and much-loved family house was on a new journey through its life, and I know, we as a family were delighted to see it being used and loved. It was to some of us a sad day when it came to an end and moved to Bath - but time marches on and who knows what the next fifty years has in store for Corsham Court and Bath Academy of Art.

A GREAT CHANGE
Part of an address given by Lord Methuen, when he opened the Pictures for Schools Exhibition, organised by the Society for Education through Art, at the Tate Gallery, June, 1948 ...Ed

Now a great change is taking place in this country, as a natural process in evolution and partly accelerated by the raising of the school age whereby a very greatly increased demand has come about for more teaching accommodation and a larger teaching staff. The incidence of taxation is such that many fine country houses can no longer be fully occupied by the families who have for long dwelt in them; and sooner or later it seems almost inevitable that a new use will have to be found for them. The National Trust realised this need and before the last war had already taken steps to preserve Country Houses of National Interest under their special scheme. Since the war great progress has been made; but there is still the danger of many fine houses, together with their contents, not finding just the use for which they may be most suited. I wonder if more country houses could not be put to the same use as my own home, Corsham, is now being put?

In this house, I believe, you will find in a marked degree, the required environment to which reference has been made, not only in the house itself, but in its so-called amenities, that is its gardens, park, etc. Further, though the façade itself is Elizabethan, the interior, thanks, in a large measure, to that genius “Capability” Brown, has some remarkable XVIII century work, together with all its original furniture and fittings. There is in addition the collection of pictures made during the first half of the XVIII century. Here indeed is craftsmanship, such as is seldom seen now, not because our native talent is lacking, but because for a century or more the patron class has had his mind warped by the cheap and ugly. Where mass production has in large measure replaced individual craftsmanship. Such is the environment that the pupils at Corsham enjoy and I believe that
environment is bound to have an accumulative influence on them over a period of years.

By this arrangement, the house comes to be shared by the greatest number of users. The public, as before, has access to certain rooms twice a week: the pupils have access to the same rooms at all reasonable hours and in addition occupy the principal bedrooms, the stables and outbuildings as studios.

some of the teaching staff reside there, and we as owners continue to reside in that part of the house we have always occupied. One can only hope that some such happy arrangement may be arrived at in other instances, where the possibilities and the advantages may exist, for such houses, if I may say so, have the highest educational and environmental value, particularly if what is best of their contents can be retained.

INCIDENTAL REMINISCENCES

Gwyl Maw

I am particularly grateful for this contribution from Mrs Maw, in her capacity as a representative of the Local Authority and latterly as Chairman of Governors, for it provides a real link between the beginnings in Bath and the merger with Bath College of Higher Education resulting in the incorporation of the Academy to form a new institution in 1963. Although relatively brief in coping with such a huge task, it conveys a clear sense of some of the problems which had to be confronted and the way in which solutions were approached.

It may be interesting for the reader to link this with some of the views expressed by Henry Boys in Appendix VI ...Ed.

We first met Clifford and Rosemary when Clifford taught at the local College and Rosemary at the Royal School. We lived in Hamilton Road and C and R at the Lansdowne end of the road. Our daughter Richenda and Penelope Ellis were very good friends, tearing up and down Hamilton Road with new ideas, paintings etc., and very workmanlike they were too. My husband Dan was also an Art Teacher and President of the Bath Society of Artists, also a co-opted Member of the Library and Art Gallery Committee, and I was elected Member of the City Council. Tom Hennell was a mutual friend. As Chairman of Corsham Court Committee I saw a good deal of Clifford Ellis and had to fight many battles on his behalf, for his ideas were far reaching and not readily understood by some Councillors. He wanted art education to be something continuous and not to stop at the age of sixteen which it did at that time; he wanted it to be a life process, and he was able to get Corsham Court because of his friendship with Lord Methuen, and he was pressing to take thirteen to sixteen year olds there and develop this process. Of course Bath City Council wanted to keep the thirteen to sixteen year olds in Bath, and I had to work hard to see that he got that continuous development, because if they had been taught to draw a line here and connect them etc. he would have had a lot of undoing to do when he got them at sixteen at Corsham. He did want it to be continuous. I think there was a financial difficulty with the City Council if they sent them too far out of Bath. So there were all sorts of minor administrative problems that I had to solve. In practice this meant there were students of all ages, some adolescent and some going on into maturity.

The Academy was a great success from the very beginning because both Clifford and Rosemary were born teachers and could deal with the needs of a widely divergent group of people without any effort. The work of Corsham Court students was to be a revolutionary influence on art education throughout the kingdom, and it is still a growing influence today as regards the effect it has had on teaching methods and its outlook on many artistic matters.

Clifford was a natural teacher with a clear vision of the artistic needs and direction for students. However this artistic vision doesn’t fit clearly into an administrative framework, and this was an area where a lot of patient negotiation had to be carried out with the local Council. Because it was such a personal vision and achievement it was inevitable that on his retirement some changes would occur, but the influence of Corsham Court is still evident in the artistic community because of the benefit that so many have had in going through the Corsham experience, and the major contributions they have made in important fields of creative activity.

Clifford had a great sense of occasion and always sought that the detail of everything was right from the preparation of the Committee Room to the meal served beforehand in the Dining Room, where the smallest detail of food and wine was given careful attention. For himself Clifford made few personal demands. When he and Rosemary came to live at
Corsham Court the top floor which was semi-attic he felt was quite good enough and was happily ensconced up there, never making any requests for improvements and so on; all the finance went on the students and on the academic provision of accommodation and resources.

Ideas had developed in Sydney Place, but limitations of space and outlook prevented true fruition, whereas Corsham offered everything, rooms of the right size, the right atmosphere, the buildings and the friendship of Lord Methuen who was anxious to support and develop the revolutionary ideas put forward by Clifford Ellis. Clifford felt entirely at home in the atmosphere of Corsham Court and developed in his own artistic integrity because of this.

He took for granted that examinations and success in the artistic world happen inevitably as a result of the integrity of approach to being an artist or a teacher and by definition both.

Clifford was very good at envisaging what a new project entailed and the difficulties that would have to be overcome if it were to be implemented fully. He worked ceaselessly to overcome these difficulties and never spared himself, or indeed others. Clifford was very good at seeing what the problem was and knowing the right person and the appropriate method to implement a solution.

Despite the initial problems we all faced, and the efforts which were required to find appropriate and sensitive as well as practical solutions, they were exciting times throughout, and it was a privilege to be associated with, and to work for, such a unique institution, as it was throughout its history at Corsham and the traditions which it established in such a relatively short time.

**IN THE BEGINNING**

*Kate Fryer*

I went to Bath as a teacher at the School of Art in January 1937. I was appointed by the Head of the School at that time, Paul Fripp. I assisted in the life class, taught a few crafts and some design to both day students and the juniors. There were two other full time women teachers and Clifford Ellis was in charge of the juniors. The school occupied the top floor of the Technical College in the Lower Borough Walls and as the building had previously served as a hospital the surroundings were somewhat clinical and characterless.

Clifford and Rosemary were working very hard on their private commissions and were rapidly making a reputation in the graphic arts even carrying out a commission for the British Pavilion in Paris as well as doing a number of posters for Shell and other commercial projects.

I had only been at the school for a little over a year when Mr Fripp left to take up a post in Carmarthen and Clifford Ellis was appointed Head in his place. This left a vacancy and it was about this time that Reginald Brodthurst joined the staff to take charge of the juniors. Clifford had known him earlier in London.

For one summer term Clifford ran a special course for teachers, not just teachers from local schools, but teachers from other parts of the country many of whom would have had a term off in order to attend. It was an arduous course but highly successful. Some, I know, never forgot and I look back on it as the experience of a lifetime. I had a good deal to do with this course and have memories of sitting in a chill wind during a painting class in the Ellis's garden. Every side of art helpful to teachers in schools, was touched upon and expeditions were made to places like Bradford-on-Avon and others in the locality.

The school may have been small but what it lacked in numbers was made up for in enthusiasm and verve.

Judge the excitement when we heard that Sickert had come to live in Bath, and more than that had asked to be allowed to teach at our school so with his wife Therese Lessore he came one morning a week. To get the ball rolling, illustrations were thrown into the epidiascope. At first Clifford selected reproductions found in books - Manet, Degas etc but later Sickert brought along his own selection taken from the back numbers of "Punch" or the "Illustrated London News." Thus we came to know the drawings of the Victorian Illustrators, Georgy Bowers, Leach & Keen. Sickert's allusions were sometimes obscene particularly when he was referring to
people he had known personally and he often lapsed into French, but it was all very enlivening and broadening to the minds of a young and unsophisticated audience.

All this took place under the shadow of the threat of war.

In the summer holidays of 1939 I went up to Leeds as usual but at the end of August when war seemed inevitable I received a telegram. "Return at once, Ellis". I packed my bag and came back to Bath.

The following day I went to report at the Technical College only to find the whole place closed. It had been requisitioned by the Admiralty, there was no admittance. I got in touch with Clifford at home and found he was working on some kind of camouflage scheme and he suggested I go up to discuss the situation. I found him making scale models of industrial buildings of the riverside area. These included Stothert and Pitts and Oscar Windebanks. In and around these industrial sites were terraces of houses and these had to be taken into account when designing the bands of tone on the roofs of the sheds.

But before being totally involved in this kind of work there were other more pressing matters to be attended to - the salvaging of any equipment that had once been part of our now non-existent School of Art.

The Admiralty gave us one day to get out of the Technical College anything we might require. After that there would be no way of gaining access. So on a Monday morning we went into the basement where all the precious possessions of the School of Art and much more had been literally thrown. We worked from morning till night, just the two of us, until our arms ached - but we got out what we wanted. What I chiefly remember is the sheer physical labour of moving heavy objects but what, more precisely these objects were, time has blotted out. It had its
lighter side of course especially when we found some Edwardian under-garments of mysterious origin.

But still we had no school and no students and as Clifford was still absorbed in his camouflage activities I joined him at his house in Lansdown Road in the making and the painting of the scale-models.

It was interesting work whilst it lasted but it was not the teaching for which we were being paid, or should have been paid. I had my salary as usual but where it came from, whether the Bath Education Authority or the Industrial concerns by the river, I never knew. Perhaps the two parties came to some "gentlemen's agreement"!

Quite obviously the authorities were not hurrying to rehouse us, so we must rehouse ourselves. Clifford, on making enquiries had come to hear of some empty houses in Bath which might be suitable for a school. We came across a place in Green Park that had possibilities. It was two houses with communicating doors that had once served as a hostel for employees of one of Bath's large drapery stores, the kind of place mentioned in "Mr Polly." Both houses were the standard 18th Century Bath pattern with attics and cellars with further cellars stretching out under the road in front and beyond. It would accommodate the juniors and anyone else we could find as students but first these had to be looked for. Eventually two boys (young men) materialised whose parents had come down with the Admiralty. They were quickly joined by the daughters of a Bath photographer and Income Tax man respectively. Then a lively trio from the Royal School, ex-students of Rosemary's and others followed and with the addition of those who came in out of the black-out we were able to make a start. The two houses were very shabby so the painting of walls and the hanging of drapes (salvaged from the Technical College basement) effected an improvement. We heated the rooms with coal fires, made sure the shutters showed not a chink of light, opened up and at the end of the day closed down the premises and turned off the electricity supply at the meters way down in the basement. But there was no telephone and Clifford made his calls from a phonebox in the road!

War is war whether real or phoney - no time to dream in "Ivory Towers." Under Clifford's brilliant leadership we embarked on a number of schemes to aid the War effort. At the Food Office and other public places in Bath, School of Art posters were soon to be seen.

Work requiring a more scientific and academic approach was undertaken in the making of panoramic landscape for target practice for tanks. Knotty problems arose as to how the laws of perspective could be applied to a continuous landscape ... a landscape based on reality. The first depicted the English scene, the second done later was a French landscape - data taken from postcards etc and was actually used at Army Headquarters on Salisbury Plain.

One day Clifford told me that a man had called on him with some beautiful paintings. His name was William Scott and had I ever heard of him? I had, as it happened - from friends who had been students with him in London.

At the time William was doing market gardening in the Mendips. Clifford immediately gave him a few days teaching until such time as he, William, would be called up.

I liked William Scott from the start. He had a soft part-Scots, part-Irish accent. On further acquaintance he proved to be shrewd and perceptive and possessed of a keen sense of humour. Mary his wife came to the School also. Her metier was sculpture, she modelled beautiful simple figures, and instructed our students in the making of terracotta figurines like the Tanagra figures she admired.

By this time (around 1940-41) the School was becoming the culture centre of Bath to which those interested in the visual arts gravitated. Some well-known people gave talks in the evening, one of whom was Cecil Collins who has now, so much later, come into his own. We also had Laurence Binyon. He was a great draw and people were almost jostling each other on the pavement to come in. Sir Kenneth and Lady Clark visited the School early in the War and I once found myself handing a cup of tea to Herbert Read.

The Sickerts came once or twice more but by this time Walter Sickert was infirm and feeling his age. However he did have a few interesting observations to make on our new home. Of the large casts he said "All these statues - It's like seeing one's father-in-law at the end of the
Bath Education Authority

You are invited to the opening by
SIR KENNETH CLARK, K.C.B.
Director of the National Gallery
at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 3rd November
of 99, SYDNEY PLACE, BATHWICK
(at east end of Pulteney Street)
as a new home for
BATH SCHOOL OF ART
street.” A reference no doubt to his own first father-in-law Richard Cobden, and on leaving the building he looked to the municipal flats opposite and the washing drying on the balconies and said “These people are making poetry for us.”

Sickert died in January 1942 after several months of illness. Clifford made the arrangements for the funeral. Although the changed circumstances were bound to affect Mrs Sickert’s life she continued to live in the large house with its two studios, on St Georges Hill tho’ she must have known at the time she would not be able to do so for long. She made us a very generous gesture. She lent us a number of Sickert’s paintings to put on show in the School for about a week. It was thrilling to see these real ‘Sickerts’ at close quarters.

This exhibition can only have taken place between January and late April of 1942. Had the exhibition been delayed by weeks the result could have been disastrous - not to say tragic.

On the Saturday evening of April 25th 1942 I returned home to Park Street after a walk over Lansdown. It was Double Summer Time and a beautiful afterglow lingered in the sky. I had not long been in before the air-raid sirens were to be followed by more ominous sounds. Was this yet another raid over Bristol? One glance from my back window indicated otherwise; the raid was on Bath and flares were being dropped all over the town. Soon the crump of bombs sounded unpleasantly near and this went on for some time until the raiders flew off - or so we thought. After an interval of about an hour more bombs began to fall and at times it seemed as though Bath was being systematically destroyed from the air. This went on most of the night. Early next morning I had visitors - “Lansdown Crescent is down” said Rosemary Ellis, to be immediately corrected by Clifford “Not down but badly knocked about, - and our school has lost all its windows like many other houses in Green Park.” I later went down to see for myself. Hardly a pane of glass remained, dust and debris were everywhere. I cannot remember whether there had been casualties in the immediate vicinity or not. The following night the raid was repeated with even greater ferocity and this time our school entirely succumbed to a final assault. It was completely gutted by incendiaries and we lost everything. Only the shell remained. Clifford’s immediate concern was for his students and he went round to each address where the bombing had been worst to make sure they were safe. He had particular concern for those living away from home - in digs - or rooms. We were all very shocked by what had happened and angry too at the wanton destruction of so much that was beautiful - there were many casualties in the City.

The Bath Blitz brought other problems in its wake personal to our students. As we no longer had a school, there was nowhere we could hold the special examination in Art due to take place in a fortnight’s time. The city was in a state of chaos and no premises were to be had anywhere. It was quite a serious situation not only to us but to Mr Green H.M.I. who had lost another school in his circuit - Southampton or Exeter - or both. Depriving the students of the opportunity to sit the Ministry’s Examination could mean they were called up for National Service without any qualification for a normal career. Then salvation came in the form of Mrs Sickert, who offered part of her own home as a school for the seniors where they might work in peace and take their exam. And so it was that St. Georges Hill, Bathampton became a temporary School of Art. St Georges Hill made a very pleasant School of Art. Sickert’s “Raising of Lazarus” dominated the studio where we worked - there was plenty of room, the light was good and once the exam was over there was greater freedom as to what the students did - but no appreciable slackening off. Clifford continued History of Art talks and initiated another panoramic landscape for use by the Army. This must have been in anticipation of things to come (not that any of us were in the know) the terrain was French - a large panorama with landmarks taken from postcards. July came and with it the end of term, time to say “Goodbye” to St Georges Hill and Mrs Sickert - but before we took our leave we must clear away all signs of our occupation and restore the house to its former state of cleanliness and order.

We had much to be thankful for in that summer of 1942. We had experienced a traumatic event and come through unscathed. We had been allowed to work in peace in a house recently occupied by a very distinguished artist and given hospitality by his most gracious wife. We were indeed grateful.

When I returned to Bath in September 1942 it was to fresh premises - 99 Sydney Place; the arrangement with the Bath Education Authority no doubt having taken place soon after our
leaving Mrs Sickert's. By the time I arrived on the scene a great deal of second hand Art School equipment was already in place. 99 Sydney Place was a beautiful house on a grander scale than either of the two destroyed by enemy action in Green Park. Furniture had been left behind by previous tenants. Edwardian pieces of superb quality upholstered in 'golden' brocade and much too fine to stand everyday wear by students. The juniors were brought back into the School and under the benign instruction of Reg Broadhurst were installed in rooms on the ground floor. A great deal of hard work went into the refurbishing of 99 Sydney Place: walls were colour-washed with paint, cupboards and shelves made ready to hold any books and equipment that might come our way whilst those fine sofas and chairs were given protective loose covers of dyed hessian, one of the few materials not rationed at the time. As far as was possible in the context of a School of Art we tried to retain the elegance the house undoubtedly possessed. The first floor 'salon' became the life room by day and a meeting place for the newly revived Art Club on Monday evenings. It saw a great deal of activity and its classic features like the Ionic columns which divided it were pointed out to visitors with pride. There were now sufficient students to make classes viable and at time went on many more were to join. Not all were required to sit the Ministry of Education's Examinations or attend full time. Service men and women stationed in, or passing through the locality were always welcome.

Clifford and Rosemary had the capacity to collect as their friends some of the brightest and most distinguished minds of the art world and were ready to give them hospitality should they come to the School to talk. Osbert Lancaster, Ceri Richards, Geoffrey Grigson, Thomas Hennell, John Piper and Sir Kenneth Clark were amongst those who did. When Clark was expected, excitement ran high; there was much activity in tidying up and hanging the walls with the best work. Listening to Clark was enthralling; to participate in his great scholarship, to hear first hand views and ideas expressed in that beautiful English (and enjoying the occasional word of slang so casually dropped in), to have to ourselves such an erudite speaker was an experience not to be forgotten. But beware the ill-judged question. Clark didn't suffer fools gladly.

One evening he brought along some small Cezannes from his own collection. They were framed in dark blue velvet to enhance their jewel-like quality. At another time he came with small pen and wash drawings of the kind made in the coffee houses in the 18th Century. He lent them to the School for a period and I recollect spending the whole of a Whit singled holiday mounting and making them ready to hang on the walls. It was Whit singled on account of a private arrangement between Clifford and myself when for some reason, now forgotten, I wanted some other time off. Clifford was always very accommodating in these small matters.

Of the other speakers John Piper was the one most pleasurably anticipated. He came suitably prepared with his favourite illustrations - reproductions of Constable, Palmer, Fuselli and others of the Romantic School. Always urbane he talked to us in that light humorous manner with which we were now becoming familiar. Sometimes he would digress into a more literary vein and I remember him once quoting from Tennyson's Maud. His talks like his work, played upon our imagination. Nostalgia for the past took a strong hold on our minds unremarked by the monotony of war. As a variation on the lectures given by the famous, the Art Club members themselves were sometimes called upon to make their own contribution - by putting on the screen something of their own choice (picture or sculpture).

The Ellises exercised a great influence on the artistic life of Bath. Anyone from the art world seemed to gravitate to the School even if it was only to have a look or see for themselves so their name became quite famous amongst a certain set. Another influence whose word carried great weight was of course Lord Methuen. He was President of the Bath Society of Artists, he had been a pupil of Walter Sickert and was an R.A. Not all that usual in a member of the aristocracy.

The School was now expanding and soon others were to join the staff. Kenneth Armitage came up for interview (leaving behind his Major's cane), Millicent Wood, with a glowing recommendation from Herbert Read, joined us and took over alabaster carving. Part-time teachers flitted in-and-out and a genial air of activity prevailed. The news of the possible move of the entire School to Corsham took me entirely by surprise. Clifford told me of the plan
one morning. I must confess I was dismayed. It seemed that Lord Methuen had offered part of his house for use as a School of Art. This with the spacious grounds opened up endless possibilities, not only in fine art, painting and sculpture but in wider cultural activities, music, drama etc. Being of a more pessimistic nature I could see only the difficulties; the isolation, the lack of amenities and the inaccessibility. Clifford however was quick to point out to me what would most likely happen as an alternative - a return to the position of being part of a technical college with all the drawbacks that entailed. Not an attractive prospect. So the Corsham idea became a reality. Soon advertisements began to appear in the Times Educational Supplement for staff of various categories, teachers of dance, music, mathematics and much else. Virtually it all added up to a residential School of Art. The juniors were to remain behind in Sydney Place, but all else except the part-time day and evening classes were to go to the country.

The new school was to be called BATH ACADEMY OF ART - the move was on, and the way looked set for a wide cultural venture.

EXTRACTS FROM A 1942 DIARY
Barbara Birch
May 1st 1942

Anne rang up and said Ellis rang them up last night to say he could put us (A & I) both up at his house at 97 Lansdown during the exam. Nine of them already there. They are sleeping there and working at Sickert's studio at Bathampton. Packed hurriedly and arranged to catch the two something to Yeovil and meet Anne at Sparkford.

G.W.R. at Bath still not working so had to get a bus on from Bathampton. Lugged our suitcases up to 97, seeing the bomb damage for the first time. Clifford greeted us in Home Guard uniform with open arms. "Welcome Home". Anne and I are sleeping in the kitchen with Beryl and Claire. Mr & Mrs Ellis sleep in a room on the ground floor. Miss Fryer (house burnt) in dining-room, Riette Sturge-Moore in front room on first floor, Mrs Eades on first floor, and also John Piper while he stayed here.

To get to St. George's Hill House (Sickerts) went up Pulteney Street, left up Warminster Road over canal; left fork and straight on up the hill. Rather a nice walk.

Worked from 9.30 - 12.30 as usual in Sickert's studio, large room with three windows facing north. Had lunch and worked from 2 - 4 again and did evening work until about 6.30 or 7 and then trudged home.

May 8th

Sickert's house is large with a wizard garden. We have the run of the studio, a large room on the ground floor and a smaller room upstairs where we (the drawing exam people) do perspective and architecture and the painters do still-life.

Yesterday Claire and I were up in the room Sickert died in, drawing the first Mrs Sickert's death mask (there were three Mrs Sickerts) which was a horrible thing. We found lots of things belonging to the old man including his teeth, toothbrush, hairbrush, hairclippers and billions of stump ends of yellow pencils.

May 15th

Exams. So far we have had life, cast and memory comp. all of which I did badly I'm afraid. Tomorrow we have perspective then anatomy and architecture on Saturday. For cast we did a bust of Dryden by Grinling Gibbons, rather a nice thing in carved wood and gilt. Ellis said it was the first time anything has been done other than old Venus and Discobolus and thinks we ought to do it jolly well!
THE CORSHAM EXPERIENCE AS SEEN FROM THE OUTSIDE

Peter Cox

In 1943 I was trying to put together a chapter on Art Schools for the Visual Arts Group of the Arts Enquiry, a research project sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trust and run from P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning) in London. I think it must have been Sir Kenneth Clark who suggested that I should contact Clifford Ellis, then Principal of the Bath Art School. When I walked into his office at 99 Sydney Place rather apprehensively, I found Clifford carving the lettering on Sickert’s tombstone; this was different from anything I had so far experienced in visiting Principals of other art schools. It was to be the beginning of a long personal friendship with him and Rosemary and to have a great impact on my life and on Dartington’s as well.

The house they were living in then was on the Landsdown Hill and was the first artist’s home I had ever stayed in. What would have been the drawing room was their studio with a paint-stained floor. I don’t think there were carpets anywhere but there were lovely drawings of animals - Rosemary’s - up the stairs and along the passage. Clifford’s preoccupation of the moment was to save Bath’s beautiful railings being melted down into guns and Rosemary, having got Penelope off to school, put Charlotte on to the back of her bicycle and set off for the Royal School, then evacuated to Longleat.

I was so impressed by the two of them that I invited them to come and take part in a four day Teacher and the Arts course at Dartington, which I was planning with the Local Education Authority, and in which Imogen Holst, the newly formed Amadeus Quartet, Rudolph Laban, Lisa Ullman and Dorothy Elmhirst were to take part. They brought with them three students both to help and gain experience - Margaret Inglis and Jean Melville I remember particularly - and a fourth, Fanny Martiennsen, arrived uninvited ahead of them but was taken on as an additional assistant.

Clifford’s lecture - on how a group of children could see and paint the same jug of flowers so differently, and their daily painting class - the teachers sitting in pairs painting each other by candlelight - were immensely successful and much appreciated, particularly by Imogen Holst whose outlook was surprisingly parallel to Clifford’s - believing, as she did, that musicians who wanted to teach should be educated and trained as musicians and teachers simultaneously. The respect was mutual and Imogen was invited back to Corsham. This began a number of exchange staff and student visits; one of the most memorable was a joint outing to the Holst Trust in Cornwall, in which Clifford himself took part.

In 1949 when the Dartington Hall Film Unit was making Animals on the Farm for use in schools we invited Clifford and Rosemary to design a set of lithographs to go with it; regretfully they were not reproduced for lack of funds but the originals can now be seen on the walls of High Cross House, Dartington’s new Archive, and are being much appreciated.

It was through these projects that I gradually got to know Clifford and Rosemary well. I stayed with them at Monks Park on the night that the Academy opened and remember having drinks with the first five students to arrive. In the summer of 1951 I suggested that they might like to come camping in France and Italy and we set off in my car. Clifford having planned the route and everything else with his usual meticulousness. Travel by car and camping on the continent was still something of a post-war novelty. To have Clifford as one’s guide was an education in itself.

All sorts of projects grew out of this friendship. Rosemary brought a group of students down to put up an exhibition for our first Children’s Christmas Festival in 1951 and four years later Clifford organised at Dartington an exhibition of Corsham Lithographs. Meanwhile all sorts of interesting relationships began to develop with Isabelle Symons, Henry Boys, Liz Pisk who used to come to lecture to theatre courses, James Tower whose work was included in our Pottery and Textiles exhibition of 1952, and particularly Riette Sturge Moore.

Clifford became one of our principal advisers on how the Arts Department at Dartington should develop and a governor when the College of Arts was established. His foresight in envisaging Bath Academy as an institution which was both an art school and a teacher-training establishment was extraordinarily imaginative, not to say canny. It was a precedent we tried to
make use of at Dartington but failed. I shall always remember the lady at Teachers Branch becoming rigid with fury and saying, "Don’t ever quote Corsham to me; I make the regulations and Clifford Ellis is always the first person to find ways round them."

Looking recently through the College files I am amazed about the number of things I sought Clifford’s advice on. It was through him that I first invited Robin Tanner to Dartington and met Bobbie - the person he suggested who might be willing to teach at the Totnes High School for Girls part-time while also teaching two days a week at Corsham. From then on Dartington benefited from a stream of ex-Corsham students who taught at Foxhole, the Adult Education Centre, the College of Arts and the Totnes schools - Jane Tate, Joy Abrahams, Pennie Brent-Smith, Kate Nicholson, Ivor and Maureen Weeks, Albert Lehelloco, Don and Anne Marie Evans, Bruce and Nancy Kent, John Gridley, Steve Hoare, Helen Whiteford and Keith Frost with his two beautiful whippets! Together over a period of thirty years or so this varied group of personalities, working clearly within a common background of inspiration and training, together enriched the life of Totnes and Dartington to an extraordinary extent. For a time contra-flow students left Totnes and Dartington to go on to Corsham, among them Leila and Alison Chaplin and Steve Collingbourne whose parents worked for the Dartington Hall Trust.

As the sixties progressed and the teachers’ course at Corsham disappeared, the institutional relationship declined but the personal friendships remained.

TEN YEARS AT BATH ACADEMY OF ART

Christian Watson

Clifford Ellis interviewed me on 3 September 1946 and offered me a job as his secretary at the Academy. The fact that Rosemary had taught me at the Royal School then at Longleat during the war may or may not have helped me get the job, I’ll never know.

I was just out of the W.R.N.S. and staying with my sister near Bath so I started off at 99 Sydney Place, then the home of Bath School of Art. The first task was to get an office going at Corsham.

The staff then consisted of Isabelle Symons, Millicent Wood and Anne Phillips who was appointed warden of the girls hostel at Monks Park.

The Ministry of Supply had recently left Monks and we moved into empty huts that had been married quarters. At first we had beds but no chairs; light but no water. We camped, cooking on a Baby Belling and using cutlery and crockery borrowed from the Red Cross store at the Court. Food was still rationed and mostly we ate out of tins.

The next task was to appoint more staff and there were plenty of applicants. Our little band was then joined by three Kenneths, Garlick, Armitage and Storey, and a musician, Lewis Leslie. William and Mary Scott also appeared as part-timers.

Students started arriving on 8th October for the first day of term on 9th. My diary records that meals are much less substantial now that the students have arrived. By then a cook had been appointed and we had moved into the house at Monks Park. There are many comments in my diary about what we ate and food was of some importance in those days.

We worked all hours of the day and night to launch the Academy, even painting the library shelves till midnight the day before the students arrived. But there was a great feeling of excitement, as if we were on the verge of starting something really worthwhile.

We managed to have a lot of fun too. My diary for October 31st records, "didn’t stop till 7 as usual but tonight it was rather a lot as Harry Cliffe had asked us to a Halloween party in his digs and the others had to go on without me. So I went on my bike and perishing cold it was too - however they had kept me some food. Harry, Alec Henson and Dalwood live at the top of the Wardens’ House. They have a nice big room with low oak beams, latched doors, creaky floors and primitive sanitation but the effect is charming. Ian Collingwood brought his guitar, Leslie and Garlick were there and we sang songs and enjoyed ourselves. Fanny Martenssen rode my bike into a wall coming home but didn’t hurt it much."

The diary was not kept up after that, probably through pressure of work, so I have to rely on memories of the seven happy years I spent at Corsham until 1953 when I went to Kenya to join my sister and brother.
During that time various houses in Corsham were acquired as student hostels, especially Beechfield (for men, with Ken Storey as Warden). For the girls we used No. 40 High Street, Weaver’s cottage, Ethereal House and No.’s 4 and 5 Church Street.

William Glock came to do External Examining and one Easter he and John Amis who organised the Dartington Summer School of Music had a week of music, visitors using student rooms. It was a particular privilege to hear the Amadeus Quartet practising in the Music Room at Monks Park. We also had a recital by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

The Ellises were kindness itself to me. Rosemary was a wonderful hostess and provided many suppers when they lived in the flat on the top floor of the Court. Clifford employed two of my sisters part-time and, when we returned from Kenya, he gave my husband a job and put us in a flat at 5 Church Street. I was warden of girl students there and also did a job at the Research Centre in Art Education, which ran for three years with grants from the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Schools Council.

Lord Paul Methuen was a good friend of the Academy, living in the West Wing at Corsham Court, painting and gardening and keeping an eye on things. He let us use the State Rooms for special occasions. I shall never forget hearing Jacqueline du Pré in her student days, playing her cello, accompanied by Gill Severs on harpsichord. We all sat on the carpet that Lady Methuen had designed to echo the plaster ceilings; it was judged too precious to accommodate chairs.

Eventually the Music Room was moved from the Court to the former Riding School by the main gate. This room had to be renovated as it had been used for sculpture, which was then housed at Beechfield. I remember the Riding School as being good acoustically.

When we built our house near Malmesbury and started hand weaving, we had much help and encouragement from members of staff, especially Stephen Russ. I shall always think of Corsham with great affection, and remember with gratitude the Ellises, staff and students who were such good friends.

CONVENTIONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL

Kenneth Garlick

In the summer of 1946 I had just completed a war degree in Art History at The Courtauld Institute of Art and was looking for my first job. The post of Lecturer in Art History and Librarian at the newly created Bath Academy of Art was advertised. Various friends said “You haven’t sufficient experience to apply but have a go.” So I did. When Clifford Ellis offered me the post I said, “I hope I made it clear that I have no librarian’s qualifications.” “Yes,” he said, “that is why you are appointed.” That somehow was a clue to Clifford’s Corsham. He didn’t want people who were set in their ways. He was looking for people who were sensibly starry-eyed and at the same time able to face a challenge, one of his favourite words. Age did not come into it. Individuality did. I was swept off my feet by the excitement of it, being with artists and craftsmen, working in the surroundings of the Court and Corsham village. Talking to Lord Methuen and learning about the Methuen family gave me a feeling of taking part in a continuity of history, just as working in the Academy gave me a feeling of taking part in the making of a new history. William Scott was painting his bold yet sensitive and beautiful semi-abstract still-lifes. Kenneth Armitage had a robust, military air and executed his modelled figures with impressive skill. Clifford and Rosemary, Isabelle Symons, Millicent Wood, talked earnestly about education. Education was a word I did not like. I wanted to be above all that. This opened my eyes to quite a large extent but I still regard that word with some withholding. The personalities were unusual and gifted sometimes to the point of eccentricity - Helen Binyon, Riette Sturge Moore, Margaret Lester Garland, Biddy Haslam, Geoffrey Spencer, Andrew Wilson, Lewis Leslie was in charge of music. His idiosyncratic interpretation of Gluck’s Orfeo - interspersed with readings from Rilke moved me deeply. I played the piano just well enough to bash out an accompaniment to The Dance of the Furies and The Dance of the Blessed Spirits on an old upright as the dancers rehearsed on the lawn. This meant that I was taken off a certain amount of teaching. I enjoyed it but it brought home to me that if ever I was to get into the museum world - my real aim - I must not be seduced into staying at Corsham for long. It was too heavy. This however was why it was so thrilling to the students who were only there for a few years and might never experience anything like it again. You could see them blossom.

Lord Methuen told me that I might take students into the Picture Gallery at any time. This, I felt, was
when I came into my own. I could take groups around and talk about Van Dyck or Salvator Rosa or Lippo Lippi in front of the real thing. I could try to convey my enthusiasm for the history of Grand Tour collecting and for the importance of works of art remaining in private hands and not all going into public galleries. Private learning and private enjoyment. I remember once reading Browning’s Fra Filippo Lippi in front of his Annunciation while the students sat on the floor. I am not sure that it came off, but it nearly did.

Once I felt that a challenge from Clifford was too much. This was when he arranged for me to go to Bath once a week on the back of Kenneth Storey’s motor-bike to teach the small boys in the school at Sydney Place to draw in the style of the old masters. I couldn’t draw myself anyway. I got through Giotto and Masaccio and a few more. It was a kind of mayhem. Then I very boldly told Clifford that it wasn’t fair to them and it wasn’t fair to me. He saw the point. This time the challenge had failed.

Why was the Bath Academy so important? It was because it was conventional and unconventional at the same time. It looked forward but always through a respect for tradition. It was more than an art school. It was a world of its own. Music, literature, biology and history all played their part according to the predilections, even the whims of the teachers. Finding the right teachers was Clifford’s great gift. A number of us did not stay long but I don’t think he wanted us to. He liked change. The students came from all sorts of backgrounds but there was no nonsense about social or ethnic engineering. This was real. Clifford had a genius.

CORSHAM AS I REMEMBER

Veronica Heffer

In September 1946 my friend Jean made an appointment for us to see the Director of Education in Chelmsford, as we had both failed our Intermediate Art and Craft Exam leading to the A.T.D. We were not sure we wanted to stay at Chelmsford School of Art and retake it the next year. He gave us a single sheet, on it was a picture of Corsham Court and details about the two year Teacher Training course, also a description of the Court and the Park which was a bird sanctuary, on reading this I applied and was accepted.

We arrived during a beautiful autumn, likened by Paul Gell to the Canadian fall where he had been in the R.A.F. There were fifteen two-year students, some girls from Bath Art School and some men students most of whom had been in the Forces. We were taken on visits, given lectures about the Court and its landscaped gardens by Kenneth Garlick. At that time we were free to go anywhere in the Court and grounds, into the kitchen, to see if Mrs Dennis had any food, into the walled kitchen garden, the greenhouses with orchids, down to the lake, where in the summer we took out the little boat to study the great crested grebes. Everybody was on Christian name terms. In a way it did feel like our home and we always had plenty of friends. I wrote to my mother that it was almost too good to be true, it was like a cultural holiday camp in the most beautiful buildings and countryside.

We took no written exams and I only remember one education lecture given by Isabelle Symons. We had opportunities to do most things, though no choice. I was very happy to paint with William Scott. I loved all the biology with Geoffrey Spencer.

There were free music lessons, field trips every Saturday, gramophone concerts at the weekend given on the paper mache horned gramophone. We went to the first production of Albert Herring at Cheltenham and string quartets in the Pump Room Bath. There were talks from Winifred Nicholson about twentieth century painters and Julian Trevelyan telling of a trip to Spain, where he slept on the rim of a volcano. As soon as I could afford it I went to Spain. We went to Dale Fort after a film show by John Buxton about Skokholm, we were given four pounds from petty cash by Clifford to pay our fees, we ended up drawing and sitting among the gannets on Grassholm.

Eventually we had to go on teaching practice, but unusual schools were found for us. I went once to a prep school in Bath where all the staff were straight out of Decline and Fall or St. Trinians.

One beautiful summer’s day we went for a picnic to Spyke Park, we swam in the lake with the tacompyles and the water was copper-coloured. I went and looked down on the house. Much later I found an entry in my Grandmother’s Birthday Book “December 13th 1886 went to Spyke Park, Chippenham.” She had gone as an under housemaid. For me, Bath Academy of Art at Corsham was a lovely place to be and I was privileged to be there for three years. I was always grateful to my friend for making that appointment with the Director of Education who thought the tiny brochure he had just received might interest us.
The Furies from the production of Gluck's Orpheus

THE CORSHAM EXPERIENCE
Eileen Webb

In the summer of 1946 I had not even heard of Corsham. By late October I was there, one of the first students of the newly opened Bath Academy of Art. Each one of us had a tale to tell of how we arrived there, mainly by chance. Or was it fate after all? Every autumn since, I have relived those golden days, not through a haze of nostalgia but with the sharp vision of true experiences.

Rosemary and Clifford Ellis inspired and motivated everyone involved. To do that required an unusual strength of purpose which inevitably also meant battles of will from time to time. The whole concept of Corsham was idealistic, propelled by post-war optimism and made possible by the enthusiasm of Lord Methuen together with funding from Bath City Council and others.

One of the earliest worries about the experimental two-year training course for art teachers was what would our qualification be, and would it be recognised as valid? The Diploma Course was self-evident so the four year students had no such worries. Running these two very different but complementary courses parallel to each other was a major innovation. We shared resources and lectures but remained largely separate. This arrangement was a social experiment as well as a unique educational one, but not understood by us students at the time.

Corsham Court was the focus of the working studios. The gracious building and splendid rooms provided an on-going source of inspiration. We studied paintings in their historical context. We were also privileged to study modern and contemporary paintings in a special exhibition in 1947.

Set in the Wiltshire countryside the Court is surrounded by its own parkland designed by Capability Brown complete with lake and trees. Painting from nature and the landscape was basic to our studies. Drawing from plant life in the gardens and greenhouses, both there and at the residential house of Monks Park, provided ideas. These were developed in the printing shop and pottery as design.
The work flowed from the inspirational setting and it was sufficiently 'avant garde' to upset inspectors and their like who looked for a very traditional way of doing things. Clifford in outlining his ideas early on described Glyndebourne as a 'powerhouse of ideas,' he wanted Corsham to be another. In that context music was ever important. No-one who took part in the outdoor production of Gluck's Orpheus and Eurydice is ever likely to forget it. The sight of the stag being pursued by hunters in and out of the trees of the North Walk or the Furies with Cerberus, is still alive in the memory. Costumes were designed, dyed, made and worn by the students of both courses. Long hours and frayed tempers but what amazing achievements!

Professional standards were set in every area of study. We were learning by doing ourselves, the better to teach others when our turn came to leave. For a few of us, our two year course was extended to three for further study. Teaching practice come wind or weather had to be endured. Walking to Lacock in three inches of snow, with the ration of art materials for the day's classes carried in a rucksack on one's back is unforgettable too. But there you have it, we were and went on being, the pioneers of the Bath Academy of Art!

Fifty years on, the influences of Corsham are still having their effects. No student nor lecturer left behind his or her own experiences of being there when they moved away. The inspirational qualities of the actual learning experience became part of each person to a greater or lesser degree. In turn, each person brought this to bear on his or her own teaching. Not every student became an accepted good teacher but there was always a certain something which set the standard for a true creative endeavour.

The ideas and ideals set before us by Clifford Ellis changed our perception of the way we saw things, the way we learnt. He explained the purpose was not to teach us factual knowledge as such, but where to look for it, how to research and to discover from personal observation a direct understanding of the subject in question. Then to use this in writing or teaching, in painting or printing or in whichever creative process was appropriate.

Teaching, a creative process? Transmitting ideas, engaging young or older minds, finding the means by which people can themselves learn, is demanding, but can be inspirational, even today.

So much of this was misunderstood, so much wasted, in later years when real freedom was lost in the deceptive laissez-faire of free-expression. The traditional discipline of the classroom was destroyed by the mis-use and lack of real understanding of the way the Corsham ideals could work. Results whether in painting or writing or in examinations do not just happen. Even conceptual art has to begin with the artist's own experiences and perceptions often barely recognised as such but it is there none-the-less.

It is the human mind which must continue to matter. Human endeavour and achievement which must be supported and encouraged. Art can inspire and illuminate ordinary lives. The inspiration of Clifford Ellis's vision of a powerhouse of ideas based on the Glyndebourne of 1947 is still with me. No more vividly so than when I leave the new Opera House after yet another amazing and wonderful evening. The building ablaze with golden light against the summer night sky is illumination of a very special kind.

Corsham gave us all an insight and left us to find our own way of using it in our own lives and in our dealings with others. Teaching is now in the form of giving Art lectures to the "Golden Oldies" and sometimes to the young. The influence of Corsham is due for reappraisal.

MEMORIES OF BATH ACADEMY
Irene Chedd

Early in 1946 I was about to leave school and was looking for a place at art school. I applied to Chelsea, but as with all the well known art schools, places were reserved for people coming out of the Forces. I was told to apply again in three years time.

Jack Longland, then Education Officer for Dorset where I lived, advised us to contact Clifford Ellis who he knew was hoping to start a new venture in Art Education.

So around Eastertime I had an interview with Clifford at Sydney Place. I was surprised that he seemed to be as much concerned with my other interests as he was with my ability to draw and paint. However he said he'd be happy to have me if he got Corsham Court - if he didn't he was going abroad.
He got the Court and I became one of the first students on the four year course. We girls lived in the army huts at Monks Park - very cold in winter but quite fun. I was mixed up with the two year students. There were identical twins in my hut, Nancy and Muriel Burbridge.

I remember watching glow worms in the grass out of my windows at night and hedgehogs snuffling through the grass.

At the beginning of the first term we spent a lot of time at Monks Park designing and printing curtains for our rooms and covering the chairs in the library and music rooms with ex-hospital blankets from the Court, generally painting and decorating and liquid-lining floors. Not a bit how I expected Art School to be - of course we did our two days of life drawing as well. No drawing from the antique for us. We used to cycle to the Court for lectures and life drawing. That first year we were expected to try a bit of everything - Pottery and Fashion Design at Sydney Place, Sculpture with Kenneth Armitage, clay modelling from life with Mary Scott, and lino printing with Biddy Haslam. I've still got the clay models, but I don't know what happened to the rest. At that time Harry Cliffe, who had just left the forces, was a student with us. He had worked as a lithographer before the war so we soon had a lithographic studio in the stables - in our second year I think. I became very interested in that - even though grinding stones was hard work. But I still did some painting with William Scott and Peter Potworowski.

It was usual at that time for students to take the N.D.D. in either painting or sculpture, but four of us felt we'd like to take the illustration examination. I took it in lithography. We took this exam in our third year, before we had taken the Intermediate. Not a good idea because, if we wished to teach, we needed the Intermediate, which we were then forced to take in our last year and, as there were so many parts to it, were unable to devote as much time as we would have liked to our chosen subject.

Corsham was a wonderful experience. It was exciting being in at the beginning. Things I loved were - the place itself, the avenue, the gardens, the lake (skating in the winter, watching the great crested grebes in the summer) I also enjoyed the
beautiful rooms - the State Rooms and Picture Gallery where I spent many hours alone when I was taking my exam, trusted with all those treasures; Lord Methuen's lovely books, and the Academy's library. Then there was the companionship, and being taught by exciting people like 'Tage', Riette Sturge-Moore, Andrew Wilson and Clifford himself. Then there were the outings - being taken back-stage by Riette when she had designed the sets, to the first production of Peter Grimes. Also taking part in the productions of Orpheus, Lear and Kaleidoscope - making and designing costumes. In music, I learnt to play the violin and the organ in the Music Room at the Court. We designed murals with Clifford for Hertfordshire schools, and with William Scott for Beechfield. We went on field trips with Geoffrey Spencer to Bowood House to see horons and to Slimbridge etc; a fellow student and myself had a wonderful week at Skokholm Island drawing and photographing birds. While there we sat amongst the gannets on Grassholm and they completely ignored us while we drew. It was quite amazing.

I think our Corsham experience made us question, experiment and explore, to be adventurous and not afraid to do things our own way. When we were there, just after the war, there was generally a great feeling of excitement, of renewal and of better things to come in which we would have a part. We felt we could achieve great things. Some of us did, but most of us got bogged down under the need to provide for our young, and the mundane tasks of everyday life. And I'm afraid our brave new world after the war doesn't look so good fifty years on.

However the spirit of Corsham still lives - and hopefully those of us who have been educators ourselves have passed on some of it to the next generation, and are still doing so!

A SUPERB OPPORTUNITY
Paul Rudall

It was a superb opportunity to live and work alongside such artists as William Scott, Kenneth Armitage, Peter Potworowski, 'Nibs' Dalwood and later, after I left, Henry Mundy, Peter Lanyon, Howard Hodgkin, William Booker and many others. The atmosphere was relaxed and devoid of commercial pressures so prevalent nowadays. The emphasis was upon a general awareness, not necessarily exclusively of visual art, but of life.

Looking back on the experience, it seems that Corsham at this time was full of optimism about art and life, so different from the introverted pessimism of today expressed in the art world, and by many people generally. In those days, too, the attitudes of art schools in this country were largely reactionary, whereas those of Corsham looked to the future positively, as did political feeling in the early 1950's.

These attitudes had a profound influence on the approach to teaching art in ordinary schools, as an attitude to life and not as a way to teach pupils to be artists, very much in line with similar attitudes expressed by Marion Richardson, Herbert Read, Nan Youngman, and, of course, by the founder of the Academy, Clifford Ellis.

WARTS AND ALL
Reg Boulton

I would like to put forward some of the 'warts and all' aspect of Corsham. My mind goes back to the first time I went down to Corsham to be interviewed by Clifford Ellis in that wonderful Chinese Room which was in June or July of 1947. I had been in the Air Force for five years and I came out in January of that year and I did about two terms teaching in a secondary modern school near where I lived in South London. In spite of that I retained a certain amount of idealism about the post-war world and making things better for the future, and teachers having a vital part to play. Very idealistic, looking back on it.

The first sight of Corsham, having never been to that part of the world before, was absolutely stunning. The great thing about Corsham that everybody appreciated, quite apart from anything to do with art education was the absolutely wonderful place, and if nobody learnt anything at all I am sure just being there must have had a beneficial effect.

I had been asked to take a self portrait and a painting or drawing of a piece of bacon, this surprised me but nevertheless I did it. I might explain that although when I was at school, (I was now twenty-four) and I
had done practically no art whatever, I was sort of good at art. But I didn't do even the equivalent of 'O' Levels in those days, the Grammar School I went to didn't believe in such nonsense. I did this laborious self-portrait which was about the first bit of seriously studied drawing I had ever done and then I got some watercolours and did a little bit of a slice of bacon. I had no idea what it was all about. Clifford and Isabelle Symons were there and for some unknown reason they accepted me. I turned up there in a couple of months time and I was absolutely lost and completely amazed by what was going on. Fortunately there were four or five other ex-Servicemen there and it is interesting to look back and think about those chaps. It became weird when we realised that apparently there wasn't any kind of structure to the course. Having been on courses in the Air Force one was instructed, and having come from Grammar School where one learnt things properly the idea of floundering around was a bit disorientating. I am sure that in some ways that wasn't altogether a bad thing but I think in other ways it would have been quite useful to have had explained to us exactly what we were doing.

There were other more positive things - we had some art history lectures from Kenneth Garlick which were good solid stuff and there was a chap who interested me because I was interested in reading books and writing. I read quite a lot during that first year and did some writing. I also went along and sat in a room with a lot of other people in a big circle, something I had never done before and looked at this girl who was completely naked, which surprised me because I had never seen one before like that. That was Annie, who was part student and part model. There didn't seem to be any particular approach to drawing, we just sort of floundered away and did the best we could. Kenneth Armitage came round from time to time and he would do a very dramatic bit of drawing and try to explain forms of things but I didn't really grasp what we were supposed to be doing for some time, except looking at Annie of course which was very pleasant.

It was interesting too that the painting classes run by William Scott, seemed largely to be dedicated to producing paintings that looked like William Scott's. This wasn't true of the sculpture group. In the sculpture studio we did quite straightforward academic things like modelling heads and modelling figures and then later I carved a torso based on my girlfriend who is now my wife Ricky.

What I am saying is I don't know what the revolutionary and visionary ideas were except that it wasn't a straightforward course and to a very large degree people were left to flounder. If that's being visionary I think it is a rather limited view and no sort of coherence was ever explained or conceived. Clifford Ellis gave talks but I don't really remember very much about what he said so it couldn't have been all that important. The thing he seemed to emphasise most of all was straightforward careful study of whatever it was that was put in front of us, or rather what one put in front of oneself because it was all left to one's own imagination except the generalised theme was set. You studied something and you were given lots of confidence to have a go yourself. There was very little teaching of techniques or certain sorts of approach which would lead to specific end products. Perhaps that was a good thing because I know in a lot of art colleges that is exactly what was going on. Now if that was the revolutionary view well so be it - but it takes some people a long time to understand an idea if they have to reinvent the wheel themselves every day.

A lot of time was wasted for reasons that I wouldn't criticise Clifford for, we used to go to do some pottery at Sydney Place and that meant getting a bus, not getting there until about 10.30 am, then doing a bit of pottery, then having lunch, then doing a bit more, then coming back. It was all very slow and very very pleasant of course, but hardly the hothouse of teeming ideas and creativity.

The great thing was that every now and again somebody whose quality we mostly didn't altogether recognise or understand would crop up because Clifford had this extraordinary ability to know people and persuade them to come down. I remember, I think it was in my first year, or second, when Sir Kenneth Clark turned up and gave a talk on Ingres and then on another occasion William Glock came down and talked about Stravinsky, and gave us a dramatic piano recital.

The one thing I think that Clifford Ellis somehow managed, was to persuade us in some strange way that we were all very special. The idea was that we had all been highly selected. Of course this was actually nonsense because the college had only been open one year when I went there. I think he was glad to get any students at all. Certainly in my case what I went there with, was so poor that any other place would have rejected me out of hand. I don't think there was any selection at all but nevertheless he persuaded people that we were all rather special and in a sense we were because we lived in this wonderful surrounding, but that wasn't anything to do with art education - that was the special circumstances of the place and the time. The feedback from this
persuasion that we were special was that in spite of
the fact that I think the standards were very low, we
got off with a certain amount of confidence, feeling
that we were going to improve art education in the
schools and I must say from what I have seen of it the
state was so low that we could hardly have done
anything but improve it. I remember going to one
school on teaching practice where art was a matter of
getting out books with illustrations in and telling the
kids to copy them.

All this might sound really rather negative and I have
perhaps emphasised the vagueness of Corsham as I
knew it in that first year and rather less so as I began to
understand things a little bit more in the second and
third years. I have no doubt that in the sixties it was a
high powered place with streams of marvellous
teachers going in and out and all sorts of things that we
never had were going on. But I suppose, oak trees have
to grow from acorns and we were at the acorn stage.

Corsham was really aiming to be a liberal arts college
except that somehow or other it wasn't really made
quite clear in the beginning in my mind that's probably
what it was doing. Later, colleges of education did
include many aspects of what Clifford Ellis was
unusual in introducing at that time. Slightly odd but
very valuable things like organising the library as he
did, not on the Dewey system but in bands of time so
that you had books about the 15th Century from all
sorts of aspects put together, then books about the
16th Century, all aspects put together. I remember
William Brooker saying to me on one occasion that he
thought this place would be ideal as the Royal
College of Art if all the students had already had an art
training then they could really profit by it. But he said,
and I think he was right, that nobody was really quite
up to the place, but of course that isn't altogether fair
because what Clifford was doing was laying before all
these inexperienced students a richness which very
few other people in other art colleges could get, even
though in other art colleges with their noses to the
grindstone they ended up at least being able to draw.

The visionary ideas that Clifford and Rosemary had or
were able to put into practice (and I query what they
were), doesn't detract from the fact that as I said right
at the beginning the place was so gorgeous and the
company so congenial and the relaxation so
complete that nobody could but enjoy themselves
and it changed everybody's life. Ricky also added
something which is much more important and I think
it's one of the aspects that I missed out on, she said
that she was so often exhorted to use her eyes, to
look at things carefully, that it really did make her do
so and she's the sort of person who is very observant,
and that no doubt helped her. I don't think I am that
sort of person and perhaps if you read between the
lines perhaps you hear the voice, my voice, as
somebody who wasn't an ideal student there and it is
no fault of Corsham. Ricky's contribution is very
much that she enjoyed it and it changed her life and it
made her open her eyes and that is certainly worth
recording.

PEACO-OCK, PEACO-OCK!

Adrian Campbell

Whenever I hear that sound I am reminded of
Corsham. The short-cut walk from Parkside
through a narrow bit of wood and up to the Court
entrance gates. The huge cedar tree, and great yew
hedges. Entering the side door and in the main hall
the unmistakeable scent of a great old country
mansion. The spacious, open, airy rooms upstairs
were used as studios. The neat and carefully
painted library shelves where Clifford took such
trouble over the colours, not to mention all the
wonderful books on them. I remember the
swimming pool and expeditions to it by a somewhat
unorthodox route returning from the Cross Keys, after a hard struggle with, say, life-painting all day followed by several pints! - and Ian Collingwood doing his tricks with needles through his cheeks, or flame-throwing a mouthful of paraffin - ugh!

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity ..." Nostalgically this quote from Dickens seems to sum it up very well. But what was it really like?

I do think, even if we did not realise it consciously, that there was a sense of excitement, of being in on something very new. There was an atmosphere of openness, of experiment, challenge, and discussion amongst all students. I remember long discussions and arguments among us, and criticism of homework and holiday work given by Clifford to all assembled students. I also remember his talk about the philosopher’s cave and shadows on the wall. The struggle in coming to grips with the problems of drawing and painting, and to see as a whole and not in part; to learn from "Tage", William Scott, and Peter Potworowski, whose first showing in the music room inspired us all.

The science and design work with Geoffrey Spencer, from microscopes, butterfly wings, blades of grass, etc, was perhaps less of a surprise to me as I had had some science training before. It was good to find a link-up of science and art.

The drama - Orpheus with "more Mourning" (sic) speech training by Miss Symons, costume and mask-making for Lear and, no doubt others since. Not forgetting the student dramas and affairs, not to mention the staff ditto - not so much of an art school, more of a way of life! Perhaps, about them as about the dreaded teaching practice, the less said the better!

Yes, Corsham was a widespread and comprehensive cultural training, with a sense of urgency, involvement, competition, excitement. Occasionally I think, some felt an idea tended towards the gimmicky, but that was long before the pile of bricks, torsos in baths, and draped buildings of recent years.

Above all, I think, Corsham encouraged us not just to open our eyes but to open our minds. After fifteen years of government that knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing, and whose ideas and standards of education are way pre-Marion Richardson, positively Victorian, how badly that is needed now. But for us looking back - before Korea, Vietnam, Northern Ireland, Apartheid etc, what a wonderful age!

"Bliss was it in that time to be alive, but to be young was very heaven!"

THE CORSHAM EXPERIENCE WHAT WAS THE MAGIC?

Bobbie Cox

I joined the Institute course in 1948. The rural situation of Corsham had attracted me more than London. I had been accepted to go on the Ministry course, but my father died and there was no money left to support me and I switched to the Institute course. Looking back it was a stroke of luck. I went expecting to become a certain sort of artist and was not at all sure about teaching. After three years I left as quite another sort of artist and one committed to teaching.

What experience changed my expectation and what made art and teaching my way of life rather than a peripheral profession? How did it happen? I have often wondered. Was it something to do with Mondays, the day many of the young artists of the day descended on Corsham to teach us: William Scott, Peter Lanyon, Bryan Winter, Kenneth Armitage and, of course, Peter Potworowski? Was it their influence in the studio? Or over a beer in the Pack Horse? Occasionally the influence worked the other way; a new student from France, Maria-Christine, breezed in, and had more influence on the staff than they had on her.

Or perhaps it was Tuesdays - Andrew Wilson's stern discipline contributed a wider experience, or to Design Day on Wednesdays, or on Thursdays James Tower?

Filtered in between we had teaching practice - schools became a reality, children real people and artists. What we had done on those other days became immediately useful and relevant. This was unique, there was not another course like it at the time. Had I gone to London, or been on the Ministry course, I would have had a fine art training, followed by teacher training. The Institute course developed artists into teachers. The theory grew out of practice. We did not go into schools with a
Peter Pot arrived with a huge and ghastly bunch of flowers. Rosemary expressed surprise. Peter said, “I wanted to bring a present for you. I forgot, so passing the churchyard I borrowed these.”

At so many levels of work and play these different experiences entered our lives and expectations and values changed. It did for me. Perhaps it was all synthesised on the bicycle ride from Monks to the Court, or torn apart and put together among one’s contemporaries. What was the magic? What was the mix in this ideal envisaged by Clifford and Rosemary? I, for one, left Corsham changed, enriched, and with a resource that has seen me through forty years as an artist and teacher; I have this to thank them for.

When the new intake of students came in 1949 we noticed they had a more structured timetable than us - homework was set and museum visits on Fridays. We felt sorry for them and that something had been lost. Our week had some leeway of freetime to use as we thought best, and usually I think we did, and learnt something else through it. But Corsham was now under pressure to increase numbers and structure the course to ensure that everyone was fully trained to Ministry of Education requirements. This pressure continued in various ways right to the end - imposed by people who did not recognise the uniqueness of the course - but unique it remained thanks to Clifford and his skilful manipulations.

I continued to work at Corsham as Rosemary’s assistant until 1955. In that role I saw the other side - the care, the planning, the problems and the generosity - things as students we never realised. My education continued through helping on the Beechfield scheme, a brilliant way of introducing students to children and Design day where staff from all departments came to work with us on a common design theme in their own different materials. I am sure that my own beginnings as a tapestry maker can trace origins back to those days.

We were at Corsham from 1949 - 51; just two years, almost half a century ago. When we arrived we were still teenagers, just. Adolescents even, yet the die was cast in those two years for all that came after that time. We cannot fathom how the Corsham experience had this profound effect. In those early days, as the Academy was taking shape, the course was ill-defined. Indeed there was no course in the way in which that is now understood.

There were no Degrees - BA’s with or without honours; no MA’s; no classifications. We are still grateful that we do not know if we were considered 1st class students, reasonable 2:1’s, disappointing
2:2's or miserable 3rds. There was no modular structure; no mission statement. A prospectus of the time gives little clue as to what was expected of us.

So what did Corsham have to offer? All these years later our memory is of a muddled and heady mix of activities. Within a single week we could be expected to paint, pot, dance, make puppets and consider what relevance our own art practice had to the teaching of children. Our memory is of the tutors being, in general, kind and tolerant, not abrasive or confrontational. The Corsham style of teaching appeared to come from Clifford Ellis. He set the tone. As a teacher he would suggest, not coerce; evoke, not insist. His style was anecdotal. Whether in the studio, on the College bus or over tea at Carwardines Cafe his important and treasured observations seemed to have been plucked out of the air. Perhaps the most apt word to sum up the learning process is serendipity - the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries.

Not that all the teaching was to our liking. Some of the things we were asked to do seemed then, as they do now, downright ridiculous. What were we to make of the painting subjects *Daniel in the Lions Den* or *The Snow Queen*?

There probably was too great a reliance on our ability to retain a childlike vision, to work intuitively. But in that expansive atmosphere we were allowed to find our own way. It was the total of that rich experience that had its lasting effect. Somehow by the time we left we were arrogantly confident that we had something of value to offer the teaching profession and were sometimes surprised to find that people from other places could be envious of that conviction.

So often the late forties and early fifties are depicted as grim times but for us 'bliss it was then to be alive' and to be Corsham students.

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**A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM**

*Margaret Morgan*

I went to Bath Academy of Art on leaving school in 1949. I was just under sixteen years old, and there was one other student of the same age. There were a number of folk returning from the Forces, and some students who travelled from Bath each day. The ages ranged from fifteen plus to sixty. I had been drawn to apply to Bath mainly on the information of the prospectus with the splendid aerial view of the Court, and the fact that it offered all the things I was interested in rather than a narrow specialist art course. The fact too that it obviously was based in a community was also a great draw.

I really was pretty wet behind the ears - hardly surprising at that tender age - and found life somewhat of a shock to the system with its challenges of work and living in a community and the basic tenet that each person was totally responsible for themselves and their development, though within a highly structured and rich set of experiences which we were all expected to take a full part in.

I think that for me some of the most formative of the implicit teaching was that the whole education presented was indivisible as a way of life and an approach to life. This did not in the slightest diminish the need for an in-depth understanding of the disciplines within the experience, and we were encouraged and expected to take part in all aspects of art, music, drama, and dance, as well as specialist individual lessons in music, for example, over and above the rest of the curriculum. Art was the main thrust, but the other aspects were never seen as also-rans.
 Whereas the pattern for training in other art schools and colleges was for Ministry of Education four year courses leading to the National Diploma in Art and Design to be broken into a two year course leading to the Intermediate Examination followed by two years for the Final, B.A.A. offered a three and one year pattern in order to have time to broaden the initial part of the experience in depth. The course was a revelation to me and I made full use of the possibilities, enjoying art in the forms of painting, life drawing, design, print making, textiles, sculpture and modelling. We also had to undertake surface anatomy and perspective to fulfill Ministry requirements. The other parts of the course included music, I learned singing and an instrument. There was also a music session to be enjoyed at Monks Park after the evening meal when Lewis Leslie played records in dim light through a huge grey horned gramophone to students relaxing in deep chairs, or on the floor.

 Some people opted to do dance every day, but for me it was a weekly ordeal from which I emerged so stiff I could hardly move for the rest of the week! This was a variant on ballet, taken by Irene Spencer which did nevertheless give me an appreciation and understanding I would not otherwise have had, together with a great love for watching it. An American ex-dancer, Zelia Ray also gave us a few sessions of a very different kind of approach. I can hear this American voice saying, “You must look interesting. - when you want to look interesting think of BLUE SKY, and then you will look interesting!” Later of course Veronica Tynadle-Biscoe took over with a very different approach in modern dance.

 A group of dance students from the Ballet Rambert lived with us for a week or so, each year together with their tutor, Peggy Van Pragh. We drew them as we worked, and were shown the subtleties of line and balance. Drama, mime and literature also played their part.

 I remember a whole term’s work being keyed into the 17th Century, - the art, music, literature, dance and drama. The culmination was a party which took place in the Court, and State Rooms, and the participants had to design and make costumes of the appropriate period. There was also the production of a 17th Century Masque which gave some of us the opportunity to research the period further.

 There was another aspect which was dear to my own heart. This was the art and design work based on the environment, which, between the Court and Monks Park had much to offer. There was also a thriving Field Club and I spent many happy hours watching foxes and badgers, bird watching, counting herons, and rambling around the locality with Geoffrey Spencer and like-minded students.

 From the experience of hindsight, and the knowledge of other establishments and courses, I really do think that B.A.A. had something quite unique in its holistic approach. It was as natural as breathing, and seemed absolutely logical and right. I have seen many attempts at liberal studies components and can only say that none that I had experience of were any more than poorly integrated appendages which many students saw as a waste of time - and made their feelings felt accordingly. The only other establishments we had some links with were Dartington and Breton Hall. There was a visit from Michel St. Denis from the Young Vic School.

 Life for us was real. We had practising artists and crafts people as tutors and lecturers. In my experience there was no clock watching apparent and people gave of their time and energies very generously. We had exhibitions brought in to us, or we travelled to Bath or London to see them. I was deeply moved by the paintings I saw by senior students when I first arrived there, with their simplicity of approach, glowing pale colours, and decorative qualities: Margaret Power, Philippa Eccles, Fanny Martenson, Barbara Walker.

 We went to concerts and drama as part of the Bath Festival, and to the Cheltenham Festival to experience the Britten operas.

 The staff I remember in my first years were as follows. Margaret Lester Garland, Julian Trevelyan, Margaret Wickham, William and Mary Scott, Andrew Wilson, Helen Binyon, Kenneth Armitage, Riette Surgo Moore, Kenneth Garlick, Isabelle Symons, Bidda Haslam, Lewis Leslie, Irene Spencer, Geoffrey Spencer, Steven Russ, Millicent Wood, Colin Thompson and of course Clifford and Rosemary Ellis.

 I think the things I learned include that if you are asked to undertake anything, even if it is a challenge you have no experience of previously, you undertake it. There is no place for “that is not my specialism.” You research it, - find an expert, staff or student - master it, and get on
C & RE on the staircase at Corsham Court in fancy dress for a Christmas party
with it. This was especially pertinent to productions where you could well be called upon to design, make, move, dance, sing or any other perceived requirement.

That anything you do should spare no pains and should be of first rate quality - you are only cheating yourself if you fall short of this!

That genuine experience, looking and seeing and involvement were of a calibre I had not at that time even dreamed of.

Comment of tutor after having brought in a wooden hen coop with a somewhat neurotic Rhode Island Red, and after gazing thoughtfully at what I in my ignorance and innocence considered a really good drawing: "You have drawn every hen you have ever known, but not that one!"

The second example is after an intense drawing of a bird's nest woven into the base of a wild rose briar. I had taken great pains over this, and was duly satisfied. I remember being absolutely incredulous on being asked to return to it and over the next few days do seventeen more! On realising that this was a serious request, my feelings ranged from amazement to annoyance, but by the time I had reached number four I began to understand that seventeen could be just the beginning.

It all sounds a bit idealistic, and I am sure older and more mature students may have been much further along the line than I was at the time, but I could actually see it working, and somehow with the kind of drive and integrity a lot of people put in, I could see that things could be lifted into a kind of quality and self reward that I had been previously unaware of.

Later, criticism could be pretty tough and there was a weekly session from a set painting challenge for two and four year students. All the folk involved crammed into the studios and two or three tutors went systematically round. They did not pull any punches, but were generally positive in offering ways forward. I do remember a period when my mind had been for some time on things other than work, being mortified by the comment that mine was bloody awful and gave the impression that I was not really involved with what I was doing at all. Which actually hit the nail on the head and got me going again!

Something needs to be said too about the summer productions. Just after I arrived Orpheus took place, and later How pleasant to know Mr Lear. Later still, Kaleidoscope. I was at first surprised that names did not appear in programmes, and that the major roles were often taken at different performances by different people. It was all part of the team approach where everyone was enabled to take part in a number of ways - this was no place for prima donnas, male or female!

The structure, following the launch of an idea was known by some of us as organised chaos, where we were not always so sure that it was organised! But after a time a pattern and structure began to emerge.

Certainly in the latter two productions mentioned everyone had an opportunity to design costumes and accessories. Eventually designs were chosen and others were challenged to translate them into reality. Great lengths of hessian, unbleached calico, muslin and other basic materials were available, with papier mache, dye stuffs and paint, wire and scrim by the gallon! It has to be remembered that materials were short and clothing was still on coupons. The army surplus stores had a good line in khaki long-sleeved vests and long-johns which appeared in many guises, dyed and painted, and were also worn by us as part of our daily clothing, topped off with a travelling rug, as Monks Park, where a lot of our work took place, was pretty chilly. The final production took place in Corsham Court grounds and was open to friends, families and the public. Most of us had taken a pretty full part in it, some or all of the following involvements being undertaken: designing, making, playing in the orchestra, signing, dancing, mime and movement. It seemed that everyone was involved in one way or another, both staff and students.

The advent of Peter Potworowski and the purchase of Beechfield were memorable, and he really was a very fine teacher whose love of painting, kindness and gravity in working with students made a lasting impression on many of us. Peter and a group of us were let loose in Beechfield immediately. It was a wreckage, literally. The army had been billeted in it, and had had a pretty destructive party on their last night, including attempting to take the huge old garden roller up the first flight of stairs. The wreckage of the roller, and the staircase lay there when we first went in. As always every opportunity for
experience was utilised. Peter’s group and later others designed and painted murals on the walls amidst the rubble. Beechfield was to be the grand design project, and this was soon undertaken. Curtains and cushion covers were designed and made, repairs and improvements were set in motion and eventually Beechfield emerged as a gracious and interesting place of work and leisure. Final cartoons for the murals which were to be permanently installed got underway and were carried out in a highly professional manner.

There were always outside lecturers on hand, and a particularly interesting one was given by Imogen Holst in my later years. Everyone was expected to be there, and at the time some rumble about her getting us to sing met with little approval as we felt we should be doing more important things elsewhere, so she had a rather negative group sitting around her on the floor in the Music Room at the Court. With consummate skill she had us all eating out of her hand and singing away happily within about six minutes!

Winifred Nicholson also came quite often to visit her son and daughter Jake and Kate who were students, and to lecture. I remember an illustrated lecture when she spoke on a matter near to her heart - colour. She brought the whole thing aglow with her enthusiasm and love for her subject, and spoke of the rainbow and the colours of the spectrum. She adjured us to think colour and to use the vocabulary of things we knew and had experience of, to enrich our understanding. The word “red” did not really mean anything other than a generalisation she said, but raspberry, mulberry, tomato, geranium, plum immediately suggested something tangible, accurate and memorable.

It was a lot of years afterwards - at least thirty five - that as Art Advisor for Suffolk I invited Rosemary Devonald (nee Herbert-Smith) to give the opening lecture to a residential conference for Primary Teachers. I had not seen her since our student days though I had heard of her often. I picked her up from Ipswich Station, and we recognised one another immediately in spite, or possibly because of, mutual warnings that we were neither of us the rather more sylph-like figures of our youth! In the evening we enjoyed laughing over old photographs including one of her returning from an early morning walk, long hair and white skirt blowing in the summer morning breeze! In her lecture to the Suffolk teachers she spoke of colour, and the experience of naming, and linking with known items. She did not at first remember who in particular it had come from, but we agreed that we had both used it in offering colour experience all our professional lives to teachers and children.

I was one of a small group who worked for much of one year with Clifford on mural painting which was a main part of our final examination. He was a riveting if apparently low-key teacher, and led us to a deep and lasting appreciation of Piero Della Francesca and Masaccio. I remember him telling of an experience he had in Italy when studying at great length a painting which had a splendid night sky with stars. On emerging into the night on his way home he looked up and was transported into the experience of the painter, seeming to see the sky through his eyes. It really can happen.

After Peter Potworowski the most influential person as far as painting went for me was Bill Brooker. He was always a friend, as well as a tutor who could make tough demands. His feeling for Vuillard in particular was one which he communicated and which I find is still a growing interest today.

I think there must be a final word which is really to do with the hidden agenda of the place. Living and working in a community has its particular sets of difficulties and problems, personal and workwise, not least for some members of staff in the context of the very powerful vision and drive of Clifford. If there were any difficulties in the earlier years they were not apparent to students. There was a community spirit and I genuinely believe that the mutual friendship and respect between staff and students was evidence of a maturity of approach which offered a great potential. You know that if you were committed and serious about what you were doing you would be taken seriously and given every possible opportunity and assistance to go further. You always did know too that however far you went, there were always vast and exciting realms to experience, explore and make your own contribution to. It was really just a beginning which I believe for many people set a course for what happened later. I was always glad that it was not a great place for reunions, the important part of life was always the present leading into the future.
THE FOCUS AND MAINSPRING

John Eaves

The subject of art and its practice was the focus and mainspring of everyone’s attention at Corsham in those early years. Short of real studio/classroom teaching many of the staff may have been but the obsession with art and its manifestations carried everyone through their three years personal and teaching studies. Our endeavours as budding painters, sculptors or ceramicists were equally important as our teaching with children; one could not function without the other, it was inseparable and part of a whole social concern. The fact that Peter Lanyon or William Scott were as interested in your painting as those paintings you had seduced from children in schools was significant in itself and not replicated in other art schools at the time.

The art scene was beginning to internationalise so Clifford and Rosemary Ellis were quick to respond in their staff appointments and connections. Mme. Langevin frequently visited, bringing her influential hedonistic paintings and prints from children at Paris schools; Scott and Lanyon, already established artists, brought us close to the U.S. experience from their meetings with Rothko and Motherwell and this in turn brought us straightaway into an engagement with the new and innovative, Peter Potworowski consolidated this with his highly imaginative studio practice along with his personal French connections via Leger and Bonnard. All these people provided perfect resonances for our teaching in schools; the links were logical, effortless, natural and a million miles away from the dry academism of the London art schools still under the dominance of William Coldstream and post-Sickertian drabness.

Some ex-students are critical of the incompleteness of the total experience at Corsham but all one can say is that it will always be so wherever you study. To my mind it was a vital visual beginning to one’s art education and left one anxious to build on that experience. It continues; that’s how I see it.

SERIOUSNESS OF PURPOSE

Antony Curtis

I was brought up fifteen miles to the west of Corsham and joined the Royal Navy there on September 16th 1946. My fortnight’s induction must have closely coincided with the opening of Bath Academy close by.

My interview at the Court, in summer 1950, felt like a return home. As one of two newly qualified teachers from Loughborough College, both seeking a supplementary course, I was the last to be seen by a person referred to as ‘Clifford’, most unusual, the Principal addressed by his first name!

The person confronting me had examined the standard interview cabbage and self-portrait drawings and, presumably distinguishing one from the other, he commenced to probe my identity and psyche. It was like fencing with an incisive ghost; one could see but not define him. Over an hour later I emerged, elated and indebted from the toughest interview I have ever had. My longing to make art had been mitigated by earlier misgivings. So I remember no details of our conversation. I had discovered, I remember, an ability to explain and validate myself to myself. I had also done so to this quietly elusive personality who had already acquired an aura of significance for me.

Insights into Clifford were not easily gained from short mid-off, presumably during a staff v students cricket match, I watched him make a brave and efficient use of slender resources (he was not a good batsman). There was, I reckoned a core of steel to the quiet man. Although Clifford appeared habitually kind in his every day dealings he could also appear imper turbably ruthless and authoritarian; this aroused a level of wariness in me.

Clifford collared me one morning near the end of my course to help him hang an exhibition of children’s art in the Barn studio. To this day his tutorship still guides me when hanging work; he may also have been checking my assessments. In 1952 he advised me, an ex-student then, as to which London gallery to approach with new work. Other casual contacts over the years led me to a view analogous to the cricket. Clifford occupying the crease at the focus of a field of influence, that other British game, no disrespect intended; you were ‘in’ or ‘out’ when the chips were down. He played that game much more skillfully.
A member of the Coldstream Committee once told me of their arrival at Corsham and how Clifford met them at the Court entrance. This with hindsight, appears as a poignant meeting to me. It seems the moment which anticipated the progressive loss of our art schools, and the final annihilation of Clifford’s concept of a residential art school, which I characterised as an updating of the mediaeval master and pupil relationship.

This piece was not intended to dwell at such length on Clifford, but as the innovator who powered the organisation he has seemed increasingly pre-eminent to me. Corsham provided enlightenment on fundamental issues which have since been my bedrock as painter and teacher. It took me no time on arrival to sense potential for my embryonic future; even the young woman I married came later as a student!

The high seriousness of purpose at the college was pure gold to me, it glittered with gems of humour from the people I met there which continues to this day. At that time it was rare, if not unique, to find such enlightened and truly contemporaneous work as that practiced by most of our tutors. Even today there are artists who work as though the twentieth century ended about 1880! This was not the case fifty years ago with Potworowski, Scott, Wynter, Lanyon, Armitage, Cliffe and Tower who all helped me.

It is in the education of children through art that Corsham is, and would wish to be known. I see it as having had even more potential for the training of artists. It was chronologically a brief period in my own life and remains a crucial influence for the painter in me.

Most artists display a physical ‘handwriting’ and many are also recognisable by concepts embodied in their work. I have a concept of time in the visual arts which exists with other elements in my painting. I think there is an awareness of time in contemporary life which differs from the awareness displayed by work from earlier periods. This awareness is, I think, a fundamental characteristic of twentieth century work; our tutor’s works were rich in this quality. When I was first aware of this element there were
no others I knew who held the view. It now seems to be part of the scenery amongst young people; no big deal to them but it remains exciting to me.

I was always convinced at Bath Academy that significant artists would later emerge from our ranks and hoped I might be one of them. My acquaintance with recent works by former Corsham students is severely limited. However I have seen pieces I value by my contemporaries Ivor Weekes, John Eaves, Paul Rudall, and Howard Hodgkin who has a high profile.

There must be many others and I would love to see an exhibition of Corsham artists, this time including examples of work from former students who did not return as staff.

CHEAP DAY RETURN
Keith Fair

Clunk, Clonk! "Day return to Bath, five and six," came the barely audible voice of the ticket clerk from behind the glass screen which, with its rounded top framed in well polished oak and coupled with his softly spoken manner gave, if not a feeling of the confessional, certainly an air of the ecclesiastic. I emerged into the larger world of cast iron gothic which is Paddington Station, clutching a newly dated piece of green card that was going to prove far more significant in launching me into the teaching profession than all the educational certificates I had gained, or more frequently not gained, during my school career.

The interview wasn't going any better than had previous ones, although my inquisitors, looking over the vast expanse of antique table, were at least trying to look interested in me, which was more than could be said for other panels I had encountered over the past few months. To date I had been given the firm impression that I would never make a teacher of any description and had just been wasting the time of college staff. But what had led me to this picturesque remnant of old Wiltshire which had become quite an anachronism, surrounded as it was by His Majesty's Forces and all the paraphernalia without which they seem unable to function?

"There are places at the Bath Academy of Art," my father had pronounced after a visit to the Training Colleges Clearing House during a lunch break from his work in the centre of London. We, or rather he, had paid this organisation the obligatory fee of ten shillings and so, when I had been firmly rejected by my, or it would be more accurate to say, my headteacher's first three choices of college, my father had taken himself off to their offices to get his money's worth. He continued, "I've got the application forms for you; after all, anyone can teach art." An attitude all too evident in educational circles today. By this time in my life, my father, highly qualified, both as mathematician and engineer, had despaired of his son who, I suspect, he thought almost educationally sub-normal.
Certainly the school reports that my sister and I brought home each term reflected opposite ends of academic achievement, reinforcing my view of me and reducing my self-esteem term by term as my teacher's fertile brains, assisted one suspects by Roget's Thesaurus, vied with each other to damn my efforts in more and more colourful ways. The fact that perhaps I wasn't really interested in following in my father's footsteps and had never wanted to enter the Science VI never occurred to anyone. In those days the pupil's view didn't count for much, I had wanted to become a farmer!

Before I had experienced for the first time that memorable polished wood floor on the way to the Chinese Room which squeaked more than any floor I had known before or since and which, I suspect, continued to squeak late at night when there was nobody there to provoke it, I had sat with three other candidates, all wishing to be teachers of art. They were all well into courses at their local art schools and were far more accomplished than I. They did nothing for my pre-interview self-confidence and I was surprised later not to see any of them as students at Corsham.

As the interview got underway with the rather routine opening questions, which were met with my equally routine answers so well rehearsed on previous occasions, I studied my inquisitors of whom I knew nothing by either name or repute. The two ladies had smiled at me as I entered, revealing a display of ivory that would have made the eyes of any orthodontist light up at the prospect of a lifetime's work in front of him. I also remember wondering if two of the panel had ever contemplated careers in show business as ventriloquists, such was their ability to talk at length quite clearly but with only the barest perceptible movement of lips.

"Have you ever been to an Art Gallery?" A question I had not been asked at previous interviews. I confidently replied in the affirmative and then added to impress further, "The Royal Academy." I had a relative who was an accomplished painter. Each year my sister and I were taken by our parents to see his paintings hanging 'on the line'.

"Er," came the unexpected response, "You would have done better spending your time at the 'late.'" A further minus mark to add to the many that I had been accumulating during the previous few minutes.

"I think your self-portrait is a little better than your half cabbage." Both had been done rather painfully after consultation with the school art master, who found it hard to hide his incredulity when I had told him that I had applied for a place at an art college, when I hadn't been near his art room for over two years. I remember him muttering something about not giving much for my chances. Both the self portrait, which was drawn, and the half cabbage which was painted, had been executed on regulation school cartridge paper. The paint had come from a small black tin of water colour paint which had been transferred to the paper more by a series of happy accidents than any design on my part.

A career in the lower ranks of the Civil Service looked more and more imminent with each question that was asked.

"How did you get here today?" asked the lady who had been called Rosemary by her colleagues. I suspect the question had been asked in desperation, trying to give this candidate his full allocation of time to come up with something positive. "I took a train to Bath and then caught the bus to Corsham." I remember the bus journey well. It was a hot summer day, the bus was dirty and unbearably stuffy and full of cigarette smoke. Momentarily I relaxed a little, there couldn't be anything wrong with that answer.

"But why did you do that?" came the unexpectedly aggressive response. "Chippenham is much nearer to Corsham than Bath." "Because you can get a cheap day return to Bath but not to Chippenham," I replied with a feeling of hopelessness. That was the moment when I think the Gods must have been with me. I was astonished to see smiles all round. They seemed to be saying, "Ah! At last. Here is a candidate who can think, who has initiative, a born leader of men!"

"You know that half cabbage does have something very very personal about it," acknowledged Clifford, looking again at my feeble efforts on the table in front of him.

"Is there anything you want to ask us?" asked Isabelle with a warmth that I'm sure hadn't been there before. There were, of course, hundreds of questions, but they were not vital and could wait for another occasion which, I was beginning to sense, might become a reality.

"Don't worry," Clifford said in an encouraging way as he led me to the door. He winked and added, "You'll be hearing from us very shortly." He smiled, raised his right hand and sent me on my way back over that squeaky floor and onto a lifetime teaching art.

Perhaps my father was right, "Anyone can teach art!"
CORSHAM - “JO” AND STANLEY EDGE

Keith Fair

It was the little yellow car that started the rot. Initially it had a subliminal impact on one’s life. In those early days one thought nothing of this yellow car scurrying hither and thither, driven by a rather formidable looking lady. I, not even being the proud possessor of a bike, and therefore having to walk everywhere, was not really concerned about cars; there seemed to be a far more realistic possibility of eventually acquiring a cycle to speed my journeys from Beechfield to Monks Park and the Court.

Then suddenly it was no longer there, rather like wasps disappearing in the autumn without one really registering their passing. One wasn’t aware that it was missing, just that something that had helped to make up the Corsham scene, which was so much part of our whole awakening, was no longer with us. It was only when Isabelle Symons reappeared in an open top Morris Minor that the mystery was solved.

Then, just as suddenly as it had vanished, the little yellow car reappeared, this time sporting a pair of L Plates and a new driver. Rosemary Ellis. Now the Austin Seven, with its crash gear box coupled with a total clutch pedal movement of about an eighth of an inch, minimal brakes and a tendency to roam just where it wants and not where it is pointed, is not an easy car to drive. As a car in which to learn to drive, it could only be likened to teaching somebody to ride on an unbroken horse. Later models were, to use modern parlance, somewhat more user-friendly, but the cars made in the late twenties and early thirties, although they had more character, left much to be desired if one was the driver, but this was perhaps their charm. It must certainly have been a challenge to its new owner, and students soon learnt what was meant by a crash gearbox. It would be an exaggeration to say that students and staff alike leapt into the trees when the unmistakable roar of its engine was heard in the distance, but they did wisely, give it a wide berth.

Rosemary’s ownership of a car also led to a certain amount of keeping one’s head low. We had become used to the cry “Has anyone seen Charlotte?” when, once again that small child had given her mother the slip. But now a new cry went up. “Has anyone got a driving licence?” Most decided it would not be wise to own up to such a qualification, for those who did were employed to sit in with the learner driver in her various progressions around the Wiltshire countryside.

As the driver became more proficient, the car went further afield. Its habit of going where it wanted and not where it was driven was subtly demonstrated in Bath on a school visit where those of us in Isabelle’s car which had set out to show the Austin the way, were somewhat put out to see the yellow car not only in front at a junction, but also going across the street at right-angles to the way we were travelling.

As time passed, the gear changing became less audible and Rosemary eventually passed her test. During the whole of this time, no matter what strains were put on it, the little car continued to function, never to be seen broken down at the roadside.

Years later, when the need to acquire a car to get to work became a prime concern, I decided that any vehicle that would continue to give good service no matter what abuse it might be subjected, must be worth considering. For as the pre-war advertisement stated, “You buy a car but you invest in an Austin.” I tried to buy “JO” as the car had to be called because of its Oxfordshire registration letters, when its owner progressed to something more forgiving, but alas, it was too late, as the car was then in the ownership of a local inhabitant of Corsham. Perhaps it was right that it should see out its days in the town it knew so well. I eventually spent a whole month’s salary of £30 in buying an Austin Seven, a reliable vehicle which kept me mobile for the next three years.

Many will remember Rosemary Ellis for both her generosity and depth of understanding of the problems we faced as fledgling teachers, but few will recall the skill with which she promoted the products of the Austin Motor Company by demonstrating the dependability of such a small vehicle, no matter what tasks it was forced to undertake.

Now, approaching retirement, I have reached my second childhood and have acquired three Austin Sevens, all from the early thirties. Not only do they remind me of my early days as a driver, but also of the little yellow car which was such a familiar sight in Corsham in the early fifties. I wonder how many more I will acquire now the rot has really set in! Oh, and who was Stanley Edge? He designed the first Austin Seven in 1921 when in his late teens, the same age as most of us when we became students at Corsham!
FORGING A DUBIOUS REPUTATION

Colin Walker

It was April 1950 and I was well established in His Majesty's Royal Air Force at the Transport Command airfield at Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire. My trade was that of Radio Telephone Operator which involved issuing flight instructions and providing compass bearings to aircraft. A pleasant job with much free time. In preparation for my forthcoming demobilisation in August I attended an interview with Mr 'Jock' Ross the canny Scottish Principal of Westminster Methodist Teaching Training College in Horseferry Road, London, SW1. My suitability for a career in teaching with a bias, no doubt, towards Wesleyan Religious Instruction was going to be assessed.

I failed the interview with aplomb and panache. Also my second and third choice applications to Borough Road College and to St. Marks and St. Johns C of E College were dismissed with summary contempt. I was therefore shovelled onto the Training Colleges Clearing House list which was established to deal with the misfits, rejects and grovelling infidels.

Among the list of colleges still offering places for 1950 was Bath Academy of Art at Corsham in Wiltshire. It was a relatively new name and provided a specialist course for Art Teachers in schools of general education. The interest was aroused.

Though hardly distinguished, my school academic record did include a sound if traditional Art education provided by Mr W. Cecil Dunford the Art Master who had been a war artist in the First World War. He was an impressive traditional draughtsman and photographer, particularly of cathedrals and churches while, perhaps more importantly, his son was an Anglican vicar. Each year Cecil Dunford submitted a generous selection of Wyggeston boys' pictures to the Royal Drawing Society exhibition and one year, along with what seemed like scores of others, one of my drawings received a showing.

However, a far greater influence on my decision to apply for a place at Corsham was the vigorous and consuming interest I had in the art and practice of campanology. It was well known in ringing circles that the West of England and particularly Somerset, Devon and Dorset possessed the largest concentration of heavy bells in the land while local research later informed me that Corsham itself boasted a peal of six bells of no mean weight in its parish church.

It has to be said that my application to Bath Academy of Art proved not a little fateful. It was to set in motion a chain of personal disasters that has lasted a lifetime and undoubtedly contributed to an ageing process that continues and accelerates.

Problems began early. In common with other applicants I received an assignment that included studies of a half cabbage and a self-portrait. In my examples it was just possible to differentiate between them and with the deadline for submission beginning to loom the problem of conveying the work to Corsham arose. I decided that if I delivered them in person not only would I ensure their safety but I would also be able to take a look at the Academy's setting at Corsham Court and maybe locate the parish church. I might also discover its night of ringing practice.

The R.A.F. was about to vacate the airfield at Upper Heyford and release it to the United States Air Force as a "cold war" strategic air base. All our R.A.F. aircraft had been transferred away to other airfields and the remnants of the big invasion Horsa and Hengist gliders had been put to the torch and burned. Only one R.A.F. aircraft remained - an Airspeed Oxford twin-engined reconnaissance aircraft and it was due to fly off to a new home at R.A.F. West Malling in Kent. However, it was first calling in at the airfield at Netheravon which was not too far from Devizes. A study of the O.S. map suggested that a hitch-hike on to Corsham should not prove too difficult so the flight to Netheravon was arranged.

We took off soon after noon on a fine April day. I was strapped firmly into the co-pilot's seat and wore a regulation helmet complete with earphones so that verbal communication was possible with the pilot above the engines din. My folder of work was stowed securely behind the seat. Now, I had flown many, many times before in steady, dignified Douglas Dakotas and Avro Yorks but the Oxford was a smaller, more manoeuvrable aircraft. Certainly I was not prepared for what followed.

Once in the air we first circled the airfield a couple of times and then the advice came through the earphones to hold on. The aircraft then dived, climbed, swooped and wing-dipped over the airfield while the stomach rose, fell, twisted and churned in sickening sympathy. One moment ahead of us all was sky and then it was all ground rushing up towards us. My pilot was a Flight Lieutenant who had been the station test pilot. His job had been to flight-test our aircraft after they had received a major service or mechanical repair.
He was bidding Upper Heyford farewell and I was sharing in this, his final aerobatic salute.

The nausea level was distinctly high by the time we levelled out and headed south over the north Oxford fringes and composure began slowly to return but not for long. It was on our approach to the Berkshire Downs somewhere near Lambourne that another perplexing instruction to hold on came through the earphones and a few moments later the ground once again filled the view ahead as the Oxford once more took a dive. Once again both the stomach and the adrenaline rose in synch and the amino acids and pancreatic juices heaved around. What was this fresh stunt in aid of over what appeared to be a harmless piece of downland? It was then that I spotted the brown bull. He must have been ready for us because he was already prancing about before making a charge around the field. Skimming low over him we then made a steep climb back to a safe height and reverted to a respectable progress. "Sorry about that," came the voice over the intercom again, "we usually try and dive-bomb the bugger when we fly this way."

It was with considerable relief that I parted from the Airspeed Oxford at Netheravon and thumbed my lifts through Devizes and Chippenham to Corsham. The self portrait and half cabbage were delivered into the safe hands of Mr Banham at the Court gatehouse from which prospect the impressive south front was much admired as it basked in the afternoon sunshine. Before returning to Oxfordshire using the well practised hitch-hiking techniques I noted with approval the close proximity of Corsham's parish church and also the town's delightful main street.

For any normal person this rather charged introduction to Corsham should have been sufficient. It wasn't.

I presented myself for interview at Corsham Court on Friday, June 9th. It was an afternoon interrogation and the ascent of the main staircase in the Court inspired a sense of wonder and even awe. So too did the creaking floorboards on the first floor landing. However, it was a visit to the Gents toilet that thoroughly convinced me that this was the college for me. Here one mounted an oak platform and occupied what could only be described as a sumptuous throne. As one sat in state and looked through and beyond the window a most idyllic view along the North Avenue elms stretched away into a Capability Brown distance.

My interview took place in the Chinese Room which was approached along yet more creaking floorboards.

It was conducted by Clifford Ellis, his wife Rosemary and the Vice Principal, Isabelle Symons. I felt that it had progressed quite well if not triumphantly until I was asked what I thought of National Service in the R.A.F.

Now unlike many of my normal fellow airmen who spent much of their spare time sitting around the billet stove or table playing cards I had set myself the warped aim of travelling the country during my days off ringing on the bells of as many cathedrals as possible. I had amassed an impressive personal list ranging from York Minster and Blackburn Cathedral in the north to Exeter and Canterbury Cathedrals in the south. Most Tuesday afternoons when I was not on watch and providing aircraft with information I would hitch-hike the A423 and A40 main roads to London in order to ring with the Ancient Society of College Youths at Southwark Cathedral, St Michaels Cornhill and St Pauls Cathedral. My return by the same means was through the night.

As I had admitted to the strange addiction during my interview I felt I was on safe ground if I answered the question with a blunt and direct honesty. I therefore offered the view that the armed services bred more than a little apathy and indolence. Alas any elusion of myself was obviously not to be considered, and I was sternly advised by Clifford Ellis that the course for Art Teachers would make intense demands and that Corsham expected a massive dedication from its students.

A short while after my interview the following letter arrived from the Academy. Being anxious to remain detached from the stifling atmosphere of an Exclusive Brethren home, the pride had to be swallowed and a place accepted at a college where a dubious reputation had already been forged.

Bath Academy of Art, Corsham Court
5th July 1950

Dear Mr Walker,

I am glad to be able to offer you a place here in the two year course which commences on 26th September. At the same time I think it as well to tell you that you will find the course very hard work, especially during the first months. I hope that you will also find it very interesting, but unless you come prepared for something tough, it would be much better not to come at all.

Yours sincerely,

Clifford Ellis
A BLAST FROM THE PAST
Maureen Ashmore

Maureen enclosed with her article the original list of equipment needed by students that was sent to her when she was accepted for the course in 1952.

Later lists included the phrase ‘a well-developed road sense’ after the item ‘bicycle’. Students continued to cycle between the three sites until the early seventies when the Academy ‘bus provided limited transport…. Ed.

I remember Corsham with great affection. The atmosphere, the air of something new and exciting around each corner, the characters, the stimulation, I always felt that we had a slightly superior attitude to other colleges, maybe that was the result of having so many great teachers around. Peter Lanyon, (I remember going with him in his old van to the Midsummer solstice at Stonehenge) and Terry Frost. There used to be cricket matches at the back of Beechfield. James Tower. God rest his soul, used to think we were mad.

Many of my memories come out when I talk to people about that time. I know that some students did not get on with Clifford but I could always chat to him and found him during my first year to be considerate and interested in what I was doing, and whether I was settling in. Clifford allayed my doubts when I told him that I felt sometimes that coming straight from Grammar School and not from Art School that I was lacking in my technique. He said “Don’t let that worry you, I prefer people to come straight here, it means they have not developed bad habits in drawing and painting.”

He also told me at one of the dances that he was concerned when people didn’t join in the social life of the Academy. He said artists should not become remote from their fellow man, it was easy to become blinkered and narrow.

What’s the cider like down there these days? The last time I was in the Pack Horse with my husband when we called in Corsham on our way back from Devon and I found the Academy was no more, I felt such a sense of loss it was incredible. I understand that the merger had to take place, but it was the end of something special.

A LIST OF EQUIPMENT NEEDED BY STUDENTS IN 1952

Imperial and half-imperial portfolios
Daler half-imperial drawing board
T-Square, Set-squares, Ruler
4-inch palette knife
Loose-leaf notebook
Set of lino tools and handle
Brushes, hoghair no.’s 3, 5, 7 and 9, 50% seable
no.’s 3 and 8
Crowel and sharp needles

These items are purchasable at the Academy Shop. The approximate cost of this equipment which will last throughout your course, is £5. The approximate cost of consumable materials such as paint, paper is £5 per term. Students intending to purchase the full list of equipment (as well as materials from the Academy Shop) should therefore have the sum of £10 with them on the first day of term.

You will also need the following:
2 pairs of scissors
Strong penknife
Hacksaw and blades
Light hammer
Tack removers
1” and 2” paintbrushes (such as Harris’s)
2 enamel plates
Rucksack, straps or container for carrying equipment
(Students taking the four year course should also provide themselves with a palette and a pair of pliers)
2 pairs of sheets, towels, pillowcases
2 working overalls
Cutlery and coloured crockery for use in study/bedrooms
Medical card (obtainable from your doctor if you are not a private patient)
Ration book (complete with names of home retailers)
Laundry book
One pair of unblocked ballet shoes (obtainable from Manelle and Devide, 96 Charing Cross Road, WC2)
Shorts or sports skirt
Rubber-soled plimsolls
Plain black or navy regulation swimsuit
One long sleeved white cotton windcheater, with high neck (obtainable from any sports shop)

The following would be useful but are not essential:
Bicycle (the three establishments are several miles apart)
Eiderdown or rug
Any musical instrument not larger than a double bass
Hockey stick, tennis racquet
You are asked to collect, and bring with you next term, small pieces of material or paper, approximately 3 inches by 2 inches in as many different greens as you can find.
Days began at Corsham with cycle rides from Monks Park to Beechfield. Free-wheeling down Monks Drive under flaming chestnut trees, dodging conkers and pot holes, with canvas and folder under an arm and baskets of paints dangling from handlebars. We also worked with home-made reed pens and Van Dyke crystal ink, drawing buildings around Beechfield at first, with still-life and figures. Progressing to oil painting with a variety of tutors. "Ach! You paint so thick and shiny, like a lavatory wall!" exclaimed Peter Potworowski one day. Some of us were invited for tea laced with brandy in front of his old kitchen range, kettle on the hob. Rooms one on top of the other in his three-roomed cottage at Pickwick, connected by a spiral staircase.

One November 5th two chaps bound him into a chair and stuffed his pockets with rockets, and carried him shoulder high from Pickwick to Corsham, "A Penny For The Guy" on a banner. At Corsham he was placed on a table where he freed himself, hurt pride and cross. Later he appeared with a big bag of sugar love-hearts which he emptied onto the table before us.

We made life-size and one-and-a-half life size life-drawings with Litz Pisk, studying movement, stresses and strains, youth and age, foreshortened fingers and toes with nails on, using conte and charcoal. It was the subject matter chosen for us by Litz and Peter which taught me so much, rather than what they told us.

We produced paintings on a set subject every fortnight and the constructive critiques by Clifford were a mind stretching process for me. Our first education project was a patchwork diamond, broken into smaller diamond patches in tones of red. These were put together to make quite fabulous bedspreads and, combined with the work of other students a set of rooms was furnished. Tie-dye and patchwork bedspreads, printed curtains, woven lampshades with willow and strips of wood etc. The whole making an impressive display. What happened to all those things?

Animals were not allowed at this time and photography seemed to be discouraged.
However, a little pink piglet, a runt rescued by Antonia Raeburn, was smuggled into our hut. The piglet rode to classes in her bicycle basket and scampered through the studio with ears flapping and tail twirling. When she was too large to be hidden she lived in an enclosure at Monks Park and grew cross. Perhaps she was the inspiration for the emphasis on teaching with animals in my husband’s time later.

Our first Christmas party: fancy dress - anything to do with dogs. Some of the wilder members of the staff which I think included Clifford, paraded together inside a huge dachshund, round the Court and up the staircase - one wag ejecting potatoes from under its tail. We also had a barn dance in the barn. Isabelle Symons wearing a hippy headband made from Spillers Shapes. We were there before the Crafts Council with its Liquorice Allsort necklaces.

Stephen Russ made the business of printing with dye and fixing it with heat into a great mystery for me, as with getting the design to a printable stage. Pottery too I found disheartening because everything I made was in the dustbin by the next week.

During one holiday I was sent by Rosemary to Owens College in Manchester to study Peruvian textiles. It was another eye-opener for me. Fine yarns spun on a drop-spindle, dyed and woven into such intricate designs, it seemed tedious and time consuming to one living in an age of speed and expensive labour. I have spent the last twenty-six years spinning, dyeing and tapestry weaving.

Trips to the V & A and Bristol Museum in the Academy bus eventually combined to drawing, painting and designing in my mind: the art and craft became integral not artificially divided as in the Western fad. In my third year I had a day each week painting with William Scott and Jack Smith, working on still lives each from a different viewpoint. Life painting with Tony Fry and painting technique with Harry Clife. Plant drawing with Helen Binyon who one afternoon received a nicely wrapped parcel lovingly presented by Peter Potworowski. Inside was a dead mouse.

Corsham was completely different from the traditional training I had received at Manchester Regional College of Art. Corsham showed the relationship between subjects rather than isolating them as had been my experience. We had to draw from casts of the Greek sculptors. Having been to Greece I have discovered that there is much to be learned from them about textiles for instance.

Teaching practice in a dame school in Langley Burrell. Fourteen children in a class. Later I discovered that the famous diarist Kilvert had been curate there. Next was teaching practice at St. George’s Grammar School, Bristol, and recently an old pupil from there appeared as my student on the Open College of the Arts course.

It was at Corsham that I was taught how to learn.

A PROFOND INFLUENCE
Donn Evans

Like most other male students in the fifties I arrived at Corsham straight from two years National Service, which I entered on leaving school. I had continued to draw regularly during these intervening years, and managed to attend the nearest art school life-classes two days a week. In preparation for my Corsham studentship I had taught myself basic human anatomy and read all I could about the Italian Renaissance.

At Corsham at last, some two years after my interview, I was disappointed to find second and third year students unimpressed by my ability to rattle off dates and name bones and muscles. ‘You won’t need any of that stuff here.’ After spending my first Wednesday class Design Day mixing cement mortar for other students to make mosaics, I was beginning to wonder what sort of an art school I had come to. In my first life-classes, tutors scoffed at my south-western 45° shading, but for my part I recognised no real draughtsmen amongst my fellow students. Mr. early arrogance took a lot of living down, and echoes from it continued to reverberate into my third year. For example, I heard much later that in one of those first life-classes another student asked me if she could borrow my eraser. Apparently my reply was: ‘I do not use an eraser. Drawing, like arithmetic, should show its
workings. Be honest!” However, by the end of the first term I had adopted the prevailing house style: no shading, purely linear point-to-point drawing - with much use of the eraser.

Meanwhile, I was discovering just how fulfilling a life dedicated entirely to art really was. Looking back, I can now recognise that certain teaching staff had a profound influence upon me, and apart from Rosemary and Clifford, I would identify Peter Piotrowkowski on painting, Litz Pisk for how she taught drawing, and James Tower for the attitude he held towards his own work.

During the first two years Clifford appeared remote, as we saw little of him, but we gradually became aware of his background influence by way of staff comments, tales from senior students, vacation work, and his rare lecture. On the other hand, we saw a great deal of Rosemary. She was with us all Design Day, and since the studios used for this work were on the Beechfield site, we tended to see her on other days as well, especially if she needed help to prepare displays, paint walls, saw wood, dig duck-ponds or change the wheel of her car. Staff teaching Design Day were a selection from current Corsham studio tutors, with the additions of a few visiting specialists, and would number anything from three to seven, according to the demands of the programme. Rosemary and Isabelle Symons were permanent features, tending to orchestrate events and maintain continuity. This was essential, as Design Day needed to act as a catalyst between the art and teacher-training experiences, a function which it performed admirably. The adventurous approach which Rosemary encouraged us to adopt towards the wide range of material available on Design Day, wire, card, metal, wood, bamboo, wighies, raffia, paper, wool, cloth, string, and their by-products affected our approach during the remainder of the week in drawing, painting, printmaking, pottery, and sculpture studios. It seemed to prevent us from assuming too narrow assumptions about the nature of these other art forms.

Studies were open all hours, and did not close when scheduled classes finished. I recall throwing pots until two-thirty in the morning, and of course, the business of preparing materials for teaching practice frequently kept us working late. We were encouraged not to use the host school’s materials, which meant we had to take many with us. This incurred problems of provision and transport. The Academy was willing to supply the essentials, but we produced a lot of our own drawing and painting materials. We often primed as many as thirty cardboard rectangles cut from boxes collected on Corsham dustbin day, with paint we made ourselves from whiting and size. From the reeds on Corsham Court lake we would make just as many pens to dip in the purple brown ink we made from permanganate of potash crystals. The Academy bus delivered materials around many of the distant schools, but I recall some students towing fully laden orange boxes on pram wheels behind their bicycles as they cycled to their teaching practice schools.

Design Day occurred in the Education Block at Beechfield, and it was on this site that a range of plant and animal life was built up. This added to the existing collection of plants and living and preserved specimens, insects, mammals, skeletons, already held there. I see this now as a consequence of Clifford and Rosemary’s work for the New Naturalist series. Copies appeared on the library shelves as soon as they were published, and I found myself reading them as often as I thumbed through the issues of Domus and Verve.

All these plants and animals provided considerable scope as material for art and design activity, but they also fulfilled another important function in Corsham’s programme for training art teachers. Every new student on arrival in the Autumn was given a plant or two to care for, and in the New Year the tending of an animal or animals was added. I was promoted from cacti to baby crocodiles!

In the Summer Term this cultivation of the sense of responsibility for the welfare of another was taken a step further when each first year student was given charge of an eight to nine year old school-child for one day a week. The student was expected to keep a log book on the child’s behaviour throughout a series of tutor-led lessons, meanwhile extending his own class teaching from one pupil of his own to sixteen. I do not know a more subtle introduction to the profession, and it demonstrates how good teaching may break a complex skill into achievable units. Corsham reduced Art teacher training to personal artistic growth by exposure to the teaching of practising artists and designers alongside a gradual introduction to practical teaching. This happened in a rather special environment. Corsham Court with its buildings, furnishings, paintings, and surrounding landscape, resulting from an accumulation of artistic endeavour, could not but affect the artistic consciousness, and no doubt the subliminal perceptual responses, of those immersed in twenty-four hours a day for the most
Painting a mural. The Beechfield Scheme 1951

A Natural History lesson. The Beechfield Scheme 1951
part of two years or more. Although we may not have openly acknowledged it, we were probably affected by this for life. We were also isolated in the monastic sense. We were rural and residential, unlike other art schools in the UK, and we were allowed to blossom protected from the friction of day-to-day post-war city life. We did not spend hours in pubs, cinemas or football matches. We did not read the newspapers or listen to the radio and there was no TV, of course. Outside our scheduled classes we spent our time continuing to draw, paint and pot, enjoying the occasional in-house musical evening, puppet show, play, talk, dance or party. If there was a Corsham philosophy it was largely unarticulated. There was certainly an atmosphere which was not so much competitive as collaborative, not so much imitative as eager to produce variations, and continual dialogue. For Corsham there seemed to be no subject barriers, and during those golden years no limitations either.

A UNITY OF CONTRASTS

Michael Johnson

I became a student at Corsham in 1954 when I was just seventeen. I had some knowledge of philosophy and literature but a very limited and provincial understanding of the visual arts. Coming from that background, Corsham was a revelation. Corsham Court is the most charming and elegant of buildings with its Capability Brown gardens, its collection of paintings by Van Dyke and Fra Filippo Lippi and what was then its student Dining Room hung with Reynolds and Gainsborough; and it was in this atmosphere that I discovered Picasso and Matisse, Malevich and Kandinsky, Pollock and Rothko et al. Strange contrast.

The school was open seven days a week and I worked seven days a week both at painting and sculpture as I still do. Clifford Ellis had the foresight to employ part-time teachers who were practising artists - very important that. They weren't expecting of others what they didn't expect of themselves and that came through the atmosphere of being there and rubbing shoulders with them; one breathed it in. There is a sense in that which no other world can give. Having tutors who are committed to 'making' leaves a different impression on students to having teachers who teach but make nothing. At that time one would come up with an idea and it could immediately be put into practice. This spontaneity was always encouraged.

Within two terms of arriving there, one was working with a freedom which was quite opposite to the fatigued visual forms previously known. It was simply a place where learning was attractive, joyous and invigorating, where work was made into a holiday of a kind and that's the finest thing that can happen in education. Gone was the dreariness of the classroom, come was the openness of the working studio. I looked forward to the beginning of each term as a child looks forward to Christmas.

The modern educational system should look more closely at places like Corsham and what it achieved during its lifetime. Contrary to the present world of divisions, it created a unity of contrasts. It is appropriate for contemporary study.

THE CORSHAM CRUCIBLE

Bob Clement

In the year of Suez, as the small bus trundled from hamlet to hamlet, meandering the back way from Box to Corsham, I wondered what a city boy was doing here.

I was a Brummie, born, bred and trained to working in a succession of provincial theatres in the early 1950's, just as the theatre in the provinces was beginning to crumble under the onslaught of television. I had spent the last four years designing and painting scenery for pantomimes, the occasional classic with a small cast, and endless living rooms for polite comedies and predictable thrillers for a motley collection of theatre companies.

Seeking to escape from the collapsing illusion of the magic of working in the theatre, which was more like treadmill cluttered up with impossible actors, I had talked with several teacher friends about the possibility of teaching art. In the mid 1950's, teaching was a respectable profession and, compared with the theatre, its workers had that enormous advantage of monthly pay cheques. The Arts Adviser for Somerset, a large, purple-clad and chiffon-scarfed flowing lady for whom I had
A student with children from Corsham Regis Primary School, studying a grass snake. The Beechfield Scheme 1951
designed the banners for the annual Somerset Arts Ball persuaded me that the only place to go was Bath Academy of Art at Corsham which was a very special place.

When the bus finally did arrive in Corsham, my initial sense of unreality was underlined by the splendidours of the entrance to the Court, the strutting peacocks and being closeted for half an hour in the Chinese Drawing Room for an interview with Isabelle Symons, where we discussed in whispers the rival merits of my self-portrait and cabbage drawings and my motivations for teaching.

Despite the initial and rather pragmatic reasons for my decision to go to Corsham, the period of education and training that followed were remarkable for the influence they had upon me both as artist and apprentice teacher and for the attitudes and ideas they generated about educating children that have persisted with me for the past forty years.

Like many of my contemporaries, I consider myself lucky to have been a student at Corsham when it was in its pomp as a centre for training teachers and when education was the central core to all its work. No other institution, before or since, has been so successful in marrying together the complementary strands of training the artist and educating the teacher.

The Arcadian splendour and comparative isolation of Corsham were instrumental in establishing its notorious work ethos. Apart from each other, there were few if any distractions for a body of students, who were almost all resident in two main hostels or in the village. Even the entrepreneur who opened a coffee bar in the High Street inappropriately called The Picasso, received short shrift from Clifford Ellis who immediately banned student attendance upon the dangerous new delights of expresso and cappuccino.

There was a curious paradox in the contrast between the very democratic relationships between the Corsham staff and its students. We were all on first name and easy terms, but there was no doubt about the underlying and demanding discipline of long hours of work, attendance at classes and meeting deadlines. We knew in no uncertain terms who was running the show and were expected to match the commitment of the full-time staff and the Ellises' own formidable and personal involvement in the Corsham regime. Formidable only in the nature of the expectations and standards we were set through Clifford's own intellectual drive and Rosemary's demanding energy. It did make it a bit easier when you were being bailed out whether it was piano by Clifford or forte by Rosemary that it was by someone you knew personally and who worked twice as hard as you did!

In that particular combination of education and art tutors present at Corsham in the 1950s, we were subjected to an intriguing and catholic collection of teaching styles ranging from the pernickity attention to measurement as in Margaret Lester-Gerland's life classes dithering from dot to dot, to the more dramatic and declamatory style employed by Bernard Meadows. Andrew Wilson screwed us down, while Howard Hodgkin and Anthony Fry gently questioned. Rosemary Ellis sometimes confounded us with her honest directness and Heather Tanner with the subtlety of her comments. Despite their contrasting methods and attitudes we were never locked long enough into one tutor's self obsessions to suffer unduly.

We worked from long established starting points: the figure, the tableau of objects, the landscape. There was meticulous attention to drawing. We were made aware of the long tradition within which we worked as artists and, in his daunting tempest critiques, Clifford Ellis made clear his disdain for those who brought too little experience and skill to too much ambition - cheerfully failing a student for making bad abstract paintings.

There was a certainty and sense of direction in the corporate teaching ethos at Corsham, and a concern for the student, that contrasts painfully with the 'set them an impossible task and run for cover methodology' that has characterised too much of the teaching in the art schools in recent decades.

What was so unique to Corsham at the time was the way in which our training as artists and crafts workers was linked so directly to our teaching and work as teachers. The Design Days, where we worked at Beechfield making studies and preparing resources to fund our ideas for designing and making, as a test bed for working with and alongside children, were typical of the way that link was established between making and teaching. What we had observed and practised for ourselves, we undertook somewhat nervously with small groups of children in the studios and with growing confidence with classes of children in real schools.
We were challenged to consider how to place tasks in an imaginative context for children through our use of language in support of narrative work and through using such Marion Richardson plays as asking children to make their drawings and paintings from immediate recall of things and events observed - to make a work from what they could see in their mind's eye. I well remember the pleasure of the success I had in role playing the act of shaving for a class of ten year olds and how enthusiastically they made their paintings of this event, and the contrasting disaster of trying to construct a narrative for a class of seven year olds centred on a cat and a bowl of split milk when the cat I had borrowed from a friend totally refused to co-operate once released from his basket! In hindsight, it is easier to see the influence of Marion Richardson's ideas about teaching present in the methodologies we were taught to use with children. We researched and prepared our colour resources meticulously, dyeing newsprint in the bath at home to give children an interesting coloured ground on which to make their work: we made collections of coloured, patterned and textured resources; we prepared long lists of questions to ask the children to encourage them to talk about the resources we had collected for them.

Whatever our individual uncertainties in our teaching practices or in our early years in teaching, this emphasis on the exemplary preparation and visual resourcing of our teaching stood us in very good stead. Sometimes we overdid it - like a fellow student who, designing to excite the children about the effects of light upon the face, set his beard alight when posing for them by candlelight. During my final teaching practice in a Swindon school, in pursuit of teaching the children about colour and movement, I filled the art room with lines of washing only to be tartly reminded by a visiting Rosemary that you could see real lines of washing in the neighbouring gardens if you took the trouble to look out the window!

For many years, it became a slightly jokey truism that you could recognise a Corsham-trained student as soon as you entered their art room simply by the way in which the room and its resources were presented.

When, ten years later, I came to work in teacher education myself, I found it difficult to make much sense of that fragmentation into discreet and separate disciplines that characterised primary teacher education in the 1960's and 70's, compared with the holistic training I had received at Corsham.

The studio practice was divorced from teaching methodology which itself had become fragmented into pockets of educational sociology, history and philosophy. The students were consequently floundering between studio-based pretensions and ludicrously generalised and optimistic educational theory.

Although the body of art teachers trained at Corsham in those twenty years that the Institute course survived are now in or approaching retirement, it would be difficult to deny their influence and their impact upon the quality of teaching art in our schools in the post-war years. We meet each other at occasional intervals, and however long ago the memory or tenuous the relationship, there is always an immediate and shared bond, in that we survived and benefited through passing through that crucible that was Corsham. We were suitably scorched by the warmth of the place and share a corporate sense of having belonged to something rather special. For a precious few years we shared ideals and philosophies, generated a sense of purpose and were subjected to rigour and occasional reward.

And always when we meet we exchange those apocryphal stories of what life was like under the Ellises! I remember developing an 'I am very busy look' whenever Rosemary hove into view and took a deep and pretended interest in toads because they were so much easier to feed than all those other animals that scurried round the Beechfield complex; and wondering when Riette Stugger-Moore would ever finish a sentence and why Andrew Wilson was so fanatical about finding Georgian bargains in the Bath markets to summon 'a gleam of covetousness in Lady Methuen's eye' and why Adrian Heath always seemed so much more interested in women students than us small body of men!

Much of what I was taught about being an artist and a teacher has survived my thirty-seven years in teaching since leaving Corsham, some of it modified, some of it submerging at times in response to the shifts and trends of the last three decades. But the core has remained much of my practice, confirming the truth of so much that Clifford Ellis and his colleagues presented us with during those important years. We were not only inducted into the routines and magic of making art, we were also empowered to make art work for all those thousands of children and students who have been fortunate enough to be taught by those who have shared the Corsham experience.
LIVE CHICKENS, HEDGEHOGS, CATS AND DOGS

Esther Chatterton

There were two categories of student at Corsham when I went there in the mid 1950s. Ministry students studied for four years and became painters or sculptors; whilst Institute students who made up the larger number, were those who took a shorter educational course and trained to become teachers. I was one of the latter.

I believe that the teaching course at Corsham aimed to revolutionise art teaching in post-war England which was at that time for the most part dull and pedantic. The education course at Corsham, devised and run by Rosemary Ellis, attempted to encourage and maintain that spontaneous and innocent creative impulse possessed by almost all young children. To this end we were invited to supply an inexhaustible variety of stimuli and to channel children to focus visually on the essence of the subjects presented to them. The Academy bus, which took us to our various teaching practice schools in and around the area, was therefore at teaching practice time filled with students and their cages of live chickens, hedgehogs, cats and dogs and various paraphernalia of unidentifiable and dubious origin, which in classes of thirty adolescents often invited chaos, but nevertheless produced vivid and intense paintings and three-dimensional images from the excitement that this approach awakened in children. They began to really see the world.

In retrospect I believe that the art education course at Corsham had an enormously beneficial effect in schools but this bursting forth was exhausting for students on teaching practice. The pressure to give exciting lessons which produced authentic work from the children was intense and it was a relief to return to moments such as being introduced to, in the elegant
Music Room at Monks Park, Stravinsky’s The Rake’s Progress; of hearing Henry Boys reminisce about Dylan Thomas and talk of Erik Satie and Les Six; of James Kirkup reading his poetry and Alfred Deller singing Purcell in the State Room at the Court; and also being chastised by Peter Lanyon for attending a painting class ill-prepared. Jack Smith presenting me with a rose when I painted frivolously and the weekly Wednesday lectures in the Barn, packed to capacity with attentive and participating students. Lawrence Alloway on the American Abstract Expressionists, George Barker on Poetry, Nikolaus Pevsner on The Staircase and James Kirkup’s most memorable Christmas and the Santa Baby.

I consider myself to have been privileged to have studied at Corsham and remember it with deep affection.

**ABSORBING SOMETHING OF THE ATMOSPHERE**

*Peter Lane*

In the beginning there was a self-portrait and a cross-section of a cabbage or cauliflower. Having been forewarned by a previous student, I had enclosed those two pencil drawings with my application form. Alas, an early indication that there were to be no short cuts, I was asked to repeat the exercise in colour!

Such reminiscence focuses the mind in a delightful way, releasing countless thoughts, feelings and memories that have lain dormant, almost forgotten, to resurface now as significant witness to the impact that those two, crowded years have had on my personal life and career.

Most importantly, I met my wife, Jean, at Corsham in 1965 and we were married three years later. We both absorbed something of the amazing atmosphere and the vitality that made the Academy such a special place at that time. However, I believe that it was impossible to fully appreciate its whole ethos until after we had left. So much was to become clearer and more meaningful once I had embarked upon a career teaching, firstly, in schools, followed by an art college, then a teacher-training college and, finally, university.

I recall that I had approached puppetry, a subject introduced to us by Helen Binyon, with little enthusiasm. It was only much later when working with children in school that I was to understand and exploit the truly expressive potential of shadow puppets in particular. Without Helen’s patient encouragement to her more reluctant students, I might have denied myself and several generations of children an extremely rewarding activity.

James Tower, ran a rather relaxed pottery studio in the Stable Block at Beechfield. There was little direct contact with him during the one day each week in the first term of the first year. This apparent lack of urgency allowed us to explore our vocal capabilities and the acoustics of the studio with songs of the day, rather than attend to the possibilities of clays and slips. It would have been incomprehensible then to imagine the importance that this discipline was to assume in my life. When I now consider the depth of my involvement in contemporary ceramics over the past thirty years or so, I realise how fortunate I was to spend my final term in that same studio, and to discover there an affinity with the medium. Without that second chance, undoubtedly I would have achieved far less, nor would I have been afforded the opportunity to visit so many interesting people and places around the world.

It was there that I learned to throw on the wheel, taught to do so by a fellow student Donald Locke and, thereafter, I spent every spare moment in the pottery studio. James Tower, who was to become a dear friend in the decade before his untimely death in 1988, gave helpful and constructive advice as my output increased. At a penny halfpenny an ounce, I found it difficult to raise sufficient cash to buy all the pots I had made even though I gave my cherished racing cycle to Richard Whittington-Ince for £7.10s. I sold my guitar for £1.10s to another student in order to buy a unique, press-moulded earthenware dish, made and signed by James and dated 1955.

Working through the night was an occasional necessity, sustained by cups of Camp coffee and tins of pilchards purchased from the Pickwick grocer who signed off every purchase with ‘thankyouverymuchly, ta’.

Most of my other memories are pleasant ones but I never enjoyed that cold, early morning cycle ride
up to Monk’s Park from Beechfield to don a leotard for dance and movement with Litz Pisk! However, the same venue was much more enjoyable for performing Under Milk Wood presented to us by James Kirkup in 1955. This experience left an indelible, emotional impression and the powerful imagery of those words by Dylan Thomas will never fade.

Presented with a still life composed of several white-washed objects on a white canvas, Peter Potworowski opened my eyes to the subtlety of colours where, previously, none had appeared to exist.

Andrew Wilson’s dry humour which I was to impersonate in Ellis in Wonderland at Christmas 1955. ‘If you don’t shut up, I’ll put you through the window’, illuminating calligraphy lessons at Corsham Court.

Natural treasures like discarded tail feathers from resident peacocks, strands of wool snagged on barbed wire, seashells and pebbles, together with the menagerie of assorted creatures, slimy, woolly, furry, fishy or befeathered at Beechfield provided us with constant stimuli for Design Days in the Education Block. I became something of an expert on tropical fish and the lives and loves of crested newts. The critical eyes of Rosemary Ellis and Isabelle Symons were never far away and those days would be approached with some trepidation by many students. Nevertheless, I have to acknowledge that the demanding standards which they set laid the foundations for a far-reaching philosophy that I have been privileged to uphold.

Materials of diverse kinds were avidly collected for use on teaching practice. One night I awoke suddenly from a dream in which I had been on the deck of a sailing schooner tasting the salt spray on my lips, to find myself and my bedding drenched with water coming through the ceiling above. Another student had filled a wash basin upstairs with scores of egg shells left under a dripping tap. He intended to use them, dyed in various colours and pressed into plasticine spread over cardboard, for a lesson about mosaics the following day! On another occasion, I returned to the shed where I kept my motorcycle to find a dead sheep blocking the way. It is hardly surprising that pupils arriving for their first painting lesson with a newly qualified art teacher should see me standing before them dressed in a striped pyjama jacket, lathering my face with shaving cream! It was so typical of Corsham to encourage individual expression by gaining attention through experiences of many kinds and, thus, sharpening and maintaining awareness of people, events and the environment.

LETTERS HOME
Jean Lane

My father, a very methodical civil servant, kept and catalogued every letter I sent while at Bath Academy. Amazing as it seems today, I wrote home each week and so there exists a record of college life between 1955-57, censured somewhat I am sure for parents are delicate beings. Here are a few extracts from one hundred and fifty-six letters and a time which seems so different and truly the ‘Olden Days.’ It amazes me that I do not remember many of the events mentioned in the letters but they must be true!

22nd September 1955.

We seem very cut off from the world in the evenings here. There are camps all around and it is quite a local secret that we are sitting on one of the biggest ammunition dumps in England! I am going to need all the old clothes rather than the new ones I brought. I shall have to decide which of my clothes I want to ruin and wear those, I think. (Included in this letter were samples of sheep wool, raw, unwashed and after carding).

28th September 1955.

My bike has arrived, praise be. One girl has painted. Not to be taken after meals, on hers!

9th October 1955.

I had a late pass last night until 11.45. It is awful to be in at a special time. We can have late passes on Friday and Saturday night only. I had to tell Janet the warden where I was going and who with. When I came in at 11.30 I had to report I was in. It made me feel quite guilty.
Unloading the kiln at Beechfield.
18th October 1955.

My grant came today - £13.8s.8d. I am going to put it in my Post Office account.

20th November 1955.

I have found a book I would like very much, it has some paintings in by our tutors. Contemporary British Art by Herbert Read, published by Pelican Books at 3/6d. I must tidy my room. Isabelle Symons comes round each day and we get charming little letters if they are not tidy or we move the furniture around.

5th December 1955.

The drama group is doing two short plays. One is Conversation about Christmas. James Kirkup is very fond of Dylan. The Welsh accents are pretty hopeless - many of them have never been to Wales!

I went to rehearsal for the panto last night. It's called Ellis in Wonderland. The person who plays Clifford is marvellous. He sounds exactly like him and his mannerisms are identical. Our trunks are being collected in one lot from Monks. We have to buy 'Luggage in Advance' tickets from the station.

11th December 1955.

Some HMIs came to the performance of the puppet play. One said he'd never liked puppets before this; another said it was most moving and extremely beautiful, etc. Helen was thrilled to bits and she invited us to a drink with her before the evening performance. She had bottles of red and white French wine in the Music Room with a roaring fire, cocktail biscuits and Smarties. She confided that it was her birthday so we toasted her.

12th February 1956.

We had had the HMIs in all week, thirty of 'em. The poor staff are on edge all the time. To keep wearing their new clothes is a strain too.

Riette Sturge-Moore, who takes us for costume and stage management, is a dear. Very eccentric and she has a great sense of fun. She is proud of her pokey little room on the ground floor of Monks Park. She used to have a large one at the top of the house but was always getting in late and had to wake someone up to let her in. Now, she proudly announces, she can climb through the window.

15th March 1956.

The Queen Mother is coming tomorrow as a guest of Lord Methuen. Also we have T.B. checks. The studios are decked for the Q.M., not T.B. No trousers are to be worn by women tomorrow.

30th September 1956.

The new students are bunneted and bearded already. Edward, the son of the famous painter, John Piper, is here. "My dear, I always paint on canvas."

14th May 1956.

The Ellises are back. They drove straight to Beechfield from the coast and never went home until evening. As if the ducks couldn't live without Rosemary! Charlotte said it hailed and she was sick.

(Many of the letters in the second year were full of details and worries about teaching practices).

THE LIST IS ENDLESS

Janet Pick

I feel very fortunate to have been part of the Corsham experience. There is an instant feeling of companionship between those who have been there, regardless of time. It is strange that all refer to it as Corsham and rarely Bath Academy of Art.

It gave me riches in the form of ideas and theories from the tutors I was lucky enough to have worked with. I am sure it helped me to acquire the ability to be flexible and work in a variety of settings with adults and children from a wide range of ages, abilities and backgrounds. Undoubtedly it influenced my attitude towards the upbringing of my children - I wanted them to benefit from the creative experiences I had received. It was a good character builder. It stimulated enthusiasm and encouraged determination.

Much of the pleasure I have had over the years in helping others to develop their creative skills must be due to Corsham. It widened my knowledge of the environment and sharpened my appreciation of natural things - shape, form, pattern, colour, texture, atmosphere - the list is endless.
ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Joyce Yates

You ask how I now feel about my Corsham experience, which immediately triggers a host of memories, randomly leapin from one to another; the imposing facade of the Court, raucous peacocks, cooking smells from the kitchen and the din of clashing plates and cutlery; movement and drawing with Litz, never before had I seen such a mobile spine, cold feet and peaceful hours in the sculpture studio, those awful Reynold's cottonwool hands in the Dining Room; steamy coffee breaks in the Entrance Hall, swimming in the pool, Peter Potworowski's bright studio, priming paper for teaching practice; the bicycle shed, music, starlings gathering at Monks Park, crunchy-fresh snow in a winter-blue light, a lush land of magnificent trees, people, faces and voices of students, tutors, children and many others.

Such memories steady and coalesce into specific events, a multitude of facets totalling a personal Corsham experience. Now, more than forty years on, your question seems to beg an assessment of such experience. I know that it had a huge impact on me. I took on board most that was offered. Some things I questioned, then and later. Without doubt the experience had a strong influence on me that remains to this day. It gave me a firm basis on which to build, not just in teaching but in living.

The foundations for some of that influence had already been laid. I had experienced loving parents, caring, sharing, working hard, living with a resourceful, creative father. I had been taught responsibility to family, school and community, roamed freely, as a young child, through an environment similar to Corsham (my grandfather was personal chauffeur to the owner of a large estate on the Berkshire Downs), and I had received a sound academic education in a small but very good Grammar School, where setting was practised in the upper school so giving me greater access to the art room.

I was the first pupil in my school wanting to go to an art school. My art teacher had heard good reports of Bath Academy of Art. I produced a painting of a dissected cauliflower and a pencil self-portrait. There followed a gentle but searching interview with Clifford Ellis and Litz Pisk. The next September found me pitch-forked into a new, exciting environment, presented with new ways of exploring, thinking, making and above all seeing, seeing as opposed to merely looking, seeing as knowing, as understanding. It was sometimes daunting but always exhilarating.

It is not the first time that I find myself seriously contemplating my student days at Corsham. In 1986 I wrote a dissertation for the Institute of Education, University of London which explored the art teacher training course 1946-1958. To do this I had to contact tutors and students working at Corsham during this period. The information that emerged dealt with more than the art teacher training course, so that I know that I have recalled similar experiences and have made similar evaluations from which I now find it difficult to disassociate myself. We all appreciated the beautiful natural and historical environment and all but one of us found it influential in our Corsham lives. We enjoyed living in an informal community which gave us the freedom to develop and we appreciated the contact with tutors and their work. I have never heard life at Corsham referred to as 'dull' or 'boring' but I have frequently heard it described as 'fulfilling', 'influential', 'enjoyable', and 'stimulating'.

With regard to the art teacher training, I think most of us knew that it was unusual if not unique, but the full import of this was felt later. The aspects I recollected that were generally considered to be of particular value were... the close study of two children, a view of art as a means of exploration and learning applicable to all areas of life, a developed independence, an encouragement in the use of personal initiative, an expectation of organisation and hard work, a sense of belonging to a community with accompanying responsibilities, the tenacity to pioneer, and a professional attitude to work both as an artist and an educator.’ The study of two young children was especially helpful to me and in retrospect seemed such an eminently sensible, natural thing to do.

Students and tutors of those early Corsham years referred with warm appreciation to the many gifted tutors, including Clifford Ellis. I can clearly recall special times spent working with Helen Biryon, Henry Boys, Kenneth Armitage, Bernard Meadows, and Terry Frost. I well remember Isabelle Symons giving a superb demonstration on how to capture and hold the attention of a group of lively children. But it was Litz Pisk and Peter Potworowski to whom I remain particularly indebted. To draw with Litz and paint with 'Peter Pot'; as he was affectionately known, was so rewarding. Litz, who was... both gravely still and intensely active, using the physical being to express the mind and spirit and Peter, who seriously challenged but whose eyes often twinkled with some minor amusement, were both sure and dedicated poetic exponents of their arts, and gave with great courage
Peter Potworowski on the River Avon at Saltford on an outdoor sketching trip.

and generosity. Most of us remember Peter Potworowski, recalling his humour, his exhortations to fall in love with the chosen subject and his continual insistence that we could not use colour until we had discovered the light. "Too much white." And "Light is not white. White is not light." I can hear his voice now. His studio, completely individual, full of colour and form, abounded in visual challenges, opening eyes to new ways of seeing and inviting exploration of endless possibilities. In 1946 he wrote to William Scott... "I can't paint with light, but to make a picture intelligible I transmit the light seen or imagined in colour and dispose the colour in such a way over my canvas that the eyes are able to receive it as light." Peter Potworowski's influence throughout Corsham has been recognised as strong and valued.

However much we gained from our experience of Corsham was made possible through the vision of Clifford Ellis. We know that he was a man with extensive knowledge, skilled in observation, who was able to recognise and seize opportunities. With total dedication and astute pragmatism he set about creating his ideal, aesthetic, liberal education in the arts realised in a community living and working in a beautiful and historic environment. It sounds too good to be possible. Yet Clifford Ellis almost succeeded in fully realising his vision. This was an amazing achievement. I remember feeling great respect for this man, who was kind to me, helpful, humorous. He made me think and a word of encouragement from him made the day. I also recall that he was good to dance with. He seemed to be the stable centre of the Corsham sphere, somewhat elusive but rock-firm. He appeared as the quiet, thoughtful side of a coin, the other being Rosemary, ever energetically translating ideas into teaching practicalities.

It has been said that the students left Corsham confident, enthusiastic, full of ideas and ready to change the face of art education in this country. I am sure that was certainly true of many of us in the early years. I am also sure that many of us had to quickly learn to temper ambition and concede to given situations. It was not always easy to compromise whilst remaining firm in one's belief.

It has also been said that the Corsham teachers failed in their attempts to make any changes. The truth would seem to lie somewhere between the two. Given that it takes years for fresh ideas to filter through the state education system and that on the way they are frequently misinterpreted, diluted and distorted, even so I think we have to concur with Dick Field's statement made in 1970 that "one of the more remarkable phenomena of the last thirty years in our schools has surely been the spread of practical art". Corsham teachers have played a significant role in these changes. Field also said "There are many signs that we are moving into a period when education will concern itself with the venturing across the barriers that divide subject from subject". This will be familiar to all Corsham teachers, but I do wonder if the teaching profession has really understood why this is beneficial. Dividing knowledge into subjects is a convenient tool of the educational trade and alone does not guarantee a good education. Clifford Ellis and his colleagues understood the artificiality of subject boundaries and a Corsham education was based on an aesthetic awareness and appreciation, a message that is currently stuck in the filtering system. If we believe in Clifford's philosophy, that it is a good path to pursue, then I think the case needs strengthening. We need a greater knowledge of how learning takes place. We need to understand the different ways of the various languages, such as the verbal, visual, musical and mathematical, through which we interpret and rearrange embodied experiences.

We can all see what is happening in education today and we can all see that which the multi-media chooses to put before us as art. Together it can produce a gloomy picture of an aggressive and devalued culture.
inevitably being passed to the next generation. Regarding today's art students, it appears that they are lucky if they receive a few minutes a week 'contact time'. I assume this is current jargon for teaching, or perhaps it isn't.

It seems an appropriate time to review the Corsham experience, one that happened in a particular time and space, created by a particular man, but with a philosophy that remains valid today. As Corsham was about the visual arts perhaps it could also be evaluated through seeing. I end with a suggestion that there could be three, consecutive, touring exhibitions, the first showing work of Corsham tutors, the second of Corsham students and the third showing work of young artists who were pupils or students of the Corsham students. It would need a great deal of research to be comprehensive but, at the very least, could produce interesting exhibitions.

Now I return to the present, to my husband in one of the many long-term Corsham marriages, which have added to the rise in population, and to continue observing my grandchildren and exploring some of those 'endless possibilities'.

NO EASY ANSWERS
Sue Varley

I began my studies at the Art Teacher Training Course at Corsham in Autumn 1955.

I attended a traditional grammar school where art was a rather unimportant part of the curriculum. I was aware, when I was first at Corsham, that I was being taught in a completely new and different way, being encouraged to look and to understand what I was seeing and also to become more self-motivated. There were no easy answers given. I was just encouraged to develop my own way of seeing and to think for myself. I also remember very clearly the beauty of the environment and when I look back on my days there I feel privileged to have lived and worked in such visually stimulating surroundings.

My first impression of the pottery, the stable block at Beechfield House, was of an empty, white-washed building, rather cold and smelling of damp clay. Most of all I remember the copies of large Thomas Toft slipware dishes, glowing with rich, golden honey coloured glazes, which hung on the walls. I had never seen anything like them before!

I later chose to specialise in pottery. James Tower, who was in charge of the pottery department was an inspiring and sensitive teacher. We were set projects at the beginning of each term, and then given the freedom to develop our work in a personal and non-prescriptive way. Help or advice was always given when it was needed but I gained most from my time in the pottery by being allowed to discover, often by making mistakes, how to use clay as a creative and expressive medium, on my own, and being able to develop my ideas, which became the basis of my future work in clay.

The ideas and inspiration of Clifford and Rosemary Ellis are still valid today and I feel they need to be remembered, and not forgotten, in present clay art education.

A VARIETY OF PATHWAYS
Peter Jackson

At the age of twenty six in 1956 I went to Corsham for the deepest educational experience of my life. I can say that without hesitation after taking a Degree, a Masters and a PhD at various intervals in my life since. I use education here to describe an event which deeply changes the way one looks at experiences and enjoys the world around.

Before Corsham I had been in the R.A.F., the Meteorological Office, at sea a Cargo Superintendent, and finally was running an art shop whilst attending Southampton College of Art part-time.

It may have been intuition but once I saw the brochure I knew it had to be Bath Academy of Art. So I shaved off my beard, cut my hair, and clothed in dark suit and stiff white collar tramped up the gravel drive of Corsham Court on a very hot August day, to be greeted by Clifford Ellis in loose orange shirt, tan slacks and open-toed sandals. I was accepted in spite of hardly remembering any modern artists except Rouault. Maybe my many Cezanne pastiche drawings helped, or the half cabbage all applicants drew had an attraction, who knows?

Southampton College like so many other provincial Art
Schools of the day had an extremely narrow curriculum, Pasmore and the great change in Art Education had not arrived. At Southampton, Cezanne was God, the unstated aim was to produce pastiches of his work with flat AA Herkomer brushes, likewise in drawing, anything else was quickly labelled slick. Thus I arrived at Corsham handicapped, but without realising it, it took me the first year to forget Southampton and begin to open my eyes.

Two rather jarring experiences helped to open my mind. First Harry Cliffe coming up to me during the obligatory year white still life as I dabbed away with a flat brush, “We don’t want any of that bloody Euston Road stuff here!” Later on in the term at an evening life class, Jack Smith came up and looked over my shoulder as I shaded away sensitively à la Cezanne! After Southampton as soon as I picked up a pencil my hand moved to make Cezanne-like marks. “Why the hell has she got a fur coat on?” My world fell apart as I really saw my drawing for the first time, yes like a gorilla! Jack didn’t leave it there, we went to the back of the room for a chat on drawing, and then retired to the dear old Pack Horse for a pint, and the slow long road to explore drawing began, and still continues.

Corsham grew up within that great explosion of secondary education during the post-war era, which in turn led to an increase in teacher training and the necessary colleges. The teacher training course at Corsham had a completeness and totality, aimed at visual development in a multitude of ways and media. At its best the development of the school teacher and the individual artist had a related rationale and flowed together. Obviously the ideal was not always achieved, and frustrations occurred, but nothing like the frustrations I was to see later in life when involved with teacher training at other Colleges. Then, ardently Drama or Art students had to down tools for two or three days to listen to barely understood lectures on Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, or History of Education, which seemed in their abstraction to often have little relevance for them. At Corsham education questions arose, but when relevant, and usually in association with visual work, then discussion occurred.

The ideology or aim of Corsham came I’m sure from many causes and influences, and transmitted via the personalities of Rosemary and Clifford Ellis, who had worked together as a team on projects in the thirties. Important was the influence of various aspects of the Bauhaus, also the pre-war and post-war ideas of ‘Education through Art’ appearing in the magazine Athenae, but these ideas can be traced right back to the Arts and Craft Movement of the latter part of the 19th Century. Filtered in were theories from Montessori and Froebel. Clifford I know was well versed in the theories of Piaget.

Later in life I met Schiller just before he died, his ideas and the diploma course he ran at the Institute had a great influence on Carr’s work in Yorkshire and developments in Oxfordshire, all of these had a similarity with the fundamental ideas of Corsham, the importance of materials, and facing children with the real world to work from. However it would take a researched thesis to delineate the actual connections! Possibly these ideas all came out of a particular era of optimism, excitement, exploration and dynamic search, instead of a conservative re-entrenchment in the safe and controllable, opposing views of the human predicament!

Although one might think Corsham liberal in education, (certainly all the staff and students were on Christian name terms including Clifford) in other ways it was part of its time and the teacher training college pattern. It was not a grown up Summerhill! We worked a long day and most evenings until dinner, and then some lectures after; we were expected to be busy at weekends. Clifford would usually be working on his water garden at Beechfield on Sunday mornings, while Rosemary circulated, casting a critical eye on the condition of the various animals that we looked after and drew in our spare time. Goat, geese, pigeons, bantams, chickens, pheasants, tropical fish, finches, etc. It was one of my tasks to try and catch Nan the goat each morning, milk her, and still be in time for breakfast at the Court. It stood me in good stead when I had to milk a very recalcitrant cow in the Amazones of Colombia later in my life, although the anatomy and technique was slightly different!

No girls were allowed in bedrooms at Beechfield, or boys at Monk’s Park. This is not to say it never happened, but if caught you were both on the train home the next morning, no questions, appeal or discussion. I was married and was only allowed home to Southampton one weekend a month, and if my wife visited she could not enter my room at Beechfield, we had to stay in the village. However in contrast to this there were frequent wild parties. Sometimes after a particular project or piece of group work the staff would buy a barrel of cider for all and a party would commence. It was the age of energetic skiffle and jive, students excelled.

Fundamentally the teachers role at Corsham was not to tell a direct finite answer in any field, but to provide the rich varied environment in which the student might find their own route. As always there were contradictions, and many a tale is told of Rosemary’s high-pitched
wrath falling on someone who was not progressing within unstated parameters, or much worse not producing enough quantity.

A variety of pathways - this was epitomised by a mature student pleading one night, "How the hell do they want me to paint?" Tony Fry in his studio talks of the beauty of the flowing white light on the figure. The next day Adrian Heath is suggesting we analyse the flat shapes, another time Peter Potworowski has us painting his studio covered in spots and patterns! Unfortunately I remember this student always remained a little frustrated, Corsham did not win them all by any means.

Unlike the N.D.D. programme of many provincial art colleges of the fifties Corsham's curriculum for the Education students was incredibly wide and rich. By working at times a twelve-hour day and weekends, a great deal was crammed in. One was given an introductory base in Dance, Drama, Puppets, Lettering, Print-making, and crafts such as Spinning, Weaving, Tie-dyeing, plus the more normal art student's diet of Ceramics, Sculpture, and Painting. I suspect that for many students it was in later years that the educational richness of this wide menu was appreciated more fully. At the time the diversity was often viewed with suspicion by dedicated would-be painters, potters or sculptors. This can be illustrated by another of my favourite anecdotes. In the first term Music and Dance appeared on our timetable one afternoon a week at Monk's Park. We were a working group of about ten, the girls mostly straight from sixth forms, and the men somewhat older, at least after National Service, but in most cases other jobs as well. The girls entered the spirit of movement with keenness, appearing dressed in leotards. We men hated the idea - a doubtful feminine, or homosexual activity, as seen in those days of much less questioned male machismo. We attended, but sat sulking in the corner in paint-smeared jeans, smoking pipes and numerous roll-ups. The tutor, a young American lass, blonde and slim, never showed a trace of being put out. "Hello fellers, great to see you", as she continued working with the girls. This was repeated for about three weeks while she must have racked her brains for a way to snare us. Then one afternoon we ambled in, sulkily as usual. Big smile and greeting from Helen the tutor. Then after we'd settled she put a record of the Charleston on the player, and came jigging across, slim body alive and vibrant, dancing in front of my room-mate Ray. "Come on Ray dance with me." My pal, an ex-copper from the London Met, huge red beard and all male, found it impossible to resist. By the end of that afternoon we were all experts in the Charleston and the spell of sulks were ended, Helen was our girl. With the aid of a few glasses of rough cider at the Pack Horse we went to an extra evening class to decide on a project. It was The Jabberwock, we threw ourselves about inventing the most intriguing sequences. It became a big hit, a favourite of the College, and was performed a number of times, and we then made a film which went to the States. As we went our various ways after Corsham we were all strong movement supporters, and on a number of occasions in schools I had the opportunity to co-operate with movement activities, and was always pleased that dance was so strong in the College I finally taught at.

Corsham students were welcomed by schools when on teaching practice, as a source of new ideas. Students staggered or pedalled off to distant schools equipped with live animals, ethnic or curious objects, and bundles of pictures. No student would be brave enough to enter a class without visual stimulus and face Rosemary's comments. It was a far remove from Marion Richardson. Often a student would also add a package of printed up newspaper, if going to a school where materials were short, having spent half a night preparing it.

Later in my teaching career I was often reminded of the high esteem in which ex-Corsham students were held. Many became Advisors, Lecturers, and Heads of Department. At one time I taught on a P.G.C.E. course for Fine Art Degree students. Although these students were deeply grounded in their own fields and lively keen people, I realised how narrow their background was compared to the Corsham students of the fifties when it came to the school situation.

Why did it end? Perhaps Corsham was seen as too innovative; it certainly stood out on its own in the fifties among the other training colleges. I doubt if many understood its real aims, or indeed wanted to. It took someone with the vision and understanding of Herbert Read, he was a strong supporter. Maybe Corsham was seen as uncontrollable, I believe Clifford always had a small running battle going with the Ministry. Towards the end, I was told by various staff in later years, Clifford became rather disillusioned, both by the education structures, and by the students themselves as the sixties led into the era of revolt. He became more withdrawn and difficult, finally burning many important records before handing over. A sad ending, but one which cannot detract from the great vision, and at least two decades or more of carrying it out to the full, and giving many children a richness in their visual education they would never have had.

My numerous rosy memories took a heavy blow of reality when I recently revisited Corsham after
many years. The Court itself appeared prim and proper and unchanged from when I first tramped up the drive, but when I drove up to Pickwick and peered over the gates at ravaged Beechfield, boarded up windows and overgrown wasteland it seemed to speak loudly of our Thatcher inheritance, and the changed world in and out of schools.

THREE YEARS LATER, A PAINTER
Angela Hoppe-Kingston

I arrived at Corsham intent on becoming an art teacher and left three years later a painter. The teachings of Adrian Heath and Martin Froy were the most significant. William Scott, Jack Smith, Anthony Fry and Howard Hodgkins also taught me periodically. My third year was specially devoted to painting, large oils of figures in interiors and abstract landscapes. However, during the last term of the third year an unexpected, and I think probably experimental class was run by Helen Binyon on the art of watercolour. Helen Binyon had taught puppetry in our first year St. George and the Dragon. After a short morning’s lesson, we were, one day a week, blissfully sent out into the Wiltshire countryside to paint. The only criterion was to hand in a watercolour at the end of the day. I have a few of the paintings made at that time. During this time I also produced a large number of watercolour paintings of a lily which were exhibited at Beechfield. I have no idea what happened to them. My immediate response to this medium, together with the very strong influence of life drawing and the unique Corsham experience, undoubtedly changed my life and taught me to see. I taught in a school for three years. I had five children, three of them are artists - Film, Sculpture and Textiles. My husband is a geologist and recently took early retirement. I have taught watercolour painting and drawing at various times but now I am only painting. I was a founder member of the Society of Botanical Artists and am now chairman of the Watercolour Society of Wales. Was it always summer at Corsham?

IMPRESSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS
John Boswick

Corsham in 1958. What a mixture of impressions and contradictions. A Chairman Mao figure, rather shadowy, masterminding everything, relentlessly experimenting with every aspect of our education. Saying “Ver, ver bootiful”, and giving inspiring painting criticisms and lectures. Clifford’s criticisms were always constructive and full of illuminating asides.

The course was much more structured than when my wife Thelma was there from 1952 to 1956. Structured. I believe to direct our tutors as much as to guide us. Ideas had changed. Photography neglected in Thelma’s time became a tool and an art form in mine. We had to work only in monochrome for the first few weeks, then on to painting with Howard Hodgkin, who was a student in Thelma’s day, who set us a blue still life with a stack from the library to show how the greats had done it. Inspiring stuff! But I was overwhelmed by being told to emulate the masters. At first I was told off for painting the table top at an arty angle, and next that my still life looked as though it was painted at the bottom of the sea.

The next year I was made to create a ten foot painting which I fixed to the studio wall, this was because I normally hid myself in a corner. It was a collage of coloured whirling shapes. When I was stuck Howard asked me what I was going to do to it next. I replied “I don’t know” Howard said, “Well, don’t do anything it’s finished!” He then arranged the end of the year exhibition around it. His paintings reputedly hang fire for years but he knew when mine was finished!

The dreaded teaching practice. Nice little primary school at Bradford-on-Avon. I got wonderful results except from the seven year olds who had a repressive teacher who was a frustrated scientist. When the lid was off they smashed up the classroom in my lesson. A very sympathetic Headmaster told me always to terrify a new class for the first ten minutes to show who is boss. Andrew Wilson told me that on his teaching practice he gave all the bully boys half-a-crown each to behave. A fellow student, Colonel Colin McVean (ex-Indian Army), also on teaching practice, said that his army training advised that one miscreant should be shot and dragged out to the dustbin as a warning to the others. That is all I was ever taught about disciple but found art college students easy after those seven year old cupids.

I remember Stephen Russ telling Colin McVean to clean the brass weights, then adding “I suppose you’ll get your
batman to do it." We did a production of Dylan Thomas's *Visit to Grandpa's* with Colin disguised in grey whiskers riding an imaginary pony and trap in bed, puffing sparks over the bedclothes, then wandering off to be buried, "but you're not dead yet Mr Thomas." I bought a crate of beer to enliven the pub scene and it all got rowdier from then on. Colin had an essay to hand in to Andrew Wilson. "I'm sorry," said Colin, "but the goat ate it."

All those animals we had to look after in my time. I reared trout from eggs and studied their development under the microscope. Those that died I pickled in formalin and displayed in bottles. Only a step away from dead sheep. After I left I sent a picture postcard to Rosemary and Clifford after an inebriating meal in France asking them whether they had fed my trout to the HMI. Colin boiled down a racehorse and assembled the bones, proudly showing it to Rosemary; her only comment was, "it reminds me of school dinners." Not to be outdone I boiled up gigantic cods heads to get the skulls. Commanders' wives were politely coughing outside our flat door at Brockham End House and inquiring of each other where the awful stink was coming from.

Michael Werner teaching sculpture. Modelled heads made up, not from pills of clay but savage jabs with a feather-knife and chopped up bits of clay. I looked up his name. *Who's Who* gave him the title of a German Baron. One icy morning with chillicy clay he said, "I like my butter to bring my clay warmed in the morning." Sculpture with Peter Startup in many media. Two of us whistling logs from the estate with adzes, a lead musket ball buried inside one. We also built up hollow heads from sheet wax we cast. The technique was to facilitate casting in metal with the lost-wax process. I stood one on the window sill in my exhibition. It melted in the sun. John Hoskin coming late to teach sculpture, grumbling, "the effort of living is enough in itself without having to work as well." On another occasion that he was late we built a huge snow sculpture outside the studio. John was not pleased. All those Andy Goldsworthy's repressed for life.

Pottery classes with James Tower; demanding design-projects set by Clifford. The end of year pottery sale, cheaply priced student work plus a large decorated flagon priced £1. James Tower sitting at a table taking money surrounded by staff. I asked that the price be reduced. "Ten shillings then," mumbled James. Afterwards John Hoskin came to see me. "I liked your cheek!" he said. "I was going to buy that," turning my pot upside down and pointing to James Tower's signature on the bottom. Of course it's treasured now.

Being freed from representational painting by Gwyther Irwin who launched us on collage and encouraged me to exhibit with the London Group. Catalogue for about 1961, on the same page a painting by John Beswick for £25 and a painting by David Hockney for £25. Isn't life a lottery.

We bought a cottage near Bathford, water pumped from the wells in buckets, the loo a rose bower down the garden. Garden full of gourds and pumpkins etc for still life and a room stocked up with everything that might come in useful as a visual aid. Rosemary turning up one Sunday morning unannounced at 9 am.

Corsham seemed a laboratory of constant experiment. I learned a lot from set projects where I could compare my efforts with the inventions of other students, Clifford's and Howard's constructive painting criticisms and inspiring lectures. Gwyther Irwin's very demanding painting projects and mind stretching series of discussions, Rosemary's endless energy and enthusiasm even though it led to arguments that caused her to grumble one day, "you should have been a barrister." Clifford's genius was the engine that drove it all. Not forgetting a telling remark from John Hoskin one day, "Never discard your work, photograph everything, the best ideas can come from what seemed to be a failure years ago."

A SATURDAY MORNING START

Joe Hope

My first teaching at Corsham was sharing the Saturday morning life-drawing class with Harry Mundy. On my first day I arrived with some apprehension at the blue door, walked through the Court corridor and out of the back door, along the gravel path and into the Barn corridor. Light filtered down from the sky-lights and there was a pervading smell of damp. I went through the double doors and into the Barn to be confronted by a seething mass of students jostling for places on drawing donkeys or at easels and in the middle a model standing high on a dais. I met Harry Mundy. After twenty minutes, or so, we started teaching. I approached a student sitting on a donkey and said "May I look at your drawing?" She stood up and I sat down. To cover up for awkward moments and as an aid to accurate drawing I had brought with me a plumb line. I held it up in line with the model and squinted at it. My hand appeared steady but the model wasn't. I
stood up and moved forward just in time for the model to collapse backwards into my arms. We finished up on the floor where she, poor woman, proceeded to go into an epileptic fit. We abandoned the class and she was taken to hospital.

The Saturday morning class was the first example I had of working in a residential college. That is, all those students lived in or nearby the Academy and were in a sense a captive audience, so it was not surprising that on a Saturday morning you would find up to fifty students drawing in the Barn. It also meant, as I later found out, that the teaching day could be, and was, extended into the evenings. Evening seminars were an intrinsic part of the course, although some students saw it as a device to keep them out of the pubs. I was in awe of the quality of staff at the Academy. The majority of the painting and sculpture staff were at this time London-based. They would arrive at 9.50 am at Chippenham Station and be met by taxi, driven to their respective studios at the Court or Beechfield and the teaching day would start at 10 am and finish at 7 pm. They were accommodated in the Court or staff hostel and ate at the Court. The food was excellent, particularly on occasions towards the end of the financial year when there appeared to be a surplus of funds.

There was no doubt in my mind that the Academy was Clifford and Rosemary Ellis. Clifford was very clear in his own mind what form teaching should take and in what environment it should take place. Carefully worded memos written in pencil would be placed in staff pigeon-holes in the porch by the blue door. We worked and taught in painting and sculpture to a seven-term syllabus. This I understand from talking to Martin Froy was drawn up mainly by himself and Robyn Denny with additional input from Adrian Heath and based initially on a structural syllabus drawn up by Henry Boys for students studying music on the teacher training course. Staff taught this syllabus and it gave a coherence and structure to the students' development which, unfortunately, in many respects, disappeared in later years when the courses became firstly Diploma courses and later Degree courses. It also meant that staff taught as a member of a team rather than as individuals making their own specific input. I found as a teacher I learnt more from working within the syllabus than I had in my four years as a student at the Slade.

FIFTY YEARS OF CORSHAM
Emeritus Professor Martin Froy

I am often asked about the origin of the 'Corsham Syllabus', a document which attracted attention at the time.

In the late fifties, as far as I can recall, a written syllabus was required for students preparing to teach children in primary schools. In painting, I wanted something intelligible to young children but at the same time true to the subject as taught at secondary and tertiary levels. This was uncommon at the time.

I found a model in the Music syllabus of Henry Boys already in use, which while being very brief and elementary, (Minimalist), seemed to me to be profound in its implications. A syllabus in painting could never be so concise since it was necessary to define terms but this was the aim. Also the field had to be limited; an aspect of Western art based on appearances in the event, ('ter Bruggen' exclaimed Lawrence Gowing obscurely on the first visit of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, in 1963), combined with a parallel syllabus on Abstraction contributed by Robyn Denny. A further similar syllabus was to follow for sculpture. Very soon Clifford Ellis would bring all disciplines taught in the school into line to form a comprehensive syllabus; 'Light makes the Object visible' which was in general use for some years. It is curious that no one seems to have a copy.

A SURE IDEOLOGY
Marjorie Taylor

'Bath Academy of Art at Corsham Court' said it all, and I'd got no further than 'B' in the book of colleges offering education courses. The foundations of my own education looked solid enough in such a name. From the hard North-East of England, used to a cruel coast and barren moor I was bewitched by the softer landscape of Wiltshire, the historic Court and residential Georgian houses of Monks Park and Beechfield.

We grammar school girls bought drawing boards and college scarves and became real students. We made friends, hitched to jazz clubs, discussed art and everything else, and drank beer, and we knew where to get the pill and pot but of course never touched either. The swinging sixties had just started. We were monitored to an extent hardly seen in sixth forms today and I never minded the boarding school rules: 'in by
10.30, boys no further than the television lounge. No holding hands in the grounds of the Court. It was unbecoming to such a handsome setting. Meals were prepared for us and we had memorable after-dinner readings by Ted Hughes and Philip Larkin. Jacqueline Du Pre played for us when she was just out of her teens. Far from resenting the small incestuous community, I found it rewarding and still value the friends I made in those days.

However, the real Corsham experience was something else. It added conviction to what as a small girl I had only sensed, that art was of fundamental importance to my understanding of the world. Unlike art faculties today, Corsham had a sure ideology. Like the scrubbed boards of the Court and the spartan accommodation afforded by the huts behind Monks Park House, art was stripped of its caprices. A direct and honest approach was sought, unadorned. Difficult for most of us brought up with arty-crafty backgrounds. I wonder if painting an egg for Howard Hodgkin ever taught anyone anything else. After a term, some of us had not managed that egg on a six inch board without resorting to tricks or technique. Such was the discipline and confidence of the course. Today’s students, my son is one, are offered courses of self discovery, largely rambling, and untutored, and nowhere as succinct.

I have been grateful. In school for thirty years I have sometimes remembered my bus duty, muddled my way through paperwork and ten years of the National Curriculum, but in the classroom have always been sure of my ground. A good lesson in Corsham in 1965 is a better lesson in Northampton in 1995. My own students run back with their degrees. I have a certain feeling that their illustration/three-dimensional/textile/ceramics degrees are not quite worth the Corsham experience, but I hope that I have been able to make the difference somewhere along the line.

PEDALS, PADLOCKS AND PUNCTURES
Beth Williams

The Romac puncture repair outfit, a padlock and the obligatory alarm clock were three vital pieces of equipment to have on that first day. We were promptly made aware that punctuality was paramount, tardiness would not be tolerated, particularly, we soon learnt, by Andrew Wilson who never wasted one second in his attempt to discipline his unruly students.

Before clambering into the iron bedstead, being fearful of oversleeping, I set my humble Smith’s alarm clock. Noni, being especially enterprising, ensured she got up on time by hiding a huge alarm in a different place each night.

Our rooms in the ex-army huts at Monks were initially so small, bare and starkly white, becoming as the term progressed, more homely as we covered the walls with our efforts, in my case shadow puppets made under the watchful eye of Helen Binyon and fabrics transformed in steaming cauldrons with Stephen Russ. They seemed to grow smaller as time went on as we gathered more equipment, folders and visual aids.

One day hut mates were woken by loud bangs and shouts coming through the thin dividing walls. Noni was having trouble finding the biscuit tin containing her timepiece.

Every morning a stream of bicycles shot down Monks drive. However, one day we were shocked to find the bike sheds empty. Resigned to walking with bulging folders we came to the top of the drive to find a surreal scene. Perhaps we were still dreaming. The avenue of beech trees were blossoming with red and blue bikes, their silver spokes flickering high in the branches in the morning sunshine. The male students had made a detour on their way home from the pub.

One dark night four or five of us girls had been potting at Beechfield and began cycling home. As we passed the Almshouses a solitary young policeman stepped out of the shadows and stopped us. “Good evening young ladies” he smiled. He warned us of the danger of icy roads and advised us to proceed with caution. Freezing - not likely we thought. Still warm from the heat of the kiln and convinced it was an excuse to chat us up; we set off down the steep hill, laughing. Gaining speed we applied our brakes only to part company with our bikes which carried on without us and we followed, sliding down the hill and landing at the bottom in an undignified heap.
Did it really happen? Roads almost empty of cars but always plenty of kindly lorry drivers to help us safely on our way at the flick of a thumb. Black and white television in the common room and I was three stones, no, 15kg lighter.

Such a lot has changed!

**THE PRE-PROTEST GENERATION**

* Pam Hirst

Well, my Corsham experience is difficult to assess, it began a love affair with Cotswold, Corsham and Bath stone and the buildings - we spent a lot of time in Chipping Campden most days. Of course, I was always proud to say I had been to Corsham. I remember feeling rather embarrassed during my first term when I had to admit to never having heard of Bath Academy of Art - it was on a list, given to me by an exasperated Youth Employment Officer who was trying to fix me up with some post-eighteen education. I had decided I didn’t really want to teach but ‘do something with art’ and Corsham looked to be more art than teaching! On interview I was impressed by the scruffy students, and by the fact that the Librarian recognised me from my self portrait! I was thrilled when accepted!

We were the pre-protest generation, weren’t we? Who else would walk nearly four miles from Monks to Beechfield for a day’s classes, down to the Court for lunch, then back, then walk back to Monks for 10.30 pm curfew, leaving the poor lads the long trek back to their beds? No mixing of sexes and discrimination too!

I know we were told to bring bicycles, mine disappeared at the end of the first week. But, did anyone ever manage to balance a half-imperial folder, wooden drawing board, and oil box on a bicycle, and
get to Beechfield in one piece? It was difficult enough carrying them - and hard work! We did get an Academy bus provided for a few weeks in the winter of 1963 when the snow was piled high at the side of the roads, but it played havoc with any social life.

Who these days would countenance a college with no Students' Union? We had the Pack Horse, the Duke and the Royal Oak, and we still got our union cards to get us into exhibitions. We made our own entertainment including home-grown jazz bands upstairs in the Town Hall, sitting on the carpet, literally at the feet of John Williams in the State Room at the Court, and listening to Jacqueline Du Pre in the same place.

I was taught by Clifford in my first year, we had a photography seminar. I think at Beechfield squashed into a long narrow dark room in the stables. We weren't taught to develop films because 'we wouldn't need that in teaching!' We learned to print on to light sensitive paper - shadow prints. My memory of Clifford is of a very serious person who taught me to lay out pages in straight lines. He was also instrumental in getting me photographed by some third years for the annual exhibition at the end of our first year. Clifford said 'go and ask that first year, she has a round face.' They took me up into the loft above the dark room and tried to imitate the phases of the moon using a few candles. They had used an orange and then wanted a round face, not as flattering as I thought! I still have the reject photos - they had to cover my hair with blackout curtain to stop it catching the light, so I kept the ones with hair.

Having thought, no being convinced, that I didn't want to teach, I discovered that I really enjoyed being in front of a class and being with youngsters. That feeling still remains, thirty years on. I thoroughly enjoyed the Beechfield scheme, but I had a very interesting little girl who talked well and had a lively imagination. My first teaching practice was not especially enjoyable and I remember feeling very ill-prepared and thrown in at the deep end. My second was much more enjoyable. I was sent to Market Lavington to live with the Head and his family and became a part of the school and the village for five weeks. I was shown a badge's sett, and the tanks on the edge of the Plain and taught every child in the school. We had spent more time with Isobel Symons discussing Education and I still remember the feeling when I looked up to see her coming into the room. I've often thought how wonderful it was not to have had to spend hours learning and sitting exams in the History of Education. My first day in my first job I hadn't a clue about marking a register. Was that my fault or my teaching-practice schools? What a difference nowadays. We used to spend time analysing our lessons, and others and that analytical approach has always been useful.

I have recently discovered that my tuition in drawing, particularly, was much more traditional and to a greater depth than modern degree courses offer, so I feel confident about passing that skill on. I do wonder, though, why we didn't paint in watercolour or poster paint as well as oils? You don't get many schools with oil paints. Acrylics have now hit us, but for the last twenty - odd years my pupils have used poster colour and it's an art in itself that! It was a great mixture of techniques, wasn't it, a three year course at Corsham?

I have always been grateful that someone in the interview panel of Helen Binyon, James Tower and A.N. Other saw something in me that said 'She can teach' because I've had a very enjoyable career in Art education, I think I've proved to be a successful teacher, and after two awful teaching-practices I will always think that's amazing!

THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

Bobbie Deighton

Arriving at Corsham in the autumn of 1961 was like stepping into another world. Leaving behind a close, northern background that was much absorbed with the business of getting through each day's work, there was little or no time or encouragement given for the study of books, music etc as they were outside my widowed mother's experience. Any outside influence therefore was gleaned from other people.

The person to whom I owe my Corsham experience was a kindly, humorous gentle wisp of a man with goatee beard, who taught a Saturday morning art class for anyone who was interested. As I worked for my Art 'A' Level he regaled me with tales of his Corsham experiences and said it was the only place for me and I must go.

Standing on Chippenham Station in my homemade jersey wool two-piece with matching handbag and high heeled shoes of black patent leather, with my hair freshly home-permed distant alarm bells began to ring. My fellow students were easy to pick out in their casual clothes, natural hair and with southern accents. I felt a freak.
During the following week the alarm bells grew louder. My trunk didn’t arrive and my room-mate was 5'2" tall (I am 5'10") so borrowing anything to tone down my appearance was impossible.

This agony apart, the sheer beauty of the landscape, the softly coloured buildings, and the gracious interiors were so different from anything in my experience, and to have this to nurture the spirit whilst embarking on the voyage of discovery that was to come was in retrospect the jewel that Clifford, Rosemary and Lord Methuen’s vision set in my memory, the glow from which never fails to warm my thoughts.

For me the visitors that came were unforgettable too. Lydia Sylvestri from Italy, wafting her wonderful perfume over the sculpture school, she told us it was specially blended for her and only had a number, no name. She seemed to be all energy to me, tie-dyeing some fabric for curtains for her villa on Lake Como, "come and veest anytime", dashing back to Italy at the weekend to defend her Archery title, Champion of Italy, and hand-polishing a beautiful wooden sculpture for an exhibition in London.

Then there was the beautiful Sheila Hicks, the weaver, from South America, whose complete outfit, even her shoes, had been hand-woven by the Indians she had trained. She taught us to see the versatility and beauty of thread as a medium.

Domenico Mancini, a quiet patient man who taught us about plaster casting while telling us tales of building sets for film companies.

The highlight had to be the evening, sitting cross-legged on the beautiful carpet in the State Room at the Court being mesmerised by the spectacle and music of Jacqueline du Pre - I think by candlelight.

Best of all though, were the people. I still have my dear Corsham friends, some thirty years since we shared those days, and I treasure them, for they were my travelling companions on that very special, unforgettable, journey.

SPECIAL YEARS

Pam Bray

CORSHAM, even now after more than thirty years, the name evokes a nostalgic glow, in spite of cold clay, wet plaster, oil paint and turpentine, and because of warm balmy weekends around the pool with screeching peacocks, the smoky snug Duke of Cumberland, the treasure trove in the cellar of the Court, meeting girls called Izzy, Bunny and Tuppence, not to mention the initial trauma of drawing half a cabbage and a self-portrait to gain entrance.

My first opportunity for a Corsham connection happened immediately as I boarded the train in Sheffield, and found two others who were also headed to this indeterminate place. Although my life has taken me to distant parts, to this day those fine Yorkshire ladies have remained dear friends, bound by the threads woven during our Corsham years. At that time we were initially a mutual support group, ‘Northerners in the South’, viewing others, who to me personally, seemed so much more sophisticated, well-informed, and ‘arty’.

Monks Park, an elegant warm stone mansion looked like it would be a wonderful home, alas we were living in ex-Army huts behind the house, where the daily morning silence was only punctuated by Mrs Miner’s melodic Welsh tones inquiring “Anybody dying?” Imagine our delight as final year students moving to the top of the house, becoming acquainted with the Pope family, and meeting Michael’s imaginary friend ‘Figure-field’. At this time I was the proud owner of a 1949 Austin which boasted indicators which flipped out, but rarely flipped back. Countless times I demolished the right one on Monks Park gate-post, so consequently becoming firm friends with the man who ran the local car spare-parts graveyard.

The raids between Beechfield and Monks Park residents became an integral part of our lives, with
continual rivalry to outdo each other. Red dye in the Beechfield boys laundry so they all sported pink underwear, was only topped by the Monks Park residents rising one morning to find all their bikes hanging in the trees along the driveway, whilst the seats sprouted like mushrooms in the grass below.

Our social education gave us the opportunity to be introduced to people from all walks of life and to fascinating individuals from all over the world. A beautiful Estonian, a talented Mauritian, a hygienic, health-conscious American to name but a few. We all made trips into Bath, doing massive laundry loads of jeans whilst at Sydney Place studios, enjoying seminars and films in the Barn, darts in the Corsham pubs, and lots of self-made entertainment. Life was full and relatively uncomplicated, but upon reflection it always seems that way!

Of course we were in the noble surroundings of Capability Brown and friends to be educated, and that we most certainly were. Nobody could make papermaking as intriguing, as magical as Isabelle Symons. We learned the intricacies and nuances of the English language under the watchful eye of Edward Malins whilst listening to his sonorous monologues. A class in the Printing House with Stephen Russ and Harry Cliffe was just one of the warm fuzzies, whilst across the courtyard in the sculpture studio Michael Pennie gave us Michaelangelo's mechanics, as Ray Robinson amazed us with his extra-sensory perception. A Saturday morning weaving class with Sheila Hicks was a stimulating insight of art from its very roots, and fifteen years later I was so vividly reminded of this, as my parents and I toured A. T. & T. World Headquarters in my then home of Basking Ridge, New Jersey and gazed in wonder at a six storey high Sheila Hicks weaving enhancing the main foyer. Tutors were our idols, mentors, friends, and extended family. I still treasure a small gouache work given to me by John Eaves in exchange for baby-sitting services. Fashion thankfully then as now, only required clean jeans to survive, which of course was as much as we could do on our meagre budgets. I do remember only too well, in order to facilitate a three-week trip to Greece and Turkey my room-mate and myself not only gave up coffee, but washed our laundry and our hair in 'Daz.' Of course hair came in all lengths, styles, and colours, yes, the guys had long hair too, but after viewing Jean Seberg as 'Jeanne D'Arc' in an evening film, how I yearned for the shorn-waif look.

Teaching practice could be the bane in the lives of Certificate Education students, but also the time we could shine and strut our stuff. The teaching techniques we learned stand today amongst the finest I have ever seen anywhere in the world, and I have met the challenge of teaching in different countries and different states in the U.S.A. As a Corsham graduate I have the security and self confidence of knowing everything had been covered to cope with the real world of classrooms, curriculums and kids.

Thank you Corsham, you educated, enlightened and enriched my life. I hope I learned my lessons well and in turn have passed on my knowledge and experiences from those special years in Corsham.

SICKERT’S BALL

Tony Benge

September '63. Peter Stringer's shrink-tests in the Barn having pronounced me 2D but with an attitude problem, I was being initiated into the mysteries of photography, first exercise 'Reflections', under the eagle eye of The Boss's Wife. She, a mix of evangelic and patronising, "I can see you poor provincial fish haven't a clue what's going on but take it from us it's good for you." Me, decided morose 'What's this crap to do with art, man'. But Rosemary, bless her, persisted, encouraging me with a prize: Sickert's Ball.

Sickert's Ball, an irreplaceable gift to the Ellis's from the great man, was a shiny silver thing like you get on Christmas trees only bigger. Much bigger. The trouble was the wire loop for hanging it by was the same flimsy hair-grip device that you still get on the much smaller ones. Thus one minute me anticipating prize-winning snaps and nonchalantly sauntering from Beechfield darkrooms to graphics block, the priceless orb swinging by my side; the next, an arc of light curving up under the trees towards the sunlit autumn sky then down onto the tarmac path with a sickening hollow plop. Reflections? Suddenly, I had thousands of them.

I remember absolutely nothing of the outcome to this auspicious start to my Corsham career. The trauma must have been all too much for me. But I still have a tendency to balls things up. And if I didn't say sorry, Rosemary, well what did you expect from a 2D with an attitude problem?
CORSHAM - THE SHORTHAND MNEMONIC FOR ART

Brian Maycock

Even though I am three thousand miles and thirty years from Corsham, not a day goes by in my working life when I am not reminded of those three significant years in my life.

Now, were this the first sentence of a novel, one might be forgiven for suspecting that a mystery was about to unfold. In my case, it is definitely no mystery but one could be forgiven for mistaking it for a haunting. Corsham, the shorthand mnemonic for art, for education, for life's partner, for mentors, for friends, for meals at the Court, for pubs; and, of course, for the Ellises.

My own Corsham experience began, I suspect, like many others, seven years before being accepted to the College. Terry Burns, (an ex-Corsham graduate) was my High School art teacher and, even though I had no way of knowing it at the time, from the first moment I entered his art room, I was hooked. Five years later, perhaps it was much less, when I must have realised that resistance was futile, my sights were firmly set on the West Country. Had not been accepted ....well, it doesn't bear thinking about!

From the vantage point of 1995, I should acknowledge that much of the three years is a blur, a blur which is only partially attributable to an introduction to the many pubs that comprised the routine of Beechfield to the Court and back. Mostly, it is attributable to the passage of time after which only the highlights remain.

There was the first hour when a second year student offered me a ride to supper in his bubble car and I made the mistake of admiring his shirt. Presuming that he had bought it in that particular colour combination, I asked where he got it and was informed that, being an art student means that 'you do this kind of thing for yourself.' The first day when, as impromptu spokesman for the group in which I had been placed, I made the mistake of telling Rosemary that I had not come to Corsham to study photography; and then there was the first meeting with Clifford in a social setting when he scared the life out of me by asking that I tell him 'something amusing.'

Whatever happened to the Mikes, Penny and Ounstead who, one Sunday morning, were engaged in a competitive, but elegant, display of gymnastics, diving over such things as a concrete sculpture plinth on the Beechfield lawn; I believe we were on our way to lunch. Suddenly, half a dozen geese hover into view and immediately assumed the role of the next challenge. Both artists sprang above the group only to forward roll into eye contact with the Ellises who must have been doing a little early morning gardening or fowl feeding. That was something special that Clifford and Rosemary seemed to have, the totally unpredictable ability to appear at what felt like the least convenient moment. For example, from where did Rosemary spring, when, with Gill Clarke sitting on my lap, I was told to get away from that girl as I had a cold and she had teaching practice? Thank God that we became, and still are, married. I may never have survived the implications of that moment.

What I really took away from Corsham, apart that is, from exposure to the best artistic process and practices, was an inability to make do when it comes to something like preparing for an open house. How well I remember those poor kids at the first school I taught in (a position that Rosemary was instrumental in finding for me) who helped mop the floor at two in the morning as we backed through the art room door leaving behind the 'best exhibit they ever had at the school.' Then there was the question of photography. Having been 'persuaded' by Rosemary that to know this medium was to be on the cutting edge of art education, I must confess that I have made good use of the knowledge and have introduced photography into every curriculum for which I have had responsibility.

In closing, I want to relate three short stories which demonstrates how global is the influence of Corsham, and also just how remarkable is the capacity of its graduates to encounter one another in both their professional and personal lives.

Our daughter was attending McGill University in Montreal and was anxious that Gill and I meet a friend that she had just met. The young woman was from Pakistan although her immediate family were living in Oshawa, Ontario. After a few minutes of general conversation, I asked whether she corresponded with anyone in Pakistan because; about the time of the India-Pakistan war, I had lost contact with a Corsham friend. Salima Faiz was the friend and it turned out that she and her husband were good friends of the family. My daughter's friend went to her own apartment and returned with photographs of Salima and her family and, better yet, a current address. I wrote, receiving a charming reply from Salima which included news of another Corsham graduate, Paul Sproll. He had been a candidate for a teaching position at Rhode Island School of Design when Salima, a graduate student at the time, was a student representative on the hiring
committee. Paul was hired and, happily, was still there when I telephoned.

In 1990, when on sabbatical leave and visiting colleges in England, Gill and I rediscovered Derek and Margaret Pope and from them found the address of Terry and Pat Burns. Visiting Terry and Pat, we discovered that my old art teacher had become an expert genealogist and, wouldn’t you know, the other purpose of our trip included attention to our own, stalled family research. I became the student all over again! Forty-six years old and back in Grammar School! But how could it be better, a Corsham trained genealogist. Curious, discriminating, thorough, able to suppress the urge to creativity in matters genealogical and the good teacher to boot?

Finally, back again in 1995 and on another sabbatical round of fact finding, I was meeting with a county supervisor who, after we had gone over the materials that I needed to know, said “you trained at Corsham didn’t you?” He went on to offer that, as education in the UK has been recovering from Mrs Thatcher’s innovations, university art education departments appeared to be turning to a model that looks remarkably like the Ellis vision. I think that he may have offered a couple of examples but it was lost in the mist of “of course, it had to be”.

Could it be that, after all, the world is really flat with a small retaining wall running round its perimeter — perhaps the one that, allegedly Clifford had moved ‘a foot to the right’ as a summer work project for students? The ripples from Corsham running out to the four corners and, bouncing back, eventually returning to the source!

I don’t know about you but, as a model of personal and professional epistemology, it works for me.

DUNDEE SEVILLE ORANGE MARMALADE
Sue Legoux

In June 1973 Clifford Ellis wrote me a letter which began,

“Dear Susan,

The Dundee Seville orange marmalade story was first told to me by my mother when I was a very little boy and I have come across it from time to time since then. But now I wonder.

Our earliest cook-book, 1750, has a recipe for Seville orange marmalade.

The story, however, is about Dundee where, I see, the first effective clocks were not completed until 1830....”

I have no idea how what this letter was about. I do not remember anything of the preceding conversation or correspondence and cannot imagine why I should have been interested in the history of marmalade, or, for that matter, Dundee. Yet, in a strange way, this latter seems to me to say a great deal about Clifford and Rosemary and, by inference, Corsham and its unique educational style. For what Corsham taught, more powerfully than anything else, was curiosity. Clifford had a remarkable gift for looking, whether it was looking at people, looking at history, literature, plants, animals (or even marmalade), whatever fascinated him came under intense and careful scrutiny. Something of this capacity for intensive looking must have rubbed off on almost every student, whether they were aware of it or not. Having little or no imagination, I personally never had any realistic prospect of a creative career as a designer or maker but I do attribute whatever success I have had as a researcher to the encouragement I was given at Corsham to be endlessly curious.

B.A.A. GETS THE BLAME
Kate Pope

During conversations with my friends I have formed the impression that as our lives become more complicated and our brains are not quite as reliable as they used to be, many of us tend to over-romanticise our childhood memories. Personally I admit to the former, but with regards to the latter I find that quite the opposite applies. When we were small my older brothers and I were, like most children, quite unaware of our environment and did not recognise how extraordinary it was compared to most of our peers. Through our earliest years it seemed quite normal to have the run of Monks Park and its beautiful gardens, to swim in the pool at Corsham Court and to have as our playground the grounds of a stately home.

For me these memories are finite and crystal clear. Being picked up from infants school and taken to meet Dad at work, my legs were too small to manage the
huge red-carpeted stairs at the Court and I negotiated them on all fours. On the way to his office we passed through grand hallways with bronze sculptures and large paintings. We had games of cricket on the lawns at Monks and anyone passing would join in. Sitting between the bannisters on the staircase and looking down there was a hive of activity as students, teachers, cleaners, parents, friends, dogs and the odd chicken all went about their business.

My most vivid memories were of the Open Days, when at the start of my holidays in the hot summer sun,

wearing a newly-made dress, I followed Mum and Dad in and out of the studios and the Sculpture School at Beechfield. The student's work was a feast of wonder and imagination for a child's eyes. I met many fascinating people many of whom still reappear at the family home.

Looking back over those early years I now realise how privileged we were and apart from my lovely parent's influence I must apportion a great part of the blame to Bath Academy of Art for giving me the happiest of childhoods.

FROM TEMP. TO PRINCIPAL'S SECRETARY

Doris Durrant

In the late sixties having moved from London I decided to do some temporary secretarial work and was offered a job at Bath Academy of Art which I fully believed to be in Bath and was surprised to discover the college in Corsham Court, stately home of Lord Methuen, not far from where I was living. I was warned that I would be working for the Principal, Clifford Ellis, who could be rather difficult. However I must have been suitable, for after working as a 'temp' for a week or two I was offered the post of Principal's Secretary. I shared an office with three others, it was on the first floor of the Court, overlooking the drive and two gatehouses, with a view of the parish church and within sound of the church bells. Incidentally C.E. asked if the bells could be muffled so that he was not disturbed by the regular bell practice.

Clifford Ellis and his wife Rosemary lived in the flat at the top of the Court. He used to come down to the office before I arrived in the morning, sort out the mail and take away most of the correspondence leaving me only a few bits and pieces to deal with. The grounds at the Court were spectacular and Clifford seemed to enjoy escorting people around but this had to be done in a certain order as each section was different. The beautiful peacocks were of great interest but their cry was ear shattering. I did not know that peacocks shed their glorious tails each year, the students loved to collect the colourful feathers.

Clifford had many idiosyncrasies. He always wrote with a 2B pencil, only half length. I often wondered what happened to the other half. He sometimes used a dip-in pen, always with black ink. His handwriting was small, neat and round, and he knew exactly how much room it would take up when typed. He never dictated.

I think that Clifford was very sad when it was time for him to retire and it seemed as if he did not really want anyone else to take over the college. All files on students, past and present were bundled up, put into black bin bags and Mr Mannings, the caretaker, had instructions to burn them. I was very unhappy about this and managed to extract those files which I knew to be important and hand them to the Bursar. When C.E. moved with his wife Rosemary to a house in Urchfont he seemed to want nothing more to do with the Academy.

Michael Finn, the new Principal was a very gentle man and I greatly enjoyed working for him. After five more happy years at the Academy I retired, and shared a great party at the Court with Henry Boys who was also retiring, a memorable time was had by all.

After I left the Academy I was surprised to be invited with my husband to dinner at Clifford and Rosemary's home. I was very pleased about this as it completed my very happy years at Bath Academy of Art.

BATH ACADEMY OF ART IN CORSHAM

Julia Garratt

When I first came to Bath Academy in 1968 to take up an appointment as Academic Registrar and Lecturer in English, the summer vacation had provided an interlude in which the student protests and sit-in of the previous term could be assimilated. Clifford Ellis discussed these events with calm detachment. However, in Joe Hope's office at Beechfield I was given a different view of how dramatic they had been, marking an end to the benevolent paternalism that had previously existed and causing Clifford to retreat
from social encounters with the student body. At this time there were frequent references to 'the good old days', giving me the impression that I had arrived at a critical juncture in the history of Corsham, one where the shift of emphasis from Education courses to the recently introduced DipAD was perceived as a break with the past.

A visit to France in the following summer reinvigorated Clifford. He was comforted by analysis of the May '68 action which identified it as a structualist revolution. This not only reinforced the international dimension of the events at Corsham, it opened up for Clifford a new sphere of intellectual exploration. One outcome was the extraordinary lecture he gave in the Barn or, rather, the one he would have given it if he had not agreed to share the platform with Tony del Renzo and had the courtesy to let Tony speak first. Although curtailed, Clifford's lecture revealed the continuing desire to share with others the excitement he felt when discovering new ideas. Several times I found on my desk a book which he thought would be appropriate for me to read, or a note in the tiny pencil writing that many must remember indicating possible directions my own studies might take. With hindsight, I realise how swiftly he registered the impact of Foucault's writing for I first heard about it from Clifford and it must have been no later than 1971.

The continuing impulse to educate others took a strange form when Clifford decided that he alone fully understood the proper way to teach history to Visual Communication (he could not bear to say Graphic Design) students. A Hogarth exhibition seemed to him an ideal opportunity to counter narrow ideas of Design and to make students aware that in the past the contemporary divisions between Fine Art and Design did not apply. So, all Visual Communication students were escorted to London by him to see, not just the puny efforts at narrative painting accomplished by an Englishman, but the Raphael cartoons at the V & A to encounter an example of the job well done. His explanation of these ideas and his analysis of the paintings I found illuminating, but sadly the student group seemed in general unable to grasp the significance of his insights. They were perhaps baffled by the attentions they were receiving from the Principal of the college himself. This was all the more sad in that by then Clifford, disenchanted by what he saw as the narrow self-indulgent trajectory of Fine Art practice, considered the discipline of Design to be the most hopeful of those available at Corsham because it required engagement with the responses and needs of others. This blend of disenchantment and optimism characterised the last four years of his leadership.

For those used to working with Clifford the arrival of Michael Finn in 1972 was a culture shock. Here was someone still convinced of the value of Fine Art, moreover his commitment was ethical and spiritual as well as aesthetic. One of the most remarkable aspects of Michael's leadership was that he seemed genuinely to believe that other people might be right when they disagreed with him, even though he did not lack strong views of his own. With charm and good humour he encouraged others to develop their own abilities. The regular meetings of Heads of Departments which he inaugurated were extraordinary. I have since found that it is widely assumed that such meetings are bound to be competitive with each person fighting for sectional interests, but my experience of the Corsham meetings enables me to affirm that it does not have to be like this. The generous concern for the needs of others did not emanate just from Michael, but was strongly influenced by John Colbeck as well as Derek Pope, Joe Hope, Benno Zehnder, Robin Marriner and Desmond Williams. In spite of my affectionate memories of that group of people, I don't suffer from nostalgia, if by that we mean a desire to recapture a lost past. It seems evident that the courses have benefited from undergoing a series of changes. Clifford, of all people, resisted fixity and so it is fitting that the college he began has not remained static. Autumn 1985 in Bath, when students sat outside in the sun celebrating their arrival in the city, felt like the beginning of a new phase, not just the end of the Corsham era.

A CORSHAM EXPERIENCE

Michael Finn

We joined the Bath Academy of Art as students, staff, Governors, administrators, technical assistants and even Principals and all were important. We were called by our Christian names, a custom which I believe was started by Clifford Ellis; perhaps a small thing but a good one, because it made us think of the contribution each made to the whole and of course we all got to know one another fairly quickly as in a family. I looked upon Clifford's time as the formative period of the most advanced and successful experiment in art education for intending teachers of art and craft, but also as the last period of paternalism. The Academy was residential, situated in Corsham Court, Wiltshire, with studios at Beechfield and Monks Park. There was also a
thriving school for part-time day and evening study at Sydney Place in Bath.

I came from being Principal at Falmouth School of Art at the rather advanced age of 52 having experienced being both *in loco parentis* and then Chairman of an Academic Board of both staff and students. I applied for the post at the Academy with what I hoped were good references from the Chief Education Officer for Cornwall and from Barbara Hepworth, and I took with me to the interview an album of slides and photographs of recent work; my credentials were that of a steward, a chairman, an enabler and a painter.

There were times when being the Principal of an Art School wasn’t much fun but at least I was among some talented people who cared very much for their art. I worked in the most wonderful places with dream-like gardens. At Corsham Court in 1972, Lord Paul Methuen was still alive, but old and frail, he was a Sickertian painter of no mean ability who couldn’t abide the modern school! The Court had a collection of Renaissance pictures, also period furniture and ceramics, and in the garden, doves and peacocks. Perhaps it should be remembered that when I was appointed to the Academy it was situated partly in the County of Wiltshire and partly in Bath itself. The Bath Authority had its own Education Department which, like the Academy Governing Board, was very supportive under the chairmanship of Mrs Maw.

One of the difficulties of being the Principal of a residential college was having responsibility for the student hostels which were lovely old houses in the town itself. To have to get up in the night, after an irate phonecall, to quieten a rowdy party became a real chore, though the students were always courteous and compliant at the time. I knew it would happen several times a term. There was at that time a minor drugs problem which exacerbated what was only a natural exuberance.

So now I was on my way at Corsham and it was gentle and serene for most of the time with a staff who accepted the change of Principal with very good grace and who were keen to make the most of the national academic changes that were by now well entrenched.

However, soon the county boundaries changed, the Bath Authority was ended and the County of Avon created, which took over responsibility for an area which included both the West of England College of Art at Bristol and Bath Academy of Art, with all that meant in terms of finance at a time of shrinking national resources. The inevitable questions started to be asked!

I am unable to recall the exact date when the lease on Corsham Court had been renewed for another ninety-nine years, but it now seemed the right time for the Academy to make some pre-emptive strikes and Bath University was once again approached with the idea that the Academy should become an Art Faculty of the University whilst remaining on its present sites. Negotiations went well, but at what seemed like the crucial moment the University changed Vice-Chancellor and the balance was tipped towards their keeping a predominantly technological institution. Then Wiltshire was asked to consider taking responsibility for the Academy, but that idea did not find favour. Then the heat was on to move the Academy into Bath. It was a Conservative Council proposal, which was fought off; but then after local elections, Labour was in power and they wanted the Academy to move to Sion Hill and join the College of Education to become a College of Higher Education. They won the day. It was in line with the national moves towards bigger comprehensive establishments comparable with Polytechnics which have now become the new Universities or Colleges of Higher Education. One is tempted to say that the Academy’s idea of a merger with Bath University was not that obscure and might have been less expensive than what followed. Perhaps the Avon solution staved off other problems which were not our concern but readers of this account will understand that the effort to survive as a monotechnic caused considerable strain and my retirement after ten years at Corsham was not unreasonable once the die was cast.

As to what has happened since, I am in no position to say how good or bad it has been for art education, but the important thing is that both Falmouth and what was the Academy are very much alive even if their titles have changed. Perhaps we could never have kept the seemingly privileged circumstances of Corsham but it was thought necessary to try and I know many students thought it good to be there.

It is true to say that in the fifties, sixties and seventies, art education in Britain was second to none. There was a stream of visitors from abroad anxious to see what we were doing both at Falmouth and Corsham. Before the 1939-45 war it was the Bauhaus in Germany that blazed a trail. After the war, Bath Academy with the work of both
Clifford and Rosemary Ellis, was pre-eminent, not forgetting the later contributions from Leeds, Newcastle and Falmouth.

I must say that I found the Academy like a seamless garment and all I did was to push and pull a little during my brief stewardship - the Academy was wonderfully fashioned. It is also true to say that the staff at both Falmouth and Corsham were very talented artists and teachers and without them and some of the best students in the country, this ex-Principal would have had little to write about.

POSTSCRIPT

Alan Carter  Dean, Faculty of Art and Music, Bath College.

The merger between Bath Academy of Art and Bath College of Higher Education offered the opportunity for art and design to again work alongside music with the creation of the Faculty of Art and Music, one of three academic faculties responsible for the work of the newly established 'Bath College of Higher Education incorporating Bath Academy of Art'. This title was retained for some years to ensure that the public in general and the art education world in particular understood that the whole provision of art and design from Bath Academy of Art was to remain intact, not withstanding its change of location. For many years music had been (exceptionally) a distinctive part of provision at Corsham and the new faculty, with undergraduate degree courses in art, design and music was unique in higher education provision in the country at its time of inception.

The Faculty of Art and Music was located on three sites after they moved from Corsham with all higher education art and design at Sion Hill and Somerset Place, foundation and adult education art and design remaining at Sydney Place and music at Newton Park. The faculty was unusual within Bath College of Higher Education both for its use of three sites and its range of Higher and Further Education provision. It is worth noting the architectural distinction of these three sites. The lease on Corsham Court was transferred from Avon to Bath College of Higher Education on incorporation and remains at the time of writing as a Bath College of Higher Education site, although not used for art and design courses but maintaining links with its studio leasing for staff and the housing of the National Society for Education in Art and Design.

The Sion Hill and Somerset Place site was fully modified to meet the needs of an art school and with an additional range of new purpose-built accommodation provided a much envied context for art and design education, comprising both a complete Georgian crescent at Somerset Place and a range of relatively modern and brand new buildings on the adjacent Sion Hill site. The physical move from Corsham to Bath took place ten years ago in 1986 and the excellent developments from that time to the present testify to the vision of those responsible for the decision to merge the two colleges, controversial as this was at the time from some perspectives. Impartial observers will need to balance the loss of the Bath Academy of Art Corsham context against the gains that have accrued since the merger.

The first year after relocation to the City of Bath saw a very substantial increase in the overall number of applications for the art and design courses and the consequent move towards filling from first choice applicants for both Fine Art and Graphic Design. This level of application has been maintained and recently the Ceramics degree course was the most popular of its kind in the country in terms of application statistics. The courses continue to attract a range of young, mature and overseas students of high calibre who bring real distinction of achievement to the Faculty in both degree results and external national awards and prizes. This national and international recruitment reflects the reputation of the courses. The museum and gallery resources of the City complement the wide range of specialist accommodation and the outstanding art and design library available to the students on site. Not surprisingly, students from the Faculty have a good record of achievement after graduation.

It was with much regret and sadness that the College, at the point of incorporation had provision of Further Education in art and design at Sydney Place transferred by Avon into the care of the City of Bath College of Further Education. Happily this provision has been maintained, although plans exist for the relocation of this work away from Sydney Place and into the main accommodation of City of Bath College of Further Education. When this occurs it will mean that none of the previous Bath Academy of Art provision is any longer housed in its original locations. This work had been fully integrated into the Faculty and its loss was keenly felt. The quality of the staff, students and courses was
Studio and workshop accommodation at Sion Hill

Teaching and student accommodation at Somerset Place
quite exceptional and thoroughly deserving of its national reputation in its own right.

The College's commitment to art and design has been steadfast in the teeth of national cuts to higher education funding alongside a requirement for substantial growth in student numbers. The outstandingly successful strategy of employing high quality practising artists and designers established at Bath Academy of Art has been maintained at a time when many institutions have been forced to cease this practice. Revenue budgets have been maintained as far as national cuts will permit and there can be no doubt whatsoever of the protection afforded to these courses by the outstanding financial management and academic prioritising of scarce resources by the College. Many staff previously associated with Bath Academy of Art continue to work at Bath College of Higher Education in both full-time and part-time posts. Their experience and loyalty has been invaluable in the substantial developments that have occurred since the merger.

Fine Art and Graphic Design have doubled in student numbers since the merger and all three art and design degree courses offer both full-time and part-time modes of practice. The Ceramics course has established itself as a leading provider in the country. The Fine Art course has a Sound and Image route within it which links with the undergraduate provision in Music and Graphic Design and is fast developing new opportunities for students to work with the latest developments in computer-generated imaging and interactive multi-media. All courses offer foreign study visits and opportunities for vocational insights to their students. Complementary studies staff have a well established MA provision in Visual Culture and a mixed theoretical and studio course is available for Fine Art post-graduates. All courses are beginning to develop opportunities for higher degrees by research and collaboration with the University of the West of England. A few years after the move to Bath the courses were reviewed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate who awarded a 'Quality' rating to the provision, on the basis of our well established course-monitoring and the evaluation processes and overall control. This confirmed for staff and students the success of the merger and standards of student achievement.

Bath College of Higher Education as an institution won the right to award its own degrees up to Masters level and became an accredited institution. This was at a time when such an accolade was very rare outside the chartered University sector and Bath College of Higher Education joined a small and elite group through this success. The institution no longer needed to seek external validation for its undergraduate and Masters courses. One of the most exciting features has been the maintenance and development of active research by staff in art and design. Art and design at Bath College of Higher Education scored very well in the first national Research Assessment exercise and staff have continued to exhibit nationally with support from Bath College of Higher Education generated by income earned to the college from this initial success. Not only does this signal the quality of staff in the Faculty but also ensures that courses are being delivered by staff practising at the highest levels and bringing professionalism and success directly to the students. This, of course, was always Clifford Ellis's objective in the very early days and has gone from strength to strength. Some staff have been awarded Readerships or Associate Readerships to ensure their opportunities and responsibilities as researchers/practitioners/artists. Alongside developments in courses originally from Corsham the strong art and design provision that existed at Bath College of Higher Education prior to merger has also developed with a new and very popular degree course in Creative Arts. This new provision for students to choose to study art, textiles, music or creative writing also continues the Bath Academy of Art tradition of related arts practice and should be a significant development strategy for the future. Music has recently established provision at Masters level and there is every prospect that students will be able to study combined art and music for an MA post-graduate award in the future.

Much of the spirit and objectives of early days has been maintained and developed through the merger of Bath Academy of Art and Bath College of Higher Education and even more would be achieved if Government policy permits. All higher education faces uncertainty over funding levels, expansion, regional containment and new funding mechanisms. Art and Design in particular faces new challenges with the merger of two student recruitment systems and this will certainly affect the patterns of recruitment nationally to art and design courses. What we can be sure of is that the art and design courses born at Corsham and now firmly established as part of an excellent College of Higher Education in Bath, have continued to enhance their national and international reputation for high quality education.
Trees. Woods and Man. No. 32 by H.L. Edlin (1956)
APPENDICES

I C & RE AND THE NEW NATURALIST JACKETS

Peter Marren

The next article is based on the chapter about the Ellises and their work in Peter Marren's book The New Naturalists (1995). I am extremely grateful to him for producing it specially for this book and providing the illustrations to his text ... Ed.

The names of Clifford and Rosemary Ellis are familiar to many people who know little or nothing about Corsham, and maybe not much about art either. This is because, among scores of other projects and commissions, the Ellises designed the jackets for a famous series of books: The New Naturalist Library, published by Collins from 1945, and still running. These colourful designs are as much admired as the books themselves. Over the years they have become icons of contemporary natural history. Arguably they represent the crowning achievement of the Ellises career as freelance designers, which had embraced posters, dust-jackets, mosaics and wallpaper designs during the 1930’s and 1940’s. The New Naturalist jackets, the experiences of Clifford and Rosemary in sketching living animals at zoos and in the wild were combined with their sureness of touch for colour and bold, lively imagery. If you haven’t seen a complete library of New Naturalist over one hundred, volumes - in their original Ellis dust-jackets, I do urge you to seek them out. Though the individual jackets are interesting enough, the mass effect as they sit together on the shelf is simply stunning.

The New Naturalist Library was the wartime idea of a select group of British Naturalists, led by Julian Huxley and the ornithologist, James Fisher. They believed that the public were keen to learn about the latest achievements of science, so long as it was presented attractively. They wanted to tell people about the new kind of natural history that had sprung up between the wars, about bird behaviour and migration, about the relationships between animals and flowers and their environment, about how characteristics are passed on from one generation to the next. The new natural history had its roots in traditional nature study, that is, in field observation, and for a while it bridged the gap between the amateur naturalist and the professional scientist. There is a case for saying that this series of books represents the golden age of field study in Britain.

They were objective, unsentimental and sometimes quite technical in tone, but in their pages you learned how nature works and yet seldom strayed very far from the wayside and the hedge bank. For all their learnedness, they were outdoorsy books based on field study, and encouraged the reader to go and do likewise. The public liked them and bought around forty thousand copies of each of the first dozen titles. Many titles have since become natural history classics, and have changed our perceptions of nature forever. They were successful because they dared.

Another reason for their success may well have been in the timing. The pages of the first title, the famous book on Butterflies by E. B. Ford, were rolling off the presses as the war came to an end. In 1945, people were fed up with war and its restrictions, and were keen to walk, camp and generally revel in the countryside. This was the time when legislation for National Parks and National Nature Reserves and public footpaths was going through. The new science of ecology, the study of habitats, hitherto cloistered inside academic institutions, had come of age, and was being put to public use. New words like conservation and environment were heard in saloon bars and bus shelters, and the membership of bodies like the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds were beginning their exponential growth.

None of this would have helped the new books had they been drably presented and hence invisible in the shops. Their publisher, William (Billy) Collins, seems to have wanted eye-catching designs for these special books to which he had committed so much time, money and prestige. He seems to have been equally surprised and delighted by what he got. In 1944, the Ellises were asked to produce a jacket for Butterflies, by Ruth Atkinson who had commissioned jacket designs from them a decade earlier when she worked for Jonathan Cape. Billy Collins liked the result, a design of swallow tail butterflies and their caterpillar, and henceforward the Ellises designed nearly all the jackets for the series up to Clifford’s death in 1985. Eighty six individual designs covering every conceivable aspect of British natural history: animals, birds,
The Weald, No. 26 by S Wooldridge and Frederick Goldring (1953)
flowers, landscapes, seascapes, rocks and shells. Some sixty seven designs were for the main series and nineteen for the slightly smaller series of monographs which ran concurrently with it. To stay faithful for so long to the same series of books suggests that there was something about the New Naturalist Library that appealed to the Cables. Perhaps they discerned a similarity of aims between the New Naturalist editors and their own work at Corsham. Both wanted to bring contemporary culture into the lives of ordinary people, to encourage mass participation. Both were natural communicators. Perhaps it was part of the spirit of post-war Britain. At any rate the series proved a long-lasting and, for the most part, happy marriage of talents.

Let's take a closer look at these jackets. Those who have seen Clifford and Rosemary's pre-war commercial posters, especially the nature posters they did for the London Passenger Transport Board, will see similarities of style and technique. Clifford himself explained their intentions in a letter to one of the New Naturalist authors:

"A book jacket is by way of being a small poster; it is part of the machinery of book selling. Though, obviously enough, the jacket should be in keeping with the book it contains, it is unwise to consider it as an opportunity for an additional illustration. An illustration, as against the jacket, can be seen at leisure and free from the competition of not always very mannerly neighbours. The jacket should be immediately interesting; its forms and colours should make a very clear and distinctive image. If it does its job, the book will be taken down and opened, and the proper illustrations will be seen."

These jackets, then, are designs to catch the eye. Their success depends on the right balance of colours and tones and on the liveliness and originality of the subject conveyed. The artists worked within the restrictions of small format and the constraints of the printing process. For reasons of cost, the printer could use only three or four colours, which meant that these colours had to be chosen carefully and reproduced accurately. The artists invariably worked from nature, basing each design on pencil sketches, which were then worked up in watercolour. They usually painted the final design at the same size as the book, using gouache paint on hand-made Whatman paper, whose rough surface produced a characteristic smudgey tones and colours. Later on, they learned to prepare their own colour separations for offset litho. Clifford likened the business of seeing the final effect they would produce to that of hearing a musical score. Once a colour proof had been run off by the printer, C & RE often had suggestions to make. For instance, the proof of Inheritance and Natural History was returned with the characteristic comment: "it is nearly right. The grey, though the right tone,
The Wren, by Edward A. Armstrong (1955)
would have a more lively effect in the colour scheme if it matched the specific Pantone i.e. if it had slightly more Reflex Blue and slightly less Yellow. I am glad you like it. P.S. Perhaps ‘COLLINS’ should be a little larger and bolder.’

An unknown hand at Collins had added a warning note: “he is very fussy about matching tones, and knows a great deal about it.” It was this meticulous approach which allowed the often subtle colours to blend and dissolve with such effect. The melting cliffscape of Britain’s Structure and Scenery, for example, or the sepia backcloth of The Highlands and Islands with the bird’s red eye at the exact optical centre of the design.

It is tempting to think that the inspiration for some of these designs was found among the plant and animal collections, as well as the general ambience, of Corsham. For example, the design for Man and Birds has a church tower similar to that at Corsham. Sometimes, however, the Ellises made long journeys to find what they needed, even making journeys to Orkney and Shetland for two of the books. As title succeeded title, the Ellises experimented with designs, sometimes producing semi-abstract landscapes that owed more to tonal contrast than to form. Often, too, one finds the wit and gaiety one sees in their pre-war posters, with birds and animals peeping round the spine, or distant landscapes tucked away in a corner or receding above the title band.

Another aspect of these jackets was that, at first, the design was based on a single painting, with the title and author hand-lettered across a band of solid colour. The N.N. emblem, inside its oval, was also hand drawn, and incorporated a token, perhaps a duck or a flower or a stickleback, that symbolised the title. At first these jackets were printed by letterpress, so that each design needed to be copied faithfully on the plate by a lithographic artist. The early ones were apparently transferred onto the plate by Thomas E. Griffits of Baynard’s Press, who was the master of this art. Difficulties began after the contract was given to other presses and lesser artists, and were compounded by Collins’ insistence on economies in colour printing. A few jackets did not measure up to expectations, in at least one case because the colours were printed in the wrong order. On the other hand, advancing technology produced more accurate, more transparent printing inks over a wider and more subtle range of colours and tones. Whether the resulting brighter jackets of the 1970’s are preferable to the more subdued ones of the two decades earlier is perhaps a matter of taste. Possibly there is some loss of tone or quality, but the technique of colour separation allows the artists every brush stroke to be reproduced faithfully. The colours are even more brilliant and vivid, and the designs as imaginative as ever. Among my own favourites among the later jackets are the fierce, looming ant in its grassblade jungle and the wonderfully aqueous seal portrait, based on Clifford’s direct observations of seals at London Zoo.

Of course we would like to know which jackets were Clifford’s and Rosemary’s, and about who did what. But by asking, impertinently, the question, perhaps we are begging the point. The jackets, like most of their work, was the product of a true partnership of minds and abilities. Whichever of them physically applied the paint, the designs were discussed and conceived by both artists, and are always signed jointly. In 1985, the then Collins editor, Crispin Fisher the son of James Fisher who, more than anyone, had created the New Naturalist series wrote to Rosemary to thank her for forty-three years of faithful service. “You and Clifford have been part of my upbringing”, he said, “His death marks the end of an era. Your work has a freshness and quality as modern today as it was forty three years ago - and that can’t be said for any other graphic designer I know.”
II PREPARING ART EDUCATORS

Clifford Ellis

The following article was written by Clifford Ellis for the UNESCO Seminar on The Teaching of Visual Arts in General Education held in Bristol during the summer of 1951. I have included this important piece (Education and Art, published by UNESCO in 1953) as it seems to answer some of the questions posed by certain contributors ...Ed.

The art educator, like the artist, must be a realist. He has, of course, his ideas, his dreams and sometimes his theories. But just as a sculptor works in the reality of limestone or walrus-ivory or teak, so the art educator has his realities, whether accommodation or grants for students or government regulations. These conditions, provoke, prevent, permit or invite him in his work. They vary from year to year and from country to country. He must try, with intelligence and sympathy, to understand their nature. He must have the courage to be an opportunist. As a realist, he must be able to say: “It was possible then and there, but it is not possible here and now; it is for us to find our own answer.”

For no single explanation of art education can be valid internationally. Perhaps one of the virtues of this publication is that it has been conceived as a symposium of varying, sometimes conflicting views, and not as an attempt to set up one universal theory. The subject of art education is one of extreme complexity. Perhaps it would be possible to isolate a measure, as in a laboratory, the full significance of a drawing by a six-month-old baby. I do not know. But I am sure that by the age of five no isolation is possible. One is then concerned with the effects of a whole culture. What if one five-year-old lived in 12th-century Sicily, another in 18th-century France and a third in present-day Nigeria? It would constitute a life-work of research for a brilliant team. Meanwhile, one art educator, if he were a sensitive artist and an understanding teacher, might be doing the right thing for the little Nigerian. When at last the findings were published, many of them would be obsolete, certainly including those of most concern to the art educator. For his standards are those of the artist, they are art standards of his own time and place. They can be felt, they can be illustrated; but they change and cannot be defined.

This, then, is merely a description of something which is local and dated; something happening during those middle years of the 20th-century in the South-West of England.

Betty, Lydia and William are students at Bath Academy of Art and about to finish their third year. When applying for admission, four years ago, they sent papers showing that they were eligible under Ministry of Education regulations. They held good certificates of secondary education, were over eighteen years of age, had passed a special medical examination and William had done eighteen months of National Service. Their applications were supported by appropriate persons: Betty, who was then twenty, had been doing voluntary work with children at a youth club and was recommended by the organiser. They were all clearly interested in art; Lydia, for example, had been secretary of her school art society. They were only three of over two hundred and fifty applicants for forty-eight places. How were they chosen?

They sent examples of their work and Betty, Lydia and William were among the candidates selected for the next stage. They were asked to do two life-size drawings or paintings, one a self-portrait and the other a section cut through a cabbage or cauliflower. These were revealing for we were looking for two things, artistic talent and evidence of suitable personality. A candidate who does a glamourous self portrait but a perfunctory cabbage may not have the qualities one would wish to find in a teacher. Had Betty been insensitively taught or was she herself rather insensitive? She had done good work with the children at her youth club; her cabbage was seen more freshly, with more humility and, at the same time, with more conviction, than any of the ‘official’ drawings she had done at school. So Betty was included among a one hundred and fifty students to be called for interview.

The interviewers are myself and Miss Symons, the Vice-Principal, and, whenever possible, a third colleague. Once a fortnight we see ten candidates for at least twenty minutes each. We think that we could not interview sympathetically and clear-headedly a larger number or at more frequent intervals. A professor once told me that to him students were no longer individuals, only a texture. But Betty, Lydia and William were individuals, with personality, character, temperament, sensibility and imagination of different kinds and in varying proportions. Betty seemed to us to be like her cabbage and much better than her school report; Lydia had grown up sturdy and happily in a school where the Headmistress herself was a painting member of the art society; what would William be like as an art teacher in three years or fifteen years time?
So the forty-eight candidates of the final selection started at the Academy in the following Autumn. There were other new students, most of them following a four year course which does not necessarily lead to teaching; and older students beginning their second, third, fourth and, a few, their fifth years; one hundred and fifty students in all, and most of them resident.

The Academy came to Corsham from Bath in 1946. Our buildings had been destroyed by bombing and, among the possibilities open to us after the war, there was that of moving out into the country and starting a first English residential Art Academy. Residence for young artists and art teachers seemed a good thing if only because in a full and well balanced life it might provide an alternative to the romantic idea of the artist as a lonely and eccentric rebel against society.

Because of our local English conditions we succeeded in one direction and failed in another. Lord Methuen, himself a distinguished painter, granted us a generous lease of most of his home, Corsham Court, which, like so many of the great houses of England, was too expensive for a private family to maintain but which, with its contents, he wished to preserve intact. The 16th-century house with its famous 18th-century Picture Gallery; the deer park where, in the 10th-century, Saxon kings had hunted and where, in the 18th-century, the greatest of our landscape architects had created a peculiarly English association of art and nature - those made Corsham Court a manifestation of 'residence' as civilised living. We were also fortunate in the two houses we acquired as our main hostels, each of them late 18th-century buildings standing among mature trees in spacious grounds; fortunate too, in a curious way, that the interiors had suffered from war-time use. Groups of students were therefore able to re-decorate and furnish the rooms and so to appreciate consciously the efforts, the costs and rewards of this aspect of residence.

Soon after our move to Corsham the Ministry of Education was unable to authorise any additions to our accommodation, except by way of minor adoptions and repairs. So we have been unable to realise one important element in our idea of residence, the provision of living quarters and studios for the teaching staff. Instead of a balanced community of students and artist-lecturers, the residents at the Academy are preponderantly juvenile, with many of my colleagues living and working elsewhere. A few are resident and all give generously of their time outside working hours.

There were the ideal communities of Castiglione, Rabelais and More; there are the families in which a distinguished grandfather will argue his own subject in gay seriousness with his eighteen-year-old grandson. And there are questions to be answered. What would it cost in additional salaries if the official teaching hours of each lecturer were so reduced that he had time for both residents and for a due measure of personal life and work? And biologically? Each lecturer each year is that much older than his students. Does a gulf widen between them? Is the adolescent, on occasion, a special kind of animal? We can answer only in terms of the cultures in which we live. One of our partial answers is the Academy club, which controls its business through committees appointed by both students and staff and of which the chairmen may be students. Some activities are spontaneous and domestic; others make and maintain contacts with the outside world, and not only in the arts. The Friday club exists for the discussion of subjects which might otherwise be missed.

From September to the following Easter we forget, apparently, that some students are to become teachers; that Paul's father is a sculptor with an international reputation, that Mary's is a greengrocer; that Henri is from Paris and Mavis from a Welsh mining village. During official working hours they are subdivided arbitrarily into groups of twelve, sometimes according to initial letters of surnames, sometimes in other arrangements. By the end of a few weeks, I like to think, they work together with something of the esprit de corps, the eagerness and single-mindedness of a pack of hounds. But, you remark, they were selected as individuals. Why encourage a pack? Well, it is easier to face a new life if one is not alone; it is good, sometimes, to forget oneself; necessary to abandon prejudices. And, inevitably, groups would form; we are gregarious. It is better that we should come together through a lively participation in new experiences than because we are homesick.

Also it seems wise to regard art education as something more than self-expression. It is confusing to suppose that painting, for example, should be practised only because it is good for the 'self.' Much supposedly 'self-expression' is merely pathetic evidence of artistic starvation. The true artist in us transcends 'self'; he finds fulfilment not in 'self' but in art.

So in this way Betty, Lydia and William met one another. They met my colleagues, they met the seriousness of purpose which had made these artists professionals. They learned to work not only with one another but in collaboration with substances and tools. This was more than acquiring techniques. It was being delighted and surprised by the nature of
things. They worked with a great variety of substances so that the nature of one would, by contrast, help in recognising the nature of another. For example, each group specialised in its own materials for weaving. Betty's group worked with our native grasses, each student collecting his own and responding to their nature according to his nature. But, as well as his own, there was Betty's response and responses of the other members of the group. And he saw all the responses made by all the individual members of every group. Such collective work depended, of course, on an inspiring co-operation between the artist-lecturers by whom it was directed.

At this time, too, the new students began to look at works of art. Some exist at Corsham, others were borrowed for short exhibitions; some were visited. The students commenced a general introduction to western civilisation, a cycle of study which was to continue during the following two years. A different century was considered each term, with weekly talks by specialists, some of them distinguished visitors, on aspects of its history, philosophy, religion, literature, drama, dance, music, architecture and visual arts. These new students, together with those of other years, read, wrote, made drawings, photographs and other records of original material, gave recitals of music, and prepared and presented exhibitions and dramatic productions. As a balance to this historical and European approach, other subjects were examined at the weekly lectures of the summer terms.

Every week, in his own time and in the privacy of bedroom-study or empty studio, each student painted a picture. These personal works were criticised by different artist-lecturers but not by the student's regular painting teacher. This possibly bewildering practice is intended to develop independent judgement and later, during the second year, becomes characteristic of our way of working. By then most work will be independent. We hope that the gregarious experiences of the first terms will have given an appetite for work. It is needed, for during the next phase we must necessarily risk casualties. Students must be given the opportunity to work alone, to work bravely, sensitively and wisely. This means, also, the opportunity to work unwisely, insensitively or not to work at all. For, very soon, their time with us will be over and Betty, Lydia and William should then be adults, able to work with other people but also able to stand firmly on their own feet.

At the end of their first year the students selected two subjects for special study during the following terms. Betty, Lydia and William chose, respectively, painting and textiles, painting and drama, and pottery and music. The other students chose different combinations of these and other subjects. The planning of the second year time-table is extremely difficult and there is certainly no room here to follow so many individual cases. But we will visit William in the pottery. He had had a short introductory 'taste' during his first year and since then he has worked there for nearly two years; officially for one day each week, but as a member of the pottery club he is there for several evenings, and on Sunday afternoons he and some other enthusiasts build kilns. They are determined to teach pottery and if their school should have no kiln they will build one. William has visited working potteries and has seen some important collections of pottery. At the end of his second year he won one of our travelling scholarships and went to Spain where he saw more potteries and museums. During his teaching practice he had done pottery with children. He continues to paint and is chairman of the music club. We are not concerned here with his work in music, though his all round development may show important influences between the arts. He has clearly justified his third year, which is given only to those students who are assessed as being above average.

How has William been prepared as a teacher? First, as we have seen, as a person: and not only through his work, but through his environment. During his first two terms he had no direct training as a teacher. Then, in his third year, the summer term, he was introduced to children. An experimental school in our grounds was attended for one day each week by fifty boys and fifty girls aged from eight to ten. Our aim was to show that children were persons with individual potentials and worthy of respect, to show children at their best and so to strengthen William, Betty, Lydia and our other new students in their sense of vocation. Later on, in real schools, they would need all the faith that this first experience might inspire. Before the children came there were several days of preparation, and then each week there was not only the children's day, but a second day for discussion and further preparation. Each student 'adopted' two children, a boy and a girl, and accompanied them throughout the day and throughout the term. Together they went to various classes taken by my colleagues and sometimes two, three or four 'family groups' would combine informally. For there was a great deal to see and to do. There was a small zoo with out-of-door enclosures for lizards, for amphibians, and one very large one which the families could enter, for butterflies. There was a children's museum with new exhibits each week, boats, dolls' houses, Chinese puppets, Indian toys, traditional food decorations (these exhibits were eaten at the end of the day) and so on. The young eagles of the first year
soon wanted to fly. Watching each other teach seems to have that effect. So the children of Betty's group made looms, collected grasses (which, like Betty, they had once dismissed as 'only grass') and did some weaving. The experiment of course have become sentimental and false, but it was guided by Miss Symons, who has a real understanding of children and of education.

The experiences of the summer were carried a stage further during the following term when the students spent one day each week in village schools. Schools and students were carefully selected, for the students went in pairs. Betty and Lydia were a well balanced pair. Betty was older, more practical, but with a tendency to revert to the heavily pedestrian methods which, because of her own school days, she associated with teaching. Lydia was more imaginative, more spirited. She had a pleasing voice and a sense of timing; you will remember that she had chosen drama as her second subject. But she might forget how many paint brushes she had lent her class, or the cost of paper. She went with Betty to a small school where the Headmistress received them as members of her family; working members of a family, not an impersonal institution. She gave them a free hand with certain classes. Betty and Lydia took it in turns to teach, learn from each other, and gain confidence from the other's presence. The student who was not teaching gave out and collected materials. This, in an old-fashioned, hard-worked, general-purpose classroom, is in itself a difficult problem. Then, when the Headmistress saw what the students and her children were doing, she generously surrendered the walls of her main classroom for displays of children's work. Betty and Lydia had spent the past year in an environment which was as clean, gay and well-designed as we had been able to contrive. They had helped, at the experimental school, to display children's work sensitively and with respect. They had collected, prepared and arranged natural objects in the children's museum. They had made colour collections; Betty's master work was a range of yellow fabrics, some of her own dyeing, in which the colours quivered in juxtaposition. Soon the classroom was transformed. But Betty and Lydia received more than they gave. They learned, especially, from the maturity, the realism and the day-in, day-out steadfastness of the Headmistress. They began to understand that the art teacher was but one member of a team in a school of general education. They took their turn in distributing the daily milk. During this term, too, a second day a week was given to discussion and preparation. The different pairs were able to share their experiences and to show one another what their children had done. The quality of this term's experience compensated a little for its brevity.

At the end of their fifth term, the students spent three consecutive weeks in large town schools, and this time they were single-handed. During the previous weeks, as part of their preparation, the students had been visiting the districts in which their schools were situated. They had each to answer, by drawings and writing, a questionnaire we had drawn up. They had to work independently, to meet all sorts of people who were neither artists nor teachers, to see an England that was unlike their homes, the Academy or the villages of the previous term, but was the England of their new pupils. Their teaching was very carefully assessed, for by this stage of the course a student should show conclusively that he is fit for the award of the teacher's certificate. We had also to decide which students were above average as teachers and eligible for a third year. Mary had withdrawn from the course at the end of her first year since it was clear to all that she was not by temperament suited for work with children. Other students who, at the end of the second term, appeared not to be making the best use of their time had been given a friendly but firm warning and because they had taken this to heart, there were no failures. We wished we could have awarded more third-year places, but these were limited by the Ministry of Education for economic reasons.

The third year included a further fortnight or three weeks of teaching practice. We tried to find as wide a range of opportunities as possible. William went to a public school with a famous pottery tradition; Lydia visited several schools in Wales with the County Art Advisor; Betty acted as one of the resident guides at a children's exhibition in London. One student went to the experimental centre for art teaching at Sevres. There were many experiences to be compared and as William said: "Now one can see oneself from outside and begin to have a proper self-criticism."

The third year was devoted, for the most part, to work in the arts, in the student's two special subjects. An art teacher, like all teachers, should be a developed personality. But he will be an art teacher only in so far as he is an artist. "My dear Degas, one does not write a poem with ideas, one writes it with words." The visual artist realises his ideas in the vocabulary of his own art. He learns to 'speak' by 'hearing' other artists and by trying to reply. Our third-year students work with other young artists, some of them in their fourth year, and because of the calibre of my artist colleagues, they share the exhilaration of participating in the art of our own time, of knowing that the language they are learning is alive, and that all is not yet said.
III QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TUTORS
Joyce Curtis

The following questionnaire, part of which explored Clifford Ellis’s UNESCO article, was sent to Academy tutors by Joyce Curtis during her research on the Academy which was completed in 1986 (see Joyce’s earlier contribution, p. 55) The paragraphs in the UNESCO article were numbered by her for the purposes of the questionnaire. Joyce’s dissertation can be seen by arrangement with the Library, Instituton of Education, University of London, 11-13 Ridgmount St. (off Stall St.), London WC1 ...Ed.

Questions referring to your personal experience at Corsham

1. How did Clifford Ellis convince you of the “rightness” of his ideas?

2. How long did you teach at Corsham? Were you contracted to work there for a specific length of time?

3. Clifford Ellis has been described as a “benevolent autocrat.” Can you comment on this?

4. Who or what influenced Clifford Ellis in formulating his own ideas on art education (e.g. Cizek? Read? Richardson)?

5. It was seen that Clifford Ellis was a very strong leader.

   Did you: a. follow him in his ideas and methods?
   b. remain independent?
   or c. learn from him then break away in order to develop independently?

6. Did living in the environment of Corsham Court have any influence on you?

7. It is said that Peter Potworowski had a strong influence on tutors and students - to quote one example. Did any artists or students influence your teaching and/or your personal work through shared exploration of ideas and experience?

8. Apart from those at Corsham, which artists, past or present, have particularly influenced you?

9. Did your experience at Corsham influence your own work and teaching in later life?

10. Do you think that student-teachers left Corsham with any special qualities that may have influenced art education (at primary, secondary or tertiary levels) in this country? If so, what were those qualities? Do you think any of them are particularly relevant to art education today?

11. Did you enjoy your experience at Corsham?

Questions referring to the article by Clifford Ellis

Para 1.
Do you think Clifford Ellis was a realist and opportunist? How close did he get to realising “his ideas, his dreams and sometimes his theories”?

Para 2
Do you think that Clifford Ellis’s standards are impossible to define? Can they be felt and/or illustrated now?

Para 3
Is what happened at Corsham dated? Do you think that there are any aspects relevant to art education today?

Paras 5 and 6
Was this a unique or unusual method of selecting students at the time? Do you think it was successful?

Para 8
Corsham has been criticised as being “romantic”, “idealistic” and “out of touch with reality.” Do you think that Corsham provided a full and well-balanced life for both tutors and students?

Paras 10 and 11
Can you please comment on the ideas and views expressed here?

Paras 12 to 21
Regarding the description of the students’ art teacher-training do you remember this as an accurate account of what happened in practice? What do you see as the most valuable aspects of such art education? Was it in any way unique?

Para 22
“But he will be an art teacher only in so far as he is an artist.” Do you agree with this statement? Was this the basis of Clifford Ellis’s philosophy of art education?
IV CLIFFORD ELLIS

Colin Thompson

This paper by Colin Thompson was written in discursive form in response to the questionnaire from Joyce Curtis and he refers to the numbered paragraphs in the UNESCO article. Subsequent responses to the questionnaire by James Tower and Henry Boys, also reflect this arrangement ...Ed.

My connection with Corsham began in 1948, when Clifford Ellis interviewed me for a post of lecturer there. It was for me the beginning of a collaboration and friendship which ceased only when he died.

At the time I was learning to paint at the old Chelsea Polytechnic. I was warned that Clifford had a lot of funny ideas. Corsham was trying to teach too many things at once (even things like music and drama), and was not a serious art school at all - the students were only dabbling in drawing and painting and sculpture.

Most of the criticism was a result of confusing the programme of Bath Academy of Art with that of a conventional art school, a confusion which Clifford had not been too closely concerned to clear up. One of his strengths was an ability to see which way the political wind was blowing, and how to make the most of a new turn of events or to counteract its worst effects.

Up to 1946 he had been the Principal of Bath Art School (William Scott and Kenneth Armitage were already working with him there). In creating Bath Academy of Art he had found a way of preserving the administrative structure of the old local authority art school side by side with his newly established Teacher Training College under the Ministry of Education. This meant that students training to be teachers came into contact with, and learnt from, some of the liveliest creative artists of the moment, who were employed under the aegis of the Art School and could never have been brought into an establishment restricted to teacher training.

His perception of the way things would go in the future was built on his knowledge of history. He was a voracious reader, not only of history or of art history but of anything that contributed to his understanding - Toynbee, Mumford, Tinbergen, Levi Strauss ....., but there were many others.

His ability to learn lessons from the past went hand in hand with understanding the past as if it were still actual (see F. Para's 2,3). He saw art in terms of what the artist needed to express - whether it was a second-year student or Matisse or Poussin or the artists of the Greek black figure vases or the Egyptian frescoes. I remember his description of studying in Chartres the sculptures of the west portal and coming away seeing the world momentarily through mediaeval eyes. The style the artists worked in was no more than the convention imposed on him by circumstances of time and place.

And he understood these circumstances to be shifting sands. Old students would come back to visit, thinking that the ideas they had learned at Corsham had a permanent validity, only to find that Clifford's ideas had moved on, modified by more recent circumstances or more recent evidence. He was not a conformist, and he was always wary of the motives of members of the establishment.

But non-conformity in this sense is very different from a lack of principles. Clifford had a stern code of morals which he applied relentlessly to his own conduct. He was particularly impatient of people who saw art as a sloppy escape from reality, or an excuse to flout the laws of society. Characteristically, he admired much of abstract expressionism, except its lack of discipline.

As artist and designer, he was a thorough professional who never relaxed his standards, even if it meant staying up all night - which he not infrequently did. But when it came to teaching, his commitment was to something much wider than professional standards. In a way it was a commitment to the visual apprehension of the world.

Visual art was far from being a flight from reality. He would quote good-naturedly the head teachers who were given to refer to "messing about in the art room" as a relief from the serious business of life and learning. On the contrary art was for him the closest possible attachment to reality. He was impatient of ideas expressed in the abstract if they could be expressed in concrete terms.

In the matter of art history, I shared with him the conviction that names and dates were not what the art student needed to get out of it. The reason for the enormous success of 1066 and all that, he would say, is that this meaningless rigmarole of names and dates was exactly what history
lessons had meant to so many of our generation. The emphasis was on seeing the works themselves, and if necessary taking a lot of trouble to go to see them.

So ‘visual’ came close to being an opposite to ‘theoretical’. If you could see it, you could see if it was true or if it worked. He often reminded me of William Cobbett reeling in the sturdy English prose of his *Rural Rides* the evidence that he saw with his own eyes, often belying the commonly accepted reports on the state of the countryside.

Clifford shared with Cobbett a marvellously earthy realism. Although he never claimed literary style, his vocabulary was full of old, concrete English words which he would use with deadly accuracy. This vivid vocabulary, combined with an ability to read visual forms which I have never known equalled, could lead to brilliant interpretations of images, and indeed of all visual things. He once described the shapes in Toulouse Lautrec’s paintings as “spiteful”. I protested that he was reading into them what he knew of the artist’s character, but he replied “No - think of the rounded, generous shapes of Stubbs,” and his meaning at once became clear.

This realism led him, as a teacher, to a constant study of what motivates a child, what he or she can be expected to understand. And because of his acute sense of the transience of social values and conventions, he would see how both the child’s background and the teacher’s classroom habits of mind could interfere in the teaching process.

This came from his own experience. He was a lifelong student of the patterns of behaviour in plants and animals, and he saw human nature as an extension of nature itself. (“Is the adolescent, on occasion, a special kind of animal?”, Para 11).

He could watch the activity of a child, in a classroom or outside it, as attentively as he would observe the behaviour of a tortoise. There was no intention of getting the child to conform to a set pattern - or, as he would have said himself, to conform to his idea of what the pattern should be. He wanted to understand why the child or the tortoise acted as it did. So he writes not about “the students” but about Betty, Lydia and William. And the introduction of the students themselves to teaching (which he describes in Para 18) was on the same principle. They were each given only two children to observe in classes taken by Academy lecturers, so that they were free to concentrate their attention on the way different individual children responded to the same school situation.

There was no place in this philosophy for art teaching that imposed a method or provided recipes for pupils to follow. The art teacher’s task was to create a sympathetic environment, to open windows, to point to avenues along which young people could explore the world and, in doing so, discover and develop their own personalities. The teacher was to be like a gardener tending plants, giving them the light and nourishment they needed to flourish.

What, then, about the charge that Corsham produced incompetent amateurs? Clifford was concerned above all not to allow Betty's or Lydia's initial enthusiasm, her core of personal talent, to be submerged under ready-made recipes and received knowledge (whether on how to draw or how to teach). In her paintings he would look out for the recording, however tentative, of a genuine visual experience. The other side of this coin was of course the risk that the important business of acquiring skills was crowded out.

The biggest problem was the shortness of the course. I was always conscious that two years was a very short time for Clifford's programme. Few people will quarrel with this, particularly since it was the weaker students that could not be kept on for a third year.

There were no recipes that would have provided a safe haven for them, like the rules of thumb of a military training. The course was an invitation to developing independent thinking, an incitement to open-mindedness.

In the third year especially, the emphasis was on individual studies. The subjects were always adapted to the particular talents and interests of William and Lydia, and tied to the realities of time and place, whether it was where William was going to be in the holidays or where Lydia was going to do her teaching practice. And the place might have a museum or interesting house or factory or mine nearby, or it might have some historical association worth investigating.

The study had to be made visually and at first hand. This in itself meant that there was always room for genuinely original discoveries to be made by an active and intelligent student.

The race was to the swift, and Corsham's successes were some truly inspired teachers. I
caught occasional glimpses later in a study we made of senior school children and their responses to painting, because some of them were being taught by former students.

As to the initial selection of students, I doubt if there is any means of saying whether Clifford's method was more or less successful than others. How can we know what would have happened to those who were rejected if they had been accepted? But the basis of selection, and indeed the reason for Clifford's starting the training course at all, were perfectly clear. He realised that many art students began with the idea of devoting their lives to art but found in the end that the only way they could earn a living by it was to teach it in schools. Unfortunately the familiar aphorism "those who can, do; those who can't, teach" was a deadly summary of the state of much of the profession before the war. So the schools were being served by people who had no vocation for teaching and often resented doing it.

Hence Clifford's determination to train people who were committed to working as teachers from the outset. I think that what mattered to him most was a real concern for children combined with a humble readiness to understand things by looking at them (hence the section of a cabbage and the self portrait, see F. Paras 5, 6).

Yet you cannot encapsulate a complex mind as easily as this. I asked Clifford once whether he thought the Douanier Rousseau or Camille Bombois would have made good art teachers, and he replied instantly "Yes, brilliant." He implied not that teachers had no need to be trained, but that children would respond to active and creative minds of this calibre. I had asked him about specific artists, and as always his reply was to the specific question. As for permanent influence, Clifford himself would have seen his work as taking its place in a continuing process, pushing forward ideas that were constantly evolving. In this process his influence was on the immediate present and future, on the next generation. He was fond of quoting Sickert's retort when it was suggested that students needed to study the old masters as the child needed to take in its mother's milk. Sickert said: "Yes, mother's milk, not grandmother's milk."

To define Clifford's place in the history of art teaching in this country, we would need to look at comparative dates. The Corsham course as he established it in 1946 already had built into it a first-year foundation course and art history and complementary studies. I never heard him speak of the Bauhaus but I would be surprised if he was not influenced by the ideas of Walter Gropius. My impression is that these ideas were only introduced into normal art schools on the recommendation of the National Advisory Council on Art Education, formed under Sir William Coldstream in 1958.

But I suspect that it may be more important to look at more recent ideas on general education, since, as I have said, Clifford's ideas were as much about education in a very wide sense as they were about drawing and painting. The importance that is now being emphasised of the child seeing for himself, of learning from first-hand experience, puts visual education on a quite different footing from 'messing about in the art room', and brings it much closer to what Clifford envisaged.

One thing at least remains to be said. From the early days of their marriage Clifford and Rosemary Ellis had signed their designs "C & R E", to indicate the nature of their partnership. It was the kind of partnership that is nowadays almost unknown in art and occurs only very rarely in any sphere. It was as much part of the essence of the Academy as it was of the rest of Clifford's work.

V THE UNESCO ARTICLE

James Tower

The questions about Corsham made me nostalgic for those days which seem far off now. It is difficult to be analytical about what went on there or what Clifford's philosophy was really about. I will try to answer a few main questions. It was very important to him that the tutors practised their art, that older artists worked alongside younger artists, the students. That they actually painted or sculpted or potted alongside and with students. This was a reality at Corsham, and I never saw similar insistence at other places, quite the reverse. This was very important in generating a sense of professional dedication to art which pervaded the whole community. One felt it to be a real duty to be working and exhibiting professionally. This atelier system probably derived from Sickert, who was close to Clifford in the early 1940's, and who was of course associated with Degas and the Impressionists.
Clifford as a benevolent autocrat. This was probably true in a general sense, the ordering of the visual environment at Monks and Beechfield was totally his. The general sweep and direction of the Academy was his.

In my own relationship with him as teacher I found him liberal and supportive. We discussed the direction of the work in the Pottery from time to time, and he left me completely free to develop the concept I had of work stemming from the English tradition of Slipware and Tin-glaze painting - as opposed to the prevailing Chinese orientation via Leach. He was always helpful and appreciative of the work done in the Pottery.

I think he felt basically that all arts were one, and did try to develop the links between one media and another and this was important at Corsham, the absence of separation between one media and another.

The tutors certainly worked across the whole range - the people who worked in Pottery included Peter Lanyon, William Scott, Peter Piotrowski, Rosemary Ellis, Bernard Meadows, Howard Hodgkin and many others. I think it must be emphasised that Clifford was very knowledgeable about the English Arts and Crafts movement and often spoke admiringly of the various craftsmen he had known and were part of it. He was most appreciative of my work and the environment I created in the Pottery as he was of every artist's own environment in their studios, all quite different. This Clifford fostered and felt it was vital for the student's education.

One important thread running through the Academy was the importance attached to the exhibition, both as an aesthetic exercise and a learning and appreciating activity.

We were always engaged in making exhibitions, either of current work of tutors and students, or of historical surveys of a technique or craft or even a biological nature. These exhibitions were prepared by the students as much as the tutors and certainly an enormous amount was learned by students about aesthetic arrangement. It was this experience at first hand of aesthetic judgment that Clifford attached so much importance to. Even the grand parties at Christmas and so on, were an occasion for aesthetic diversity and understanding in terms of costume, decoration, colour and aesthetic ingenuity.

It can almost be said that Clifford's philosophy was entirely an aesthetic one. That the major values of life were aesthetic in nature, that what was beautiful and good to look at or listen to was the justification of life, and it was the duty of the artist and teacher to spread these values throughout society.

An important influence on Clifford was Madame Langevin. She lectured several times at the Academy and Clifford was very enthusiastic about her ideas and methods in the teaching of children.

Finally, I taught at Corsham for eighteen years. It was a very formative and happy period of my life. Subsequent teaching experience was infinitely poorer in quality, the lack of vision and design was noticeable. At Corsham we were very conscious, that as teachers, we were breaking new ground, and that it was Clifford who provided the incentives and the setting for this to happen. I personally am very grateful to him that he enabled me to realise my ideas as an artist and a teacher in such a beautiful and intellectually sympathetic environment.

VI THE UNESCO ARTICLE

Henry Boys

Para 1. To me the whole article is recognisably Cliffordian, an accurate and honest account of his mind, point of view, intentions and practice. It also shows the quality of those qualities.

Do I think that Clifford was a realist and an opportunist? Yes, with a reservation: isms and ists applied as labels in an indefinite context to a mind as well stocked, searching, many-sided, enquiring, flexible, individual and critical as C.E.'s can only too easily give misleading impressions and limiting interpretations of his make-up. Yes, if realist means that he had the sightedness as so many paragraphs of the article show, to realise the actuality and practical needs of situations, and if opportunist means that he had the common or as G.K.Chesterton would have it, uncommon sense to make use of the opportunities that came his way. These qualities were very useful, even basic, for his role as Principal. These faculties were evident in the legend of the foundation of Bath Academy of Art at Corsham as told to me by Isabelle Symons, which is probably true and certainly characteristic. When C.E. and Paul
Methuen met one day Clifford asked him why he was looking so glum. Methuen said "I think the time has come when I shall have to hand over my place to the National Trust." Clifford replied, "Instead of a dead museum, why not make it a living art school?" That this idea came at the right time is shown by the success of its acceptance by Bath Corporation and Bristol University and by the calibre of artists and students attracted. I think that as long as the atmosphere was full of life and stimulative and real work was being done and the students were learning what it takes to be an artist and were finding their own individual way to the end, then this was the realisation of his dreams.

Most students, even the gifted, went at first through a process of decarbonisation. C.E. used to say that the rewarding moments were when the pennies began to drop.

Para 2. C.E.'s standards and values are difficult to define but some of them can be gleaned from the UNESCO article, for instance in the story of Betty and the cabbage and the self-portrait with his comment therein. Whoever thought of this exercise was inspired. I remember a session in the Barn when he commented on each of many paintings by children exhibited there. His readings of them, both aesthetically and psychologically were a feast of insights and for me an object lesson in how to look and see. All were given serious attention.

Para 3. C.E. was very much aware of the needs of people at a certain time and in such and such situation and climate of ideas. He had a marked gift for empathy with the art of historical periods and contexts. Tremendous changes in the languages of all the arts had been happening since the end of the last century, and in painting reached the general public in England with the Post-Impressionist Exhibitions of 1908 and 1910. Much development followed, yet in general the public remained indifferent or antagonistic. C.E. knew very well that this was the authentic tradition as distinct from traditionalism. Forty years after those exhibitions, he started his school to rectify matters. I think that the principles, attitudes and ideas emanating from it, made a great and influential impact.

My point here is that a man with this task and those views would imagine that the ways and means and methods suitable for transmitting to students of his time, would not necessarily be suitable for another set of generations. Perhaps we may assume that some teachers who were taught at Beth Acedemy of Art and had kept up with their times, had the ability to invent their own ways and means. C.E. would have approved if it worked.

Paras 12-21. Except for the periods of their teaching practice and the preparation for this, the teacher training students partook of the same atmosphere, were tutored by the same
distinguished artists, attended the lectures by staff and by authoritative visitors and visited the same splendid library that C.E. had built up. Very important to C.E. and valuable to students, was that they should all be given a comprehensive mind-broadening education in the art-forms of the European past and their context. Through visits to places where the work can be seen as stimulating to the creativity of the artist as it is to the research of the historian. I am not implying that contemporary art was left out.

It is difficult to imagine a school that could offer a greater abundance of opportunities for the young artists or teachers. I think we all learnt from one another. As Howard Hodgkin wrote in a letter to The Times, I think, "It was a little university." He told me not long ago that he is often asked what it was like to be at Corsham, so its legend still persists.

Para 22. Yes, I do agree with the statement 'but he will be an art teacher only in so far as he is an artist'. It was basic in, if not the basis of C.E.'s philosophy of art education - very important to him. He wanted all of his students to catch and assimilate, in whatever degree they were able what being an artist really means. How can one transmit to others what in fact one hasn't got?
own struggles to realise their sensation. The Degas-Mallarmé story in his Unesco article is
typical. In the same way many a great musician
was adept in the memorable riposte, analogy,
image or metaphor which can startle into
understanding and insight immediately, or much
later, and can be understood on different levels
according to the experience of the student. The
experimental knowledge they carry seems to me
to be worth more to a student artist than the
cultivation and belief in any theory, which is
always relatively closed and, as Leibniz pointed
out, perhaps useful in what it affirms, though not
in what it denies.

5 C.E.'s strength lay in the rare balance of his
mental, emotional, practical functions plus total
commitment. He could always rely upon the help
of his wife Rosemary as committed, unflagging
and imaginative as he in her work for Bath
Academy of Art. A chief aim of theirs was for
students to graduate from the inevitably imitating
phases to find and develop their own genuine
independent line of work, and through self-
criticism to see in it relation to a broad, well-
formed context.

7 I am sure Peter Potworowski's presence was of
very special value to both staff and students but
I must defer to the painters and others to speak
of his work and teaching, except to say that I
would love to possess a painting of his! He was
the first member of staff I was introduced to.
When he came round to see us as he often did,
he nearly always asked me to play Satie, who
was then to the vast majority of English music
fraternity hardly worthy of consideration, but for
Peter his music seemed to have provided the
'strange consolation' which T.S. Eliot once
ventured to suggest that we can say for the
indefinable function of poetry. However that may
be, it was a great good fortune to have known
him, and, I would think to have been taught by
him. Though trespassing I can't forbear to say
that I think of him as a truly great painter.

There were always at Bath Academy of Art a few
members of staff or other faculties who were
interested in music, some very well-informed
and/or, more rarely, executants. Before the
demise of teacher-training Music students had
that golden opportunity to collaborate actively
with Helen Binyon and her puppeteers by
composing the music for their excellent shows,
and to a lesser extent with Riette Sturge-Moore's
drama group. These collaborations were of
great benefit to all involved. With the end of
teacher-training these particularly valuable
opportunities for music students ceased. I was
not the only one at Corsham to take the view that
the demise was a very great loss. One of the
Professors of Education at Bristol University
lamented it too, and he was not an artist of any
sort. He spoke, however, as an enthusiastic
admirer of the course, but nobody could have
halted the malign influence from outside.

There was also among the budding teachers, a
certain esprit de corps which C.E. wished for
them, without their becoming anything resembling
a herd. I cannot remember any idiotic prejudicial
splits with other students, so regard the teaching
course as a benign influence on the harmony of
Bath Academy of Art.
VIII EXTRACTS FROM A TAPE INTERVIEW WITH CLIFFORD ELLIS, 1981

The following extracts come from a taped interview given by Clifford Ellis in 1981 to Lucy Havelock at the Imperial War Museum. I have edited from the transcript information that has particular relevance to the story of Bath Academy.

The tapes are part of a series called Artists in an Age of Conflict, the copyright of which is held by the Imperial War Museum (Department of Sound Records, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ) ...Ed.

LH: Can you tell me about your childhood Mr Ellis?

CE: I lived in Sussex near Arundel with my grandparents during the First War because my father was in the Army, my mother had a sister and younger brother. I was very lucky in this because he was a real countryman, he was a taxidermist and knew a great deal about different things. Every Sunday morning he and I had a great campaign to escape from my grandmother who would have taken us to church and we went off with the dogs for a walk. Otherwise, if we were caught, the dogs would sit in the church porch and complain.

LH: Did you have an early interest in art, painting and so on?

CE: Yes. I liked drawing and of course I was learning about the subject matter all the time from my grandfather. There was another influence and that was my uncle who at that time was in the Army, he got badly wounded on the Somme and his Commanding Officer was a Constable, Constable the brewers, and he asked my uncle what he thought of doing when the war was over. My uncle didn’t know and so Constable said ‘Well, you’d better do something I have been longing to have done and that is to paint my pub signs.’ At that date they were rather dreary things, so my uncle gave the rest of his life to improving the look of West Sussex, painting Constable pubs signs everywhere. Unluckily they are fugitive things and so I expect they have all gone except one or two that were brought indoors.

LH: Why did you decide to follow artistic training then?

CE: Well, I think this is what happens in families, my uncle had done it and my grandfather did amateur paintings of birds and animals and this was as interesting as anything to do.

LH: Where did you go to study art?

CE: I went to the Regent Street Polytechnic first of all. Later on to University College not to do art but to do Archeology. But I suppose one of the most important influences was that I refused a scholarship to the Royal College because instead of that I wanted to go to what was then called the London Day Training College which is now more grandly called the University of London Institute of Education. I went there because there was a marvellous teacher responsible for the course, only just responsible for it, Marian Richardson. I worked with her for two years and we were a very small, select group of students, five in one year and I think eight in the next. So she not only told us a great deal but took us to places and we met all sorts of interesting people.

LH: Like who for instance?

CE: Well, an obvious case is Roger Fry who was the person for young artists to meet then. He would produce all sorts of things, I think I told you he produced a roll of newspaper and inside it there was the most beautiful watercolour, of the kind one had never seen before, real watercolour like William Blake’s idea of watercolour. ‘And I stained water clear’ and this was based on letters in a German poem, this was a painting by Paul Klee, it was the first time ever one had been brought to England. So this of course was a very exciting influence.

LH: How did Marian Richardson’s ideas about child art affect your own?

CE: Well, fundamentally. Not at all at one go. I was quite resistant to it for some while. In the end of course it was seeing what she was talking about in the things one looked at and especially the things that children were doing.

LH: What particularly were her ideas?

CE: Well, they are dateable. She went with her mother when she was still eighteen or nineteen to Roger Fry’s Post-Impressionist Exhibition and suddenly recognised there things that were, she thought, akin to things she had been trying to do for
children. In her conversation she would constantly refer to Post-Impressionist painting, what was then called Post-Impressionist painting and it might as well have been something else, but it wasn’t because that was the date she lived.

LH: You met Thomas Hennell, didn’t you?

CE: Yes, he was a fellow student with me. Also another resister of the things that Marian Richardson was saying. I remember the scorn, as he condemned anyone holding the idea that you expressed yourself. You don’t do that, you express the tree or whatever it is you are drawing. He changed his views later on, but he was, it is interesting, a countryman who liked landscapes painted by Constable, Turner, Claude and it was a long time before he had any kind of toleration for contemporary French painting.

LH: Can you remember your first meeting with him?

CE: Well, I don’t think one could forget it. He was exceptionally tall, he was 6’3”, with a not very strong spine I imagine - he stooped rather. He had very loose joints and very long limbs - almost like an animated scarecrow. He had odd garments, mostly ones which he had inherited from his father who was a parson, so he had an enormous overcoat. When his father had a new overcoat made he would tell the tailor that he wanted a serum pocket inside the coat big enough to put a hare in. These were weather-beaten garments. I should think the place where he was most at home wasn’t his part of Kent, even though that was remote, but Ireland at that time. He loved going to Ireland. They’d had troubles of course, immediately before that. So anything which was in any sort of disorder he’d acquired the vocabulary from Ireland and it was a rebellion. His work table was in a muddle. He was interested in rebellion.

LH: You shared a flat with him for two years?

CE: Yes, we shared a flat on the edge of Hampstead Heath and from there we used to walk anywhere we wanted to go, a habit which I retained for a long while. If we got fed up with London we’d walk home. He’d walk back to Kent and I’d walk back to Sussex through the night as the easiest way of doing things, in fact I never used public transport in London except taxis. Most of the time I walked. If there was not time to walk it then I got a taxi. In fact it is a very good thing - I’m the only member of this family who has no car and it is much cheaper to take a taxi than to run a car.

LH: At the time you were sharing a flat were you at Regent Street Polytechnic or were you at the Institute of Education?

CE: Well, during the first part of the time I was at the Institute of Education and then my first job was at Regent Street Polytechnic. I taught there for a year or so and then I had a menance from the then Principal who said that if I mentioned the name of Cezanne to my students he would give me the sack. So as soon as I could I left.

LH: So, if you weren’t allowed to mention Cezanne’s name, whose name were you expected to mention?

CE: Well, I don’t really know but I suspect it would have been one of the more popular Royal Academicians. I don’t think it matters. It was just that Cezanne or anything which was not comfortable was viewed with alarm.

LH: Can you tell me how you got your first poster commission? Greater London Transport?

CE: Yes. I think it was from financial necessity. We got married, Rosemary and I, in 1931 and very soon afterwards we were going round the National Gallery and she felt horrible pains and I got her home and got her doctor and she got in a surgeon and they said that she had got appendicitis and had to be operated on at once. The doctor took me aside and asked me how much money I’d got and I told her, so it linked up like that. So a set of four posters for the London Underground in those days, before National Health, was just right as payment for her operation for appendicitis.

LH: Were you collaborating on these posters?

CE: Yes, we certainly were then and we did on most jobs ever after.

LH: Can you tell me how you worked the collaboration out?

CE: It is very difficult to say - it was flexible. If Rosemary did most, initiated and carried most of the thing through her name went first and if I did my name went first. Latterly she has been doing a lot of photography which goes in her name and some of that, because I am not a photographer, she has done with our eldest daughter and so their names go on jointly...

LH: ...In 1936 you moved to Bath and became Headmaster of Bath School of Art. How did that come about?
laughed and laughed and he said, "You know before I came to the British Museum I was working in the cast department of the Victoria and Albert and there is not any cast sold from there which is not made from moulds we ourselves had made except there is a little bit of the tummy of the Boy pulling the Thorn from his foot" which is sufficiently protected by the shape of the thing to be the original Brucociani mould...

LH: ....When did you first meet Sickert?

CE: Before the war. He came to Bath, I think early in 1938. I think I have written it down.

LH: It says here March 1939.

CE: Oh well, that's it then, I looked it up. He had hardly arrived in Bath when he wrote to me, and it's a marvellous letter, saying that in due course he will be gathered to his fathers and it would be a pity not to offer to come to my establishment to tell people of the people he'd been fortunate enough to know and then he lists the great French contemporaries and one thing that I think is very interesting now, that on no account should I think of paying a fee because he was really quite well off. He got £100 or even £150 per painting. In this he was helped by his wife.

LH: He came to the school?

CE: As regular as clockwork every Friday morning at 11 o'clock and he'd bring things to show. He soon found that I could do magic because we'd got a machine that is hardly used nowadays called an epidiascope and you put something into it and this blows it up on the screen and everybody can see the things. Quite often they were very serious and well chosen things. Sometimes they were a bit baffling - he brought along one morning a lot of material to do with the Tichborne case which I don't think people nowadays need to know except it's the explanation for the name 'little Titch', because that was part of his music hall delight but a lot of things he said were terribly interesting. While he was looking at one thing he was irritated because out of the tail of his eye he saw something hanging on the wall. This was in fact a lithograph by Duncan Grant in his most Post-Impressionist vein, quite bright bits of colour dancing against one another. Sickert glared at this and he said, "You know, you don't let off fireworks every day. Life is more sombre and more beautiful". Then he tried to think of some way of making this statement clearer and he looked round and he saw sitting next to him his wife, long suffering Therese and he said, "You know, it isn't done to say that your wife is dowdy but she is, isn't she? She has got that dark almost dirty red ribbon around her hat and a hat that isn't quite black and that non-descript grey coat and that grey scarf with slightly darker grey flecks in it, but if you go on looking at her and as you look, you realise that this is all relative and that when you see her there and these marvellous colours she has chosen you begin to see the ribbon burns out bright crimson and that scarf is a tiger skin." He was a marvellous talker - he'd think of things like this to say. Also, he did things derogatory to me because although I was much younger, I represented authority and he brought some Daumier lithographs which he'd spent the previous evening happily tearing out of Chiarivari and we put these on the screen, there they were, marvellous Daumiers and on the spur of the moment I had some vague idea it was perhaps just possible, I said, "Did you ever meet Daumier", and he looked at me and he said, "Did you ever meet Adam and Eve?"

LH: You said he was actually there on one occasion when German bombers flew over?

CE: He was on more than one occasion yes, when the war started. You see these first visits were in peace then of course the war started.

LH: They were during the phoney war I suppose?

CE: Yes, no - not at all - during the phoney war we just went on as usual but when the Germans began bombing Bristol, before they bombed London it was rather extraordinary because they were up in the sky, quite high, but so many of them were in strong formation - I don't know - there must have been sometimes sixty or more bombers - one great mass of them - enormous drone of noise coming down and apparently no one on our side doing anything about it and so he then would come out in the garden and look up at them and then he would begin to sing German drinking songs, I don't know how much he believed that he was persuading them he was not a person to molest, I think it was a habit he had formed during the first war when Zeppelins came over, but he didn't like wars. That was when he first came to Bath.

LH: But these bombers were in fact en route for Bristol, were they?

CE: Yes.

LH: Can you tell me of any of your experiences during the Bath blitz in 1942?
CE: Well I didn’t feel that I could go on very much longer at the Regent Street Polytechnic because of the hostility of the then Principal against Cezanne and other recent things or what he thought of as recent, although Cezanne had been dead quite a long time. At Bath there seemed to be an ideal situation for continuing some of the experiments I had been making because there were no art exams, because the pupils were not taking the inquisitive Ministry of Education art exams. They were a different kind of animal, and nor were they doing the - whatever it was called then - the School Certificate G.C.E. and so there were no restrictions in that direction. So we were able to do quite a lot of things I had been longing to do but hadn’t been able to because of the various regulations. It was because of the opportunities there that we were preparing the way for what came later on, for example when the war ended and I had to think what was best to do, so we decided to stay somewhere in that vicinity and to continue the work which we had started then in the middle of the 1930’s.

LH: In a letter from Tom Hennell, it was evidently just after you had been appointed, he said that you had had a free rein, and you would be able to carry out all of the ideas that you had in mind. When you went to Bath School what changes or what did you actually want to achieve?

CE: Well, we wanted to do quite a number of things other than preparing people for exams which is all you could do in an art school in England at that time.

LH: How did that affect the curriculum?

CE: It is very difficult to remember now just what the restrictions were but they were terrible. You had to prepare students to draw from a number of specified casts which purported to be from the Antique ..... can I just diverge here for a moment, this is a marvellous thing I would like to tell you. Well, at the beginning of the century art schools obtained their casts from an Italian firm called Bruciani and then when the Board of Education took over the art schools they also took over the making of the casts and installed this as a department of the Victoria and Albert Museum so that they had the art schools under their thumb because you had to draw from specified casts which could be obtained only from the V & A Museum. That meant that in a few years every art school in England was equipped with casts which had been bought from the V & A. It happened that in my first years at the Polytechnic the Headmaster was a more sensitive man than most Heads and he said, “Really I can’t stick that cast of the Standing Discobolus. any longer”, so he sent a letter to the V & A saying would they please provide him with a new cast and after a suitable delay, two years or whatever it was - crates came with the upper and the lower halves of the Standing Discobolus. The school caretaker was instructed to unpack them, to fit them together because they were socketed together at the wrist and when it was ready, to fetch the Headmaster who would come and inspect it. Well he went along to look at it and it was terrible, he took exception especially to the leg on which the weight was carried and he went immediately and wrote a letter to the V & A and said, “Really I can’t accept this cast you sent”. I think there was no answer for some time, he wrote again and after his second letter they said, “What are you making this fuss about? It has been accepted by all the art schools in England for the last twelve years.” Well that was too much for him so he then wrote not to the V & A Museum but to Anderson the photographer in Rome and he said, “Please go to the Vatican Museum and take three photographs of the Standing Discobolus from different points of view and send me life-sized enlargements.” These arrived quite promptly. Manifestly the casts which had been provided by the Victorian and Albert Museum wasn’t in the least like what it purported to be, so then he wrote to the Victorian and Albert Museum again and told them what he’d done. This time they were a bit more alarmed and they sent a fairly high up official to compare their cast and the photographs of the Vatican copy and then obviously something had gone badly wrong. Then for the first time they began to make enquiries and eventually it came out that a wretched man working in the cast department had had the misfortune to break the mould and rather than be found out, he had modelled a leg for the Discobolus, made new moulds, new casts, and these were the things which had been drawn for the last twelve years by all the art schools in England, so all the teaching staff, all the Inspectors, all the Examiners had all accepted this as being the Standing Discobolus.

LH: So there was no drawing from casts at the Bath Academy?

CE: No, but we did do quite a lot of casting, and when we had a great deal to do at one go, we used to augment our staff by getting a man who worked in the cast department of the British Museum. We got to like him and of course it is very much a family matter when you are casting because you have to go on all hours and so he became a member of the family. I was talking to him on one occasion about this incident with the Standing Discobolus so he
CE: Well we had gone over to dinner with Mrs Sickert. Sickert had died earlier - he had died in February and this was towards the end of April. It had got dark and Rosemary and I were walking back. Sickert lived over on the north-east side of Bath and we lived at the top of Lansdown which is north of Bath and in between us there was the whole valley. We'd come back past the lowest part of the valley and were climbing up Lansdown and suddenly - I can't tell you what a shock it was because by that time, this was in 1942, we'd had three years ofichiving and so on, not to show a light, and so at night time it was meant to be dark - suddenly the whole landscape became brilliant and floating slowly down from the sky there was this enormous chandelier of flares. I don't know how it worked because it was very extensive. It seemed to be two hundred yards across and some one hundred feet or so and I don't know what the dimensions really were but it certainly had the effect of making the whole of the hollow containing Bath appallingly brilliantly lit. Then a few minutes later the first bombs began to come down. Although, I believe that most of the bombarding was with incendiary bombs. That is all that hit our house. They rattled down off the roof because Bath being rather basin-shaped, with a low central part and then a rim around the edge, our house was up on the rim, so the bombers were coming across so low that the bombs hadn't any sort of weight behind them and so they bounced off our slates and rattled down into the garden, where our job seemed to be to squirt cold water on the shrubs and things so that they didn't burn and let the bombs burn themselves out. Anyhow we came on up and then when we reached Lansdown Crescent it really was getting very odd because some of the bombers were flying low and machine-gunning. Others were dropping the incendiaries. Occasionally there were these high explosives which were very much intended for definite places, as we found in the morning: Royal Crescent, The Circus and all the landmarks.

LH: Were there a lot of people killed on that night?

CE: Well, I don't know how many people were killed but it sounded much worse than it was, although there were lots of places badly damaged. The interesting thing was that as you came up over the best part of Bath, the work of Wood the Elder and the Younger I think, that was very substantially built with proper masonry, but when we got to Lansdown Crescent, charming though it is to look at, it was a real shoddy building. There was a thin peel of Bath stone, not more than six or seven inches thick and the blast was pulling this off the building and it left behind just rubbish, bits of timber, broken rubble, anything. It was just a marvellous facade. This is another aspect of something. I took a distinguished Italian architect around Bath, anybody who knows Bath from photographs you see from a certain view, but when he actually saw what the buildings were like he said scenography. This is more contemptuous than you might think because it is a technical term used for film sets. I think that perhaps the most interesting thing was that when we got home among the many people who then filled our house was Riette Sturge Moore and she is very imaginative, and she collected my younger daughter, who was the only one there and she had got her started in making something. It meant a lot of banging and so there was a rival banging that they were doing.

LH: The school moved, did it to another site?

CE: The school was, yes, when the war started and our building was requisitioned we were found a block of buildings which the Corporation had bought to pull down and do some municipal housing. It was one of the blocks which the Chairman of the Education Committee, who was a very knowledgeable Bathman said was free from bugs. We looked at a number of similar places... but this is too long a story...

On Lansdown above Bath it was extraordinary how one could see and hear the blitzes on distant places. Bristol seemed to be only next door but I also saw and heard the blitz on Coventry, and this meant that when the blitz occurred on Bath people quite a long way away realised that an especially bad raid was occurring and would feel full of anxiety. I had letters from my friends in the Army who were on Salisbury Plain full of sympathy simply from the sounds they heard...

LH: ...Can we talk about the reopening of the school in 99 Sydney Place after the blitz?

CE: The temporary buildings we had held during the first part of the war were utterly destroyed and everything in them. In fact when I first went down in the early morning the lead of the printing type was dripping from the windows and later the whole of the walls collapsed so we had to go somewhere else and immediately. That very day the widow of Sickert telephoned me and offered her late husband's studios as a temporary place for us to work in so we went there. Then I went on another search of Bath with the Chairman of the Education Committee, who had such a good nose for bugs, but this time he was taking us even far more seriously than the first time
and he found a splendid house in Sydney Place. Sydney Place was built just on 1800 for people who no longer wanted to frequent the public Assembly Rooms but wanted houses with really large reception rooms where they could do their own entertaining. This is on the quadrant of Sydney Place opposite the much more modest quadrant where Jane Austen lived. These were big, grand houses, in fact I think at least two of them, certainly one, was a royal establishment. So we moved in there and were opened officially by Sir Kenneth Clark as he then was.

LH: At your request?

CE: I think so.

LH: You said John Piper was there?

CE: Yes, all sorts of friends were helpful because they knew we had lost everything in the old buildings, so they gave us books and this and that and I had an extraordinary two days because someone pointed out to me that the old Blackheath School of Art had been closed down and had already been blitzed at least once, but a lot of things were still there. We got in touch with the solicitor who was responsible for Blackheath and I drove up to London with two pantechincons and working against the clock we filled the two pantechincons, and drove back again to Bath the evening of the second day. This gave us certain things including oddments like the statutory casts that I have mentioned before that the Ministry required people to draw. The Ministry were very good, they gave us a postponement of ten days because the exams were due to start about then.

LH: Did Piper teach at all or what did he do?

CE: No, he was down this time officially because he had been asked, instructed or whatever it was by the War Artists Committee to come down to draw the war damage done to Bath.

LH: Was he living with you?

CE: Yes, because there weren't so many places you could live in and our house happened to be intact so he mucked in with everybody. We were full of students who had been bombed out.

LH: How long did he stay there doing the commission?

CE: Well to get his drawings done I suppose he was there for a fortnight but he had other bombed places to go on to draw.

LH: Tom Hennell in his letters to you describes some of what he calls fine drawings of Bath blitz which you did in fact. They were the ones of Burke's house Lansdown Place East. Can you remember those drawings?

CE: Yes, I can. Those were bought by the War Artists Committee and then were among drawings that they distributed to different public galleries when the war was over and these went to Somerset apart from the one you have got in the War Museum.

LH: Did you do a lot of drawings at the time of the blitz?

CE: Not a lot because for one thing we were very occupied in seeing that people got somewhere to live....

LH: ....At the end of the war artists like Kenneth Armitage and William Scott, joined your staff in Sydney Place. Starting with Kenneth Armitage how did you meet him and how did he come to work with you?

CE: Very simply, he answered an advertisement.

LH: What do you think he brought to the teaching there?

CE: Well, a great energy and a clear vision as to what he wanted to do, a good grasp of sculptural principles and a lively imagination.

LH: William Scott you had already met?

CE: Yes, we had already met. He came to see me in 1940, I think, I wrote down the exact dates.

LH: How long did he teach there?

CE: Well for a short time in 1940 - I've forgotten, it was the next year, was, it that he went into the Army?

LH: 1941 you said he began part-time teaching at Bath School of Art, and went into the Army in 1942 and returned in 1945.

CE: Yes, that's it. Then he returned to Sydney Place and then we went to Corsham in the next year.

LH: How did you get Corsham, how did you come to go there?
CE: It was one of those flukes which doesn't occur very often. I had been offered a job which was always thought of as a key job in my profession and it seemed a shame to abandon what we had started in Bath so it was a matter of finding somewhere in Beth with a bit more space than we had got then at Sydney Place and I realised that as people were beginning to come back from the war, anything which could be used as housing was going to be used as housing. Then it occurred to me that if we were going to be a residential art college we could do that just as well outside Bath as in it, so I made a mental note of likely places and Corsham Court was top of the list. I telephoned Lord Methuen and asked him what he was going to do when he got rid of the convalescent hospital from Corsham Court and he said he wished he knew, so we arranged to meet the next day and in those few hours of optimism when the war ended, the whole thing was fixed up in something like a week. It couldn't have been done earlier and it couldn't have been done later. So we offered ourselves as a place for students to come the following September, and they came, and we started.

LH: Did you expand the school? Not just physically, did you expand the curriculum, did you change it at all when you moved?

CE: Well, on the whole the other way round because until then the only way that one could hold an art school was to open it to students who were doing the then Ministry of Education exams which I had set my heart against. We managed to persuade the Ministry to start a college for art teachers and we also managed to get the University of Bristol Institute of Education to approve a course which again, we couldn't have done earlier, and we couldn't have done later because later the Bristol Institute was taking over a whole bunch of training colleges, dyed-in-the-wool, and they would never have agreed to anything as innovatory as we wanted, so we were in every way lucky, we had the financial permission from the Ministry and the educational permission from Bristol because we were ahead of the field and so were able to get it started. Once it was started, for a very long time to come we were able to go ahead.

LH: Can you tell me about some of the new members of staff who came to teach there?

CE: Well initially of course we weren't very large. I have forgotten the exact number of students we began with but I dare say it was less than one hundred. Then gradually we increased the numbers, I was resolved never to go to more than two hundred and fifty so that is an intake of a third of that. It is a bit more complicated to work out because there were subsections of it. Anyhow, so as far as regular full-time members of staff or part-time members like William Scott, I don't suppose there were more than half a dozen initially and as the number of students increased we increased the number of teachers. There was always a preponderance of part-time visitors, we could arrange with them that they could come either part-time by the week, which is what William Scott did, or part-time by part of the year which is what Peter Lanyon did. He came for a term and then went back to Cornwall and then wouldn't come perhaps again for another term or two terms. One of the most influential early members of staff, foundation member, who was with us for several years, was a Pole, Peter Potworowski who had been in the Polish Army and then had escaped from Poland across Sweden and eventually reached England. He had lived most of his working life in Paris, had worked in the studio of Leger and knew most of the things that were going on. He was a very very sensitive and appreciative man and a very very good teacher, a miraculous teacher. I gave him one of our so-called studios, these were a whole lot of big Army huts we had taken over and within a week it had been completely transformed into a kind of Polish fairyland. So you just went into this place and you immediately had a different idea as to what your vision was, there was invitation to look visually as an artist looks and it was half translated already into what you could paint. He had a marvellous effect on students because although there were certain things which he felt gave it a Potworowski style nevertheless it suited a whole lot of different people each going their own way. So he was there and he stayed for a long time, for ten years and then the climate changed and he was invited back to Poland, I think initially to have a one man show, but he went and they made such a fuss of him, the grand old man of Polish painting, so he never came back. He was included in the first Venice Biennale in his time there and they were going to make him the grand exhibitor for Poland in the next one, two years later, and I think he was given anything he could, to produce the show for that exhibition. Then of course in the meanwhile the political climate changed and the Poles were told to come to heel and he was told that he mustn't on any account make an exhibition of non-realistic paintings. I think it broke his heart. He had to scratch round and find early work and show those instead of what he had been counting on and he knew that the great moment of his life which so
nearly reached him wouldn't again and so he just died.

LH: You said that he brought an internationalism or a cosmopolitan taste?

CE: Yes indeed, he was a remarkable man. You see, the other thing, which is hard to realise, is that how appallingly insular we were in England. I mean, we were before the war, but then there had been the war. Years of being completely cut off from anything else that was happening and that was why it was such a blow between the eyes when the war ended and the French sent over that marvellous exhibition of Matisse and Picasso, and there had been just nothing. We had so just looked at one another. We hadn't realised how insular we had become, so there he was, he'd managed to have his own private reservoir of something in the mainstream of European painting and he had been very fortunate in the people he had worked with and had seen in Paris.

LH: What about Lanyon?

CE: Peter Lanyon was also lucky because of the man whose name I always forget, Naum Gabo being a comparatively close neighbour in Cornwall and of course Peter had been in Italy doing his war service and although he had been in the Euston Road Group for a time I don't think you would notice that unduly - he had got a much wider view of things.

LH: But his work was quite closely connected with English landscapes?

CE: As far as subject matter was concerned, a bit. But I don't think his interpretation of it at that moment and during the remaining years of his short life, other English painters had caught up with.

LH: What sort of teaching did he do at the school?

CE: Oh, he was a great tonic. I suppose it could be called landscape but it was painting.

LH: You said he brought Gabo's ideas to the school.

CE: Well, Gabo had at least been some sort of inoculation against the more insular way of English working. He was a great talker, Peter, and just his conversations with Gabo must have had a great deal of effect.

LH: His own work changed during the war, didn't it, when Gabo was in Cornwall?

CE: Yes.

LH: Was Peter Lanyon working at Corsham when he was killed, still teaching there?

CE: Yes, he came and went and came and went a bit according to what he was wanting to get done, you see we had been able to make it quite a nice flexible arrangement. Peter would say, "I am committed to having a show next April and so I don't want to come next summer term", or whatever it was. Then he had his show and then he would say, "Well, I would like to teach next term", and somehow one managed to make the necessary arrangements.

LH: What other important figures were there teaching?

CE: Well, I am finding it very difficult to get these different people fixed in their proper chronological order. I should think it was in the third year that ... oh no, I think I have to have time to work these out - they are not people who were there in the first year of our going to Corsham, they would be in the second, third, fourth year after all you see we're starting there in 1946, was it 1948 or 1949, by 1950, but then you see that is beyond the immediate effect of the war period.

LH: Lydia Sylvestri

CE: She was there immediately. She came the first time in 1947 and she came back several times, in fact I am wearing a jumper she knitted for me. She was also the champion woman archer of Italy, a marvellous person. She is a close friend of my elder daughter Penelope, so we know about her in all sorts of ways - she spent last Christmas with us, here. She practised as a sculptor in England and in Italy. Although there are some things I don't particularly like about Marini, nevertheless there he is, he is quite a chap and I think she is better than he is.

LH: Her contribution really was good because she had been a pupil of Marini?

CE: Well, she had been a pupil and she is a strong personality and this is why I think that she is better than Marini, because she has got a much more positive... and he has got a somewhat vacillating thing. There was a person who was there almost immediately after we came to Corsham, in 1947 or at the latest 1948, but I suppose I shouldn't say too much about that because it would upset all the art history of post-war England....
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A CELEBRATION OF BATH ACADEMY OF ART AT CORSHAM
describes the foundation of a unique residential art school that was based in
Corsham Court and the town from 1946-1986. Memories of Clifford Ellis the
founder Principal of the College in his rôle as Head of Bath School of Art, of war-
time Bath and the contribution of Walter Sickert to the school are described.

The major part of this book contains original contributions from ex-students and
staff recounting memories of Corsham and the effect that working with
distinguished contemporary artists has had on their lives and subsequent careers
as teachers, artists or in important posts in art education.

During the brief time the college stayed in this small market town in Wiltshire it
gained an excellent reputation that was acknowledged nationally and
internationally.

Derek Pope, the editor, whose association with the college spreads over many
years was himself a student, a member of staff and finally Principal of the college.