

# *Joe's Travels*

Ashleigh Barrow Books  
Horwich  
2023

Isbn 9789403697543

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot and days of auld lang syne? For  
auld lang syne, my dear, for auld lang syne, we'll take a cup of kindness  
yet, for auld lang syne.*

*Robert Burns*



*Author, Joe and Barney, Queensbury  
1969*

## *How it All Began*

The Whartons have long been associated with border country – with that invisible line in the landscape that runs across bleak moorlands and grassy Dales alike. Maurice Wharton was born in Saddleworth in 1902. In 1949 he married Alice May Fairbank, born in Huddersfield in 1911. They were farming folk and it was a hard, place to farm. Their son Joseph was born in 1950 and daughter Heather in 1952. They were both born in Oldham but lived in Yorkshire – real border folk.

They lived at Nook Farm. It was a bleak spot on the Saddleworth Moors, exposed not only to all weathers, but to the industrial grime of both Lancashire and Yorkshire. Maurice and May decided they needed a healthier environment to raise their young family. May's cousin, a wealthy mill owner from Huddersfield, owned a number of farms. They viewed one in Wales at Bety's-y-Coed and one at Ulverston, before deciding on Higher Ghylls in what was then Yorkshire.

It was a greener, more sheltered, more favoured spot than Nook Farm with a tumbling beck and a variety of wild life not known on the bleak moor tops. It was March 1958 when they moved. Joseph wasn't eight yet. He was to grow up with Pendle Hill and the distant peaks of Ingleborough, Wharfedale and Pen-y-Ghent on his horizons.

Farmers are not great travellers. They can't take holidays – their beasts need tending to whether it's Christmas Day or August Bank Holiday. Maurice never travelled far. He had a day at Blackpool and wasn't over impressed. For Joe things

would be very different. Travel was to be a large part of his life. He didn't need much persuading to set off, whether on a Nile cruise or a walk in the Dales.

I didn't go with Joe on his more adventurous travels round the globe, so this book is about his journeys closer to home. There used to be a programme on the radio called 'Have a Go' with Wilfred Pickles. There was a song associated with it – 'Have a Go Joe'. And Joe would. He would have a go, whether it was exotic food or drink; a tourist attraction; an antiquity; an unexplored cave; an untrodden footpath; an endurance test; a challenge, he was always up for it. He went up in a balloon. He did sky diving. He did parachute jumps. He ran marathons. He set off in his old BMW, with all the dashboard warning lights flashing, in a race to Italy with his son Nathan and a friend. Joe would always have a go.



I first met Joe in the City Bar on Leeds station in 1968. He was introduced to me as Ringo then, a nickname from school, awarded on account of his long hair. Don't know that he particularly looked like Ringo, but I suppose it had to be Ringo if you were naming him after a Beatle, John, Paul or George wouldn't have worked. Although I always knew him as Ringo, I'll stick to Joe from now on.

And he did have long hair, long hair down to his shoulders, until one day we met up with him and he didn't – the long hair was all gone. His hair was no longer long. Myself, my girlfriend Penny and Barney had met up with him for a walk over Ogden Moor near Queensbury. We quizzed him and twitted him about it at great length. A couple of days later we met him in the pub in Leeds. His hair was long again! I hadn't noticed at first. It was Penny who exclaimed:

“Your hair!”

How could it have grown back again so soon? The world seemed to rock on its foundations. Of course it hadn't suddenly sprouted again. He'd never had it cut at all. It was just Joe's sense of fun. The day earlier it had been hidden under a wig.

I was a student at Leeds Library School and Barney, Brian Anderson, was a fellow student there. Barney was a good friend of Joe's. They'd met at school in Settle. He invited Joe down to Leeds. Leeds wasn't then the aspirational city it's since becomes, but the City Bar was perhaps a pointer to where things were going. The menu didn't extend much beyond cheese rolls and beans on toast, but there were carpets, comfortable upholstery, posh wallpaper and framed railway prints.

Barney, myself and two other lads: Pete Kelly, also a friend of Joe and Barney's from Settle and Richard Pitt from Selby had a flat in Cranbrook Ave in Beeston. Joe became a regular visitor. He was far from the life and soul of the party in those days; drank sensibly and was fairly quiet. I guess city night-life and partying was new to him. He was content to observe and weigh things up. His lifestyle was certainly new





*Higher Ghylls*



*Nathan, Joe and Ellie*

to me. He invited me up to the farm, Higher Ghylls. I'd no transport so caught the train to Long Preston and his Dad met me there in his Land-Rover. It was pitch black, nothing to see but the drystone walls rolling past in the headlights. They rolled past fairly slowly. Maurice planted himself in the middle of the road and jogged along as though he was still driving his horse and cart. He'd nothing much to say but I seemed to amuse him,

I'd never been near a farm before. That smell of hay and cow shit was new to me. The cows were still inside. I could hear them coughing and stirring in the shippon. Lambing had started and there were a few sickly ones in the kitchen draped at the foot of the Aga, where the heat might revive them. Joe's Mum was gracious and hospitable. She'd cooked a good dinner of meat pie and vegetables. This was before Joe's vegetarian phase.

I moved to Blackburn in 1971 to work at the library there. Geraldine Wilson worked with me. Her husband Dave worked at Brockhall Hospital and a few of the staff from there used to meet on a Friday night to tour the pubs on the Barbary Coast. Joe sometimes joined us and thus got to know not only Dave, but Les Perry, Gordon Rawling, Keith Catlow and some others. Sometimes when the pubs closed, we went on to the Top Hat Club, or the disco above the Castle, or the Cavendish night spot.

Unlikely as it sounds Tosside was to become a rival venue for a good night out.

There was no pub at Tosside when I first went there. There had been a temperance hotel run for many years by Matthias Lawson. When that closed it became a horse and donkey sanctuary. That closed too and the place was derelict for a while. Then a licence was obtained and the Dog and Partridge was conjured up. Joe's Mum objected to its presence, but Maurice occasionally called in to nurse a gill. When beer got to 50p a pint though, he gave it up. Joe became a regular.

Roy and Frances ran the pub. There was a dance floor at the back and they started Saturday night discos. Folk flocked from far and wide, including some of us from Blackburn. Les, who had worked at Brockhall, was now at Castleberg in Settle. He came up to the discos from time to time.

Higher Ghylls had never been a paying prospect as a farm. Joe had done other jobs – grave digging, drystone walling, driving the school bus, working on the door at the Dog and Partridge discos. It was Les who put the idea in his mind of applying for a job at Castleberg and it was at Castleberg where he met his future wife Linda.

Joe's situation was starting to improve. He was fulfilling his destiny. His landlord, his Mum's uncle, wanted to increase the rent or sell up. By parcelling out the land Joe raised enough to meet the asking price and get the farm-house and thirty acres for himself. Nathan and Ellie were born. He'd moved on from Castleberg to Calderstones and was doing his training. He was earning reasonable money. The Dog and Partridge was in its heyday. You could drink there all night – go in when it was light in the evening and come out when it was daylight again in the morning. It was the heart of the village and Joe was at the heart of it.