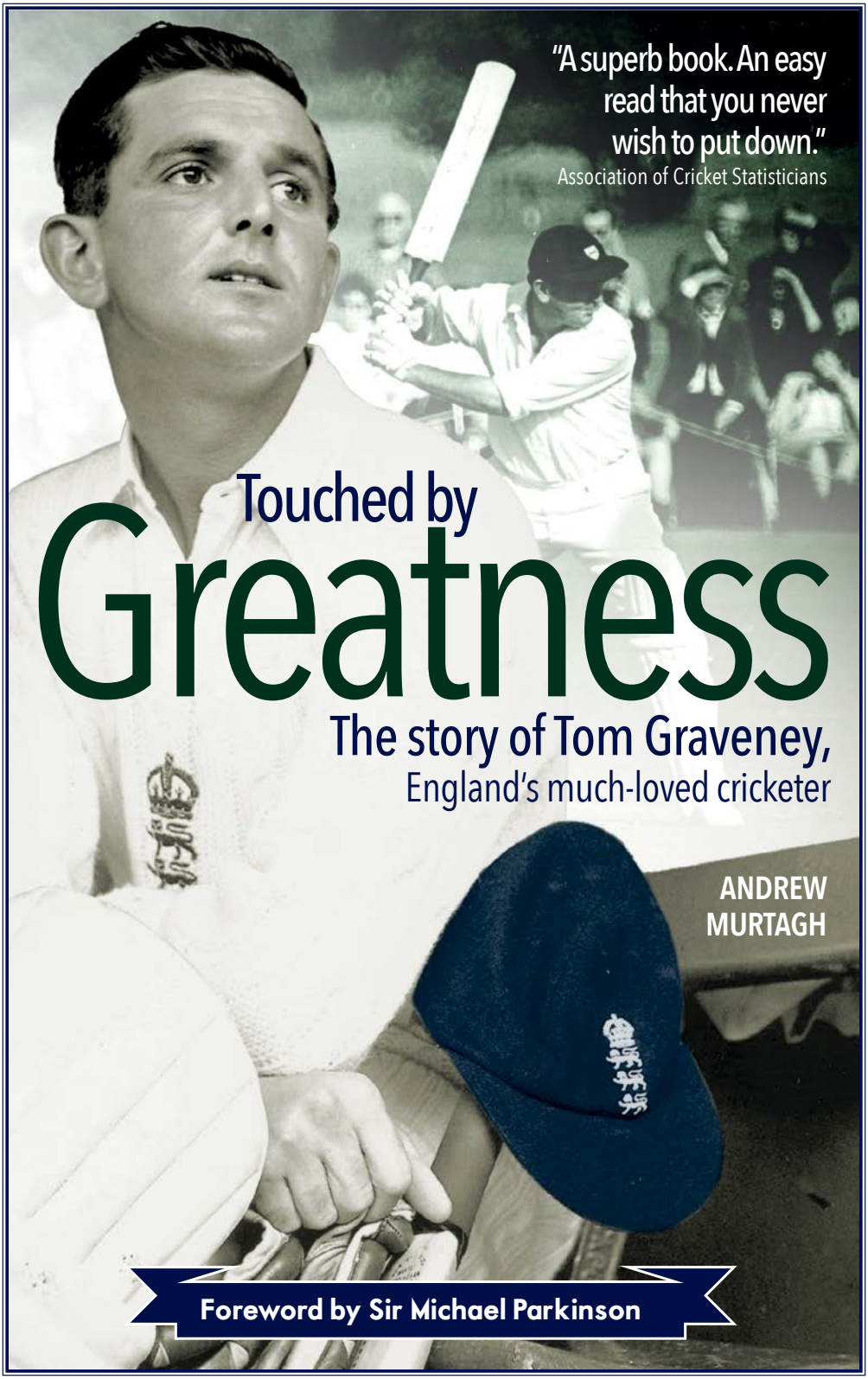
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ANDREW MURTAGH
Foreword by Sir Michael Parkinson

Touched by Greatness

The story of Tom Graveney, England's much-loved cricketer

ANDREW MURTAGH

pitch

Contents

1

Early Days 1927–45

'Did you ever smoke, Tom?'
'Yes, I did. Gave up when I was five.'

'Yer gan oot tha dor, oop tha rerd an farl in tha hurl.'

I beg your pardon, Tom?

'Yer gan oot tha dor, oop the rerd an farl in the hurl.'

I had no idea you could speak Anglo-Saxon.

'It's Geordie, mun. A lot of people forget I was born in Northumberland.'

A lot of people forget; in fact I would go as far as to say that a lot of people didn't know that Tom Graveney is actually a Geordie, born in Riding Mill, a small village between Hexham and Newcastle, in 1927. I guess that most people, myself included, had it in their mind's eye that Tom Graveney, with his ruddy cheeks, his open face and his genial demeanour, was the archetypal West Countryman, his roots deeply embedded in the green grass of Gloucestershire's cricket grounds.

'I supported Newcastle United as a boy,' he said by way of affirmation. 'Still do, in fact.'

Fair enough. I wasn't going to take issue. They are all a bit emotional and volatile up there, especially where their football is concerned.

It transpires that Tom does not actually come from old Northumberland stock – 'To tell you the truth,' he confessed with a grin, 'those are the only words of Geordie I know' – but from antecedents firmly based in London.

His father, Alfred John, known to everyone as Jack, was actually a chorister at St Paul's when a schoolboy, and it is difficult to imagine a more London background than that. Jack married comparatively late in life, to Mary Bella Strachan, who was 15 years his junior. She came from a solid country background – her father ran a local pub – and was a brilliant cook, according to her son.

We all think that no one can cook as well as our mother, isn't that so, Tom? But Tom had a faraway look in his eyes as he told me this and seemed disinclined to enter into any metaphysical discussion on mothers and sons and Sunday roasts. 'She was a strong woman, you know,' he said at length. 'Must have been to have five children in 12 years. And we were a pretty lively bunch. Sport all day, every day.'

The five in order of age were Margaret, Ken, Tom, Maurice and Dorothy. Margaret died many years ago, Maurice died in 2008 but three are still alive at the time of writing. Dorothy married a rugby player, Gordon Lovell, who was for a while scrum-half for Bristol, and now lives in south Wales. Maurice was a good cricketer and played club cricket to a reasonably high standard but was three years younger than Tom and therefore not as close to him as his other brother, Ken, who was only two years older. By all accounts, Ken and Tom were inseparable as children, and they remain close to this day, sharing a love of all games, particularly cricket.

Of course, in the world of county cricket, Ken Graveney is almost as well known as his brother, having played for Gloucestershire, becoming captain in the 1963 and 1964 seasons. Necessarily, he features large in this account of his brother's life owing to their parallel careers in cricket and to Ken being such a formative influence on Tom, especially

when they were younger. 'Ken is a great man,' Tom said, and then he fixed me with a droll grin that I soon came to recognise as a characteristic expression, 'but very *naughty!* Whenever we came home after playing outside, and I was trailing along ten yards behind, Mum would immediately know he'd been up to mischief.'

Were you ever in trouble yourself? 'Oh no,' he said virtuously. 'I was a good boy.' And again, there was that comical wince, as if to suggest that he wasn't going to admit to anything, whatever others might say.

It seemed to me at this point that it would be a good idea to contact brother Ken to confirm these boyhood memories and to give a different perspective on Tom's early life. That was easier said than done. He lives in Texas and is of course elderly now – two years Tom's senior – and not in the best of health.

To help me, I enlisted the services of Ken's son, David. He and I are old friends, our association going back many years to when we used to play cricket against each other. In fact, on my first-class debut for Hampshire against Gloucestershire, the scorecard makes dismal reading: Murtagh ct Graveney b Sadiq 0. He has never let me forget it. David of course went on to have a successful career for Gloucestershire and Durham and latterly became chairman of selectors of the England team.

'Ah, nephew David,' said Tom fondly when I told him I had contacted him, 'Gloucester had a terrific record with the Graveneys as captains, you know. Sacked all three of us!' Hmm, now there's a story for a later chapter, I thought. 'That's right,' confirmed David. 'My father got the bullet too. He's had three wives, you know, so you could say that Dad has had a…*full* life!'

So it came to pass that a transatlantic telephone conversation was scheduled and a slightly tremulous but unmistakeably Graveney voice came on the line. 'Those

games of cricket we used to have outside the back door,' said Ken. 'You know, I could never get the little blighter out!' It was abundantly clear to the elder brother that the intransigent batsman at the other end of the pitch was possessed of a rare talent, even at that early age.

'He had a level of hand-eye coordination that was exceptional. It allowed him to play the ball off the wicket. He would hook the world's fastest bowlers off the front foot! I remember once when…' He then went on to marvel at some of the innings that Tom played in his career, all of which will be appraised in later chapters.

I gently tried to steer Ken back to their childhood. 'I was the rebel, you know.' I had guessed as much. 'Tom was the gentle one. He wasn't as competitive as me.' Now that surprised me. Of course Tom was competitive. You can't become one of the world's best batsmen without competitive blood coursing through your veins. But Ken was adamant. Perhaps it was just a question of degrees, not absolutes.

'All three of us were very different, you know,' Tom told me. He paused, and I expected him to give me a thumbnail sketch of each brother, his strengths, weaknesses, personality traits and emotional contrasts.

But no. Listen to this quick analysis of the Graveney boys: 'Ken bowled fast, right hand and batted left-hand. Maurice was a slow left-armer and batted right-hand. And I bowled and batted right-handed. Curious, eh?' I laughed out loud. If ever there was any doubt in my mind that here was a man whose whole life had been informed by his love of cricket, then it was banished in that instant. And that suited me down to the ground. It reminded me a little of me, as it happens.

Jack was an engineer who worked for Vickers Armstrong, situated on the Tyne, which explains the move up north from London. 'He made the 16-inch shells for the battleships *Rodney* and *Nelson*,' said Tom proudly. 'Look – one's over

there.' I cast my eyes around his small, cosy sitting room in his house in Cheltenham but could see nothing that resembled an instrument of death and destruction. Trophies, cups, silver salvers, cricket memorabilia abounded but no ordnance from a mighty ship of the line.

'There,' he pointed, 'the lamp stand.' There it was indeed, bronze, diligently polished and gleaming in the morning sun, acting as a base for a lamp, a thing of strange, stark beauty, notwithstanding its deadly function. I was impressed. Of course it wasn't a 16-inch shell – they are nearly as big as a man – but a three-and-a-half-inch shell used for a smaller gun but it looked lethal enough.

Maybe HMS *Rodney* had not fired this particular shell during her pursuit of the German battleship *Bismarck* in May 1941 but she must have fired many similar ones in one of the most famous naval engagements of the war. I fell into a reverie. *Sink The Bismarck* was the first ever film I had seen and as a young boy I had been fascinated by this story and other accounts of momentous clashes of iron leviathans at sea.

'Keen sportsman he was. Golfer, cricketer, anything.' Tom brought me back to the here and now. Idly, I assumed he was not referring to Prussia's Iron Chancellor, or to the brave commander of HMS *Rodney*, but to his father. 'Never without a fag in his mouth, rolling it from one side to the other.'

Did you ever smoke, Tom? This was not such an odd query as it might seem. Extraordinary to relate, especially from the perspective of these disapproving and health conscious times, many first-class cricketers *did* smoke in those days. 'Yes, I did,' he replied, without missing a beat. 'Gave up when I was five!'

I looked up from my notepad. His eyes were twinkling. 'It's true. Five I was when I had my first drag and there and then I decided it wasn't for me. It was all Ken's fault.'

What had happened was that their father had decided to pay the two boys a visit when they were away at Cub Scout camp in Wallsend. He was clearly a man of style because he arrived in a sleek, chauffeur-driven Armstrong Siddeley. What other car would it be for an employee of Vickers Armstrong?

With carefree benevolence, he handed the two boys 6d each, for sweets he naively believed. Ken had other ideas. He immediately went to the nearest tobacconists and purchased five Woodbines for tuppence. With commendable fraternal consideration, he encouraged his younger brother to light one up. It was not a success. 'He did me a favour really,' Tom said, 'I never touched another cigarette again.'

Another early memory he has is that the two of them used to have wrestling matches at home in front of guests before they went in to dinner. 'We were the cabaret, you could say, the warm-up act.'

Who won? He wasn't saying. 'But I do recall the golf match we had to play, with a brand-new golf bag from my dad as the prize.' He remembered who won that tussle all right. They played with special, cut-down clubs and Ken won – two and one. 'He got the bag and I got nothing,' Tom said ruefully.

An important lesson learnt early – first is first and second is nowhere. Any professional sportsman has to embrace this ruthless philosophy to succeed and Tom did not score 4,882 Test runs without having the cold glint in his eyes of the hired gun. The trick that he mastered, and this conundrum I hoped to tease out of him over the succeeding months of our conversations, is that he managed to do it with such an easy-going and good-natured personality. His enemies in the game were apparently thin on the ground. And how did he manage to convince even his brother that he wasn't competitive?

He ran away from school. I seized upon this proffered piece of information with eagerness as evidence perhaps of a future rebel and an anti-authoritarian figure. 'It was my second day,

at break time. Hated it.' He remembers running home in a desperate race with his brother, who had been deputed to keep an eye on him, to reach the comforting and enfolding arms of his mother before Ken caught up with him. But it was but a blip on a generally happy childhood; he maintains without irony that his schooldays were enjoyable ones. 'How could they be anything else,' he averred, 'with all that sport?'

The family moved to a bigger house in Jesmond, a suburb of Newcastle, near to Northumberland Cricket Club, where a lot of good Minor Counties cricket was played. He remembers being taken to watch visiting touring teams at Sunderland, including India, South Africa and Australia and was struck by players such as 'Chuck' Fleetwood-Smith, Len Darling and Bill Woodfull.

One incident remains firmly fixed in his mind. The fielders applauded the Australian captain, Woodfull, to the wicket (this must have been in 1934) and immediately retreated to give him one off the mark.

Did they do that to all the incoming batsmen? 'No, only the captain. A gesture of sportsmanship, I suppose, a mark of respect. Extraordinary. Wouldn't happen nowadays.'

Something else that probably wouldn't happen nowadays was that if one of the five Graveney children caught any of the childhood diseases of the day, such as mumps or chickenpox, they were all unceremoniously bundled into the same room in the hope and expectation that the germs would be unselfishly portioned out, the better to build up resistance. It seemed to work. What with all the sport and physical activity, they were a pretty healthy family.

With the exception, that is, of their father. Inevitably, his heavy smoking took a terrible toll and he died of cancer of the lungs at the age of 51, when Tom was only six. Tom remembers the funeral and his bewilderment that everyone seemed to be laughing and getting drunk. His father was a respected and popular local figure and he could not get his

young head around the adult concept of seeing off a good friend with a pint or two and a few cheerful memories. Funerals were meant to be sad and solemn affairs, he thought, and somehow laughter seemed inappropriate.

How did you get on with your dad, so far as you can remember? 'Oh, very well,' he answered without a hint of hesitation. 'He was strict but fair.'

By this time, the family had moved to Fenham, on the Gosford Road. The house backed on to the moor and the two boys, Ken and Tom, helped by their father, used to cut and roll, with great ceremony and labour, a cricket pitch on the grass outside the back door. Endless hours were spent bowling and batting – and fielding, presumably, as the ball needed retrieving after any good shot – while hotly contested matches took place.

What were they? England v Australia? Yorkshire v Lancashire? Northumberland v Durham? He grinned. 'No, just me against him. Tough enough.' *Were you at all aware at this stage of your latent talent?* He shook his head. 'Never gave it a thought. All I wanted to do was play – all day if possible.'

The death of his father did not seem to impact too gravely on the six-year-old. At least, if it did, any emotional repercussions have clearly dissipated over so many years. In any case, the mind at that age is not given to introspection and the water soon closes over unpleasant memories. That is if the family environment is a happy and caring one, which it evidently was.

The period of mourning in the household was not a protracted one. A distant cousin took a shine to their mother at the funeral and in no time at all, it seemed, had taken on the whole family. Bob Gardner was his name. Immediately, a quotation from *Hamlet* floated into my mind, 'The funeral bak'd meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.'

Was Tom, I wondered, equally consumed with resentment of his new stepfather, and his o'er hasty marriage to his

mother, as was the eponymous hero of Shakespeare's most famous play? Not a bit of it. Tom was very fond of Uncle Bob and got on with him famously. In fact, he is full of admiration for him for looking after the family so well.

'To take on my mother, together with five kids, was quite an undertaking. I don't know how we would have coped otherwise.' Tom has nothing but good memories of the man. 'He treated us all very well. I liked him. He was no games player himself but he encouraged us and supported us.' Plainly, there were no family skeletons rattling in this cupboard.

Schooling was at the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle. Tom had no problems settling in and coped well enough with his studies. He spoke fluent Geordie then, he maintains, though there is no trace of the accent left now, of course. 'I'm pretty good at accents, you know,' he told me. 'You should have heard my Queensland accent when I was playing for them!'

Perhaps this talent to mimic accents tells us much about his ability to blend in with his surroundings, to feel comfortable and at home wherever he found himself – schools, barracks, dressing rooms, social gatherings, commentary boxes, committee rooms, pubs. He has always been clubbable man. When I asked him about the masters at RGS and what influence they had on him, he started to giggle. And then out came this, 'Buggy Little did a piddle on the coast of France. Bertie tried to do the same but did it in his pants.' The tears were rolling down his cheeks. 'They were masters at the school,' he gasped. 'Everyone used to sing it. Silly, isn't it? But it still tickles me.'

I assured him that as a former teacher I was well aware of the paroxysms of mirth that naughty little ditties can give rise to in the young. 'Don't put that in,' he implored me. 'Nonsense,' I assured him, 'no one can possibly be offended. Mr Little and Bertie won't come back from the grave and put

you into detention.' By then his chortles had got to me and we had to pause for a while.

The family then moved across the country to Fleetwood in Lancashire where their mother and new stepfather opened a shop, selling anything and everything, from sweets to knitting needles. Tom attended Arnold School, where presumably he soon adopted a Lancashire accent and quickly settled into the sporting ethos of the place, which counted England footballers Jimmy Armfield and George Eastham among its old boys.

It was at this time that his mother suffered a horrific car accident. She was rushed to hospital in Manchester where she remained unconscious for four days. Tom's memories of this time are hazy – he was only seven – but he does say, with sadness in his voice, that though she survived, she was never quite the same thereafter.

By this time, war clouds were beginning to gather over Europe, something of which the young Tom was aware but not so much that it interfered with games. Uncle Bob was a very good accountant and had got a job in the building trade, cranes and suchlike. This explained yet another move for the family, this time to Avonmouth, Bristol, in 1938. In the ensuing conflict, which seemed to be fast approaching, cranes were going to be of the utmost importance in Britain's docks and Bristol was of huge strategic importance to the country.

Tom was sent to Bristol Grammar School. He was now 11 years of age. The first problem was into which of the school's houses he was going to be placed. One of the housemasters gave him a little quiz. If you can spell Strachan House (pronounced 'Strawn', as it happens), then you can come here. Tom knew the answer; of course he did. Mary Bella Strachan (also pronounced 'Strawn') was his mother's maiden name. He rattled off the answer and the die was cast – Strachan House it was and he never looked back.

Was your housemaster a helpful influence on your early life? Sometimes, you know… 'Lovely man. He was a good housemaster and I liked him.' His indulgence of his new pupil must have been sorely tested very early on. First days at a new school did not seem to have a happy effect on Tom. You will remember that he didn't even make it to break on the second morning at primary school. This time he had a fight, with a boy whom he considered was throwing his weight around too much and bullying some poor unfortunate.

Who won? Tom grimaced. 'A score draw, I think you could call it.' He then went on to say that his opponent in the schoolyard scrap later became his best friend. I looked at him but there was no hint of irony in his eyes and not for the first time I wondered at the warm-heartedness of the man. Was there no limit to his affability?

I knew that there had been moments of controversy and bitterness that had stalked his career but it was a mystery to me how any disagreeableness could loiter outside his door – it was always so hospitably wide open. No doubt the telling of the story would eventually unravel the puzzle.

In the meantime, let us delight in a young boy enjoying the opportunities to play sport that came his way at Bristol Grammar School. Rugby was the main winter game and he had never played rugby. He was a round ball man so he was sent to join the spear-carriers on a side pitch, well away from the main stage, for a peripheral game of football. He scored six goals before half-time.

A passing master spotted his potential and he was immediately drafted into the prep school team as scrum-half, a position it was felt best suited his diminutive stature. So it was no more football for him.

Rugby became his game and as he made his way up the school, and he began to shoot up, he was moved into the centres and then to blindside flanker, finally ending up as full-back for Bristol. 'Gloucester soon put paid to that,' he

said ruefully. 'They didn't want one of their players getting injured in the off-season playing a dangerous game.'

Early on, he learned to kick with both feet. He used to enjoy breaking away from the scrum and making darting runs, going for drop goals if ever he was in range. Naturally, he took all the kicks. He played in a good side. Eight of them went on to play for Bristol, and one, Bobby MacEwan, became a Scottish international hooker.

The fixture list was impressive, it has to be said. Opponents included Prior Park, KES Bath, Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, Bristol and Cotham School (who counted among their alumni future team-mates Arthur Milton, David Allen and John Mortimore). The cricket was of a good standard too, he reckoned, and of course he was in the first XI at a young age.

Were you the captain? 'No, a chap called David Dalby was the captain, and a very good one too. He later went on to become the chief executive at Kent.'

How many hundreds did you score at school? He shook his head. 'None, surprisingly enough. I was more of a bowler then, an out and out quickie. Well, *I* thought I was fast!'

Do you remember any of the masters? Your cricket coach? He laughed. 'Mr Tulloch! He had a whistle tied to a length of string around his neck. If you did anything wrong, he'd wheel it around in his hand and catch you on the backside! Good coach though. In fact, I got on well with most of the masters.' Now, there's a surprise.

And how were you academically? 'All right. I was quite bright and coped well enough.' He failed his School Certificate, as it happened, because he narrowly missed out on the pass mark for one of the subjects – English Language – and as the rules applied then, that wiped out the whole exam but he put that right the next term and passed with five credits.

I wondered how the family had managed to pay the fees. His father, with commendable foresight, had set up a trust

before he died which funded his education. 'I thoroughly enjoyed my time at school,' Tom said, finally. 'They were good times and I made many friends in all the teams I played.'

I believe in the truism that team sport engenders friendship and camaraderie. And if you're good at playing games, unless you are a thorough going scoundrel, of course, the respect that you are afforded is usually assured. This may seem unfair to social commentators and champions of equality but it does seem to be an inescapable fact of life. Tom Graveney is patently a case in point. Certainly his childhood was remarkably stable and carefree.

This idyll came to a shuddering halt in September 1939, when war with Germany was declared. Or, to be more precise, it was in November of 1940 when the Luftwaffe turned its attention on the city of Bristol. It was an obvious target, not only for its docks but also because of the nearby aerodrome at Filton, home to the Bristol Aeroplane Company, which manufactured the Blenheim, Beaufort and Beaufighter aircraft, among others.

For the next six months, Bristol took a fearful pounding. Indeed, it was calculated that the city was the fifth most heavily bombed target in Britain during the war, behind London, Hull, Birmingham and Southampton. After one particularly heavy raid, the Lord Mayor of Bristol said, 'The city of churches in one night became the city of ruins.'

Tom was now 13, still not of an age when much introspection is going on but old enough to see and understand what was happening all around. He didn't believe all the good stories and the propaganda pushed out by the news and information services. Coventry had been severely bombed just ten days previously and it had been widely reported by the newspapers. Fearing a disastrous collapse of public morale, the government chose not to make known the full extent of the blitz on Bristol, referring vaguely to a raid on 'a town in the west'.

The evidence of Tom's own eyes told a different story as he made his way daily to and from school in those dark days. He remembers one intense night of bombing and being appalled at the scenes of destruction and devastation the next morning. He has a recollection of exploding bombs getting louder and nearer, one dropping on a property not far up the road from where they lived. An Anderson shelter took a direct hit and all those inside were pulverised. The fuel tanks down in the docks exploded and lit up the night sky. He remembers being on fire-watching duties at school and a visit by Queen Mary just before Christmas in 1940, when he was dressed in his best bib and tucker as a sergeant in the Combined Cadet Corps.

Into the New Year and still Bristol suffered. On 3 January, during a 12-hour raid, a 4,000lb bomb was dropped, the largest in the Luftwaffe's armoury. It did not explode. After being made safe it was dug out (it had penetrated to a depth of 30 feet) and was eventually used in the victory parade in London in 1945. Bristolians gave it the name of 'Satan'.

In March, following yet another heavy raid, a report from the Mass Observation Unit noted, 'People are getting worn out with the continual bombardment in a place where every bomb is a bomb somewhere quite near you and at you. The irregular, sporadic sudden switching of heavy raids here has a strongly disturbing effect.'

The infamous and so-called Good Friday raid was one of the worst, though thankfully also one of the last. The suburbs of the city were hit, probably by mistake, as it was believed that nearby Filton was the target. In all, Bristol was bombed 77 times, 1,300 people lost their lives and the damage to buildings and dwellings was incalculable.

I make these observations – shocking though they undoubtedly are – for no other purpose than to try to gauge the effect of relentless bombardment in a time of war on a 13-year-old boy.

How were you affected, Tom? He shrugged his shoulders. 'You just got on with it, I suppose.' And that was all he said. Or was prepared to say.

Most young boys, no matter how straitened their circumstances, usually find casual opportunity for fun and games. Ken used to collect the most extraordinary and hazardous paraphernalia and hide it all under the house. A city that is being bombed provides rich pastures for the accumulation of the detritus of war, especially for kids with recklessness in their veins and not an ounce of fear in their hearts.

Tom used to follow his brother home on these occasions, trailing the obligatory ten yards behind, not at all sure of the wisdom of some of Ken's additions to his collection. One such was a canister that had been dropped by the Luftwaffe, one of thousands of parachute flares. He had watched it come down and knowing the terrain round about, he knew exactly where it had landed. Careful searching located its whereabouts and, proudly, he bore it home, to take pride of place in the secret stash under the house.

Tom shuddered at the memory. 'God knows what we had under there. Must have been a fire risk. But Ken was like that – fearless.' Ken remembers the occasion well. Apparently he used to collect a lot of these flares that had for one reason or another failed to ignite. He would sell them to the fire brigade at 6d a time. This one was special. The silk parachute was still intact.

Who did you sell that to, Ken? He replied that he had absolutely no intention of telling me. 'But let's just say,' he finally revealed, 'that I was of an age that knew the birds from the bees!'

They remembered rationing. What healthy teenager with a bottomless stomach wouldn't? Although Tom believes that in some ways they were able to avoid the worst of it. A US naval commander was billeted at their house and frequently bore gifts and presents from Uncle Sam. This

American liked his golf and many were the times when Tom would creep into his room and look admiringly at the set of new golf balls in his bag. In wartime, you see, you couldn't afford to lose many balls. 'But I never took any,' said Tom with an innocent look on his face that suggested he had been sorely tempted.

Mention of golf set him off on one of his stories. As we have seen, he loved his golf and had played ever since he was old enough to stand up. A member at the club where he used to hack around watched a few strokes and was clearly impressed. He asked him to play with him in the Easter Handicap. They went to see the club secretary who wanted to know Tom's handicap. Of course, he didn't have one. 'What do you usually go round in?' he was asked. Tom airily replied, 'Oh, about 80.' 'Right then – your handicap will be eight.' At which point in the story, Tom started off on one of his uncontrollable giggles. 'We thrashed them,' he chortled. 'My handicap was soon reduced to five, as you can imagine.'

What was your handicap when you were playing at your best? 'One,' he replied without a trace of conceit. 'Could have been scratch if I'd been able to play more regularly.' To anyone ignorant of the game, it need only be said that a scratch golfer is a seriously good player.

The gods apportion sporting prowess with occasional unreasonable inequality. Knowing that a contemporary of his, Ted Dexter, was a golfer who could just as easily have made his name on the fairway as at the crease, I asked him if he had ever played the great man. Many times apparently. After retirement, both men worked for the BBC commentating on Test matches and they frequently went for a round of golf before broadcasting began. 'Beat him six and four once,' Tom announced proudly. Though he did acknowledge that Dexter was the better player.

School life came to an end when he was 17. 'Seventeen and a half, to be precise,' said the mathematician. This is no

mere quip. He was good at maths and it was expected that he would end up in accountancy, like his stepfather. But a few days' work experience in an office put paid to that. A nine-to-five job in a suit and tie certainly didn't appeal.

'So I joined up on the very day that I was old enough.' This was in January 1945 and the war was far from over. His brother had gone into the Royal Marines, becoming a lieutenant in 42 Commando and had seen 128 consecutive days of active service on the front line at the D-Day landings and thereafter through the killing fields of northern France. He had been invalided home with battle exhaustion, just before the Battle of Walcheren.

In the breakout from Normandy, the supply lines of the Allied forces had become stretched further and further. The capture of Antwerp, a deep-water port, was crucial. Walcheren Island stood at the mouth of the estuary and it was heavily fortified by German troops. It was a bloody battle to secure it. Ken was lucky to have missed it. His platoon was wiped out. So his younger brother could not possibly be joining up in a spirit of naive jingoism.

So why did you volunteer? He pursed his lips. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I'd been in the CCF at school and it seemed the logical thing to do, to join the Army. I just wanted to get involved. What I was sure about was that I didn't want to be an accountant!'

So he did not put away his school uniform and don a suit and a white collar. No, it was to be a uniform of an altogether rougher cloth.