

# LIFE IN KODACHROME

A photographic essay  
by  
Sue Milliken



In the 1950's and 1960's home photography evolved from black and white to colour.

The Kodachrome transparency, invented in 1935, became accessible to the general public as processing laboratories expanded outside the United States.

It was the photographic innovation of the age. The reversal film was contained in a small yellow metal capsule which was dropped into the camera and wound onto a takeup spool. At first the takeup was manual. Later cameras automated, whizzing from an exposed frame to the next, unexposed frame. When all the film – 12, 24 or 36 frames - was exposed, the capsule was rewound - at first manually and later automatically in reverse - and mailed back to Kodak in a bag supplied for the purpose, for processing.

A couple of weeks later, a mustard yellow box of colour transparencies mounted in a cardboard or plastic frame, was returned by the postman.



The instant gratification of digital photography has done away with the excitement of opening the yellow box, and inserting the transparencies into a viewer to see what you had captured weeks, and sometimes months, before.

Individual frames were loaded into a slide projector and in a darkened room the images were projected onto your wall, lifesize if that was what you wished. Alternatively you could view the images through a portable viewer, by squinting your eye to the small screen.

“Slide nights” became the social gathering *du jour*. A surge of post war prosperity had led to a tide of well off Australians travelling by ocean liner to the northern hemisphere. These voyages took up to six weeks and on arrival, the passengers settled in to some serious sightseeing which could last a year. When they returned they invited friends and relatives to their home, to show them the wonders they had seen. They pinned a

bed sheet on the living room wall, and subjected their captive audience to hours of “*Where was that?*” “*I think it was—*” “*No dear, it was—*” “*Oh dear, that one’s upside down...*”

Progress has dealt with the tedium of being trapped in your aunt's living room while your uncle screened their overseas trip on the wall beside the flying ducks. However Kodachrome transparencies have remarkable stability and if they are kept in the dark, they are estimated to retain their quality for more than a hundred years. While no one really knows this yet, they are coming up to 80 years so the estimate might be conservative.

\*

The prosperous citizens who travelled in First Class on the P&O liners “Oronsay”, “Orcades” and “Himalaya” were not the only Australians venturing out to see the world. The young were on the move too, in large numbers, in Economy and on the smaller, One-Class ships.

What follows is a personal look at a time more than fifty years ago, seen through the long end of the Kodachrome telescope.

# THE BUSH



# SYDNEY



Circular Quay 1960





The Morgue and The Rocks



From the MLC building

## **“OVERSEAS”**

In the 1950's and 60's, Australia was a white Anglo Saxon country firmly attached to Britain. Many older Australians still referred to England as “home”.

The generation which grew up after World War II inhabited a society which was vastly different to that of their parents, who had lived through the Great Depression and the War, with all the financial dislocation and human suffering of those cataclysmic events.

This post war generation, financed by good jobs and the rising prosperity of their parents, set out to discover the world in a way which had never before been possible. Air travel was still so expensive as to be out of reach of most, but the shipping companies were booming with the millions of European migrants pouring into Australia and were eager to fill their liners' berths in the other direction. Some of the ships, many of which had carried troops in WWII, had been converted from the traditional First and steerage classes to One-class, to accommodate as many ten pound migrants as possible. This meant that an equally viable number of fare paying passengers could be accommodated on the return journey. A six week trip on an ocean liner stopping at four or six foreign ports, cost a quarter of the price of an Economy seat on a BOAC Comet jetliner. Much as the early clipper ships had carried ballast out and the wool clip home, the youth of Australia now provided the ballast in reverse.

In the years before the introduction of cheap air travel, the sea journey was an End of Empire experience. Stewards in white jackets brought you a morning cup of tea. Meals were divided into first and second sittings and the menus were in French. The food sounded delicious but after a while due to the quality of the refrigeration and possibly the length of time between revictualling stops, the *Sole Meuniere* tasted much the same as the *Pears Belle Helene*. Deck games were played to pass the time and to enjoy the sunshine and a daily wager was held on the number of sea miles travelled. After dinner a pianist might play decorously in the lounge or there might be a fancy dress party. The rituals were unchanged since the invention of steam and refrigeration, so the thousands of Australians who experienced a world which had barely altered in a hundred years, were among the last to do so. That is, at least until the advent of the modern cruise ship, which is a very different experience in every way.

As travellers to Europe generally stayed away for a year or longer – and sometimes, for a lifetime - departure was a big event. Friends and family came to farewell and parties were held in cabins aboard ship. The traveller could invite as many guests as they liked, and friends would arrive with cartons of beer on their shoulders and bottles of gin in their handbags, crowd into the tiny cabins and stay until the last “All ashore!” was called. Occasionally an inebriated guest would have to be deposited in the pilot boat as the ship neared the heads, for a very stomach-churning ride back to the Quay. The parties overcrowded the ship, and eventually numbers were restricted and passes issued. Departure became a more genteel affair.



On board the "Canberra" at the overseas terminal



Throwing streamers from the ship to friends and family on the wharf below was a tradition of departure, a symbol of the distance which would separate them, and the longing to remain connected. In earlier times the streamers had been white ribbons, then they became tight rolls of pastel-coloured paper. The traveller would shoot several down, aiming at their friends on the wharf, who would attempt to catch and hold the other ends. The shipside became a thickly woven tapestry of colours, as the hundreds and hundreds of streamers intertwined. Then the ship's siren blew, and the loudspeakers blared a recording of "Anchors Aweigh". (Once, there had been a band). There were a couple more blasts on the ship's siren and finally, slowly and sadly, a scratchy recording of the "Maori Farewell". To the strains of

Now is the hour, when we must say goodbye  
Soon we'll be sailing, far across the sea  
While you're away, oh please remember me...

the ship would start to move, pulled by the tugs sideways away from the wharf. As the gap widened, the streamers stretched and broke, first a few, then more, and as the last one snapped their link to home, the travellers, often overcome by too much to drink, would cry and wave and call out a tearful “Goodbye”, until the ship turned around and headed up the harbour towards the open sea. Once out of sight of the wharf, the passengers wiped their tears and turned toward their new adventure.



At sea

The ship then made its leisurely way around the Australian coast, stopping for a day at Melbourne, Adelaide and Fremantle.



View from Kings Park

After leaving Fremantle the ship sailed out of the three-mile custom zone and entered the world of sun, duty free gin and ship's officers in starched whites...



... who seemed mostly to be off duty





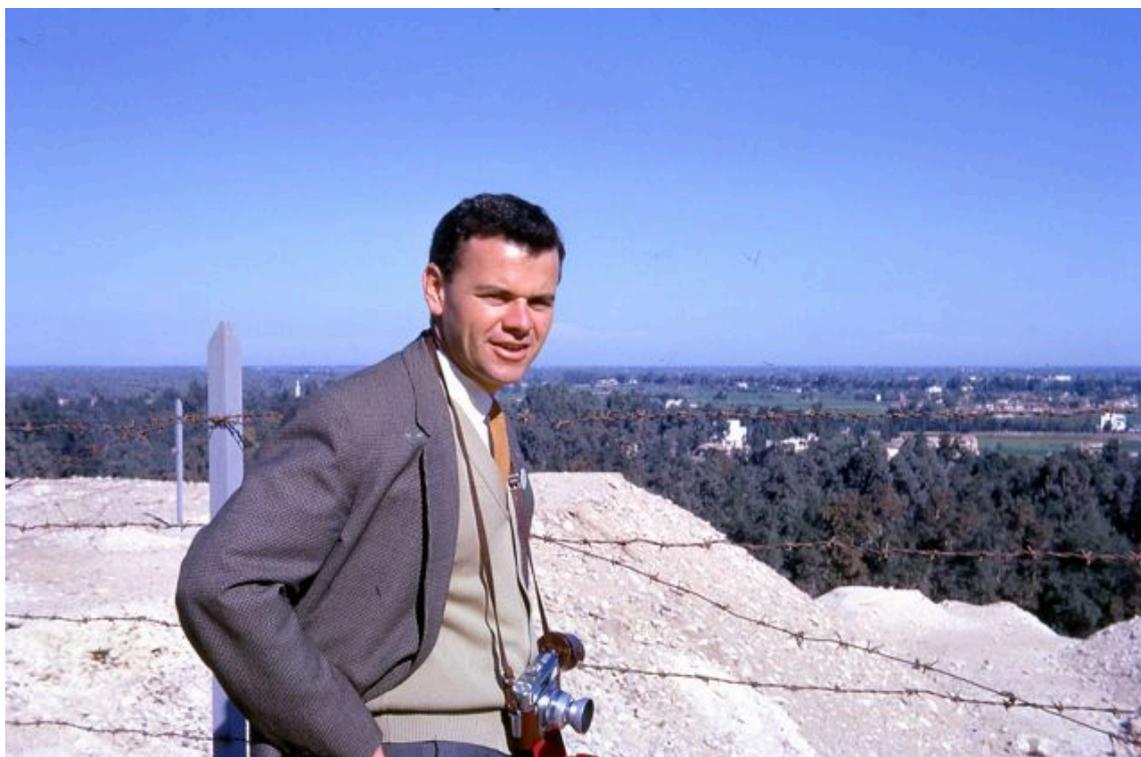
there were cabin parties...



...a crossing the line ceremony at the Equator (where the water ran down the plughole in the opposite direction)...



sleeping on deck in the tropics...



a shipboard romance...

The atmosphere was effervescent and at night before dinner there were drinks in the officers' wardroom, where a P&O gin was measured as three fingers in a tumbler, and the party ended with a conga line to a chorus of

Happy Days are Here Again  
And the skies of grey are clear again  
So sing a song of cheer again  
Happy days are here again.

After-hours behaviour was moderated by most of the cabins being shared by four or six people, and the more restrained morality of the time. Although, where there is a will there will always be a way, and there were a lot of jokes about the lifeboats, the only place one could be sure of privacy.

It took two weeks to cross the Indian Ocean. Every day was the same, hot cloudless skies upon calm, mirrored seas with only an occasional school of flying fish to break the surface and the subdued hum and vibration of the ship's engines to attenuate the silence. At night, phosphorescence in the water glittered softly in the ship's wake.

The first landfall was Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The ship dropped anchor in the small hours, quietly, a mile offshore, and the passengers awakened to a pearl necklace of lights ringing the bay, and the smell of the tropics. Overripe mangoes, spices, rainforest, decay, on the heavy, humid air.

Definitely not Australia.

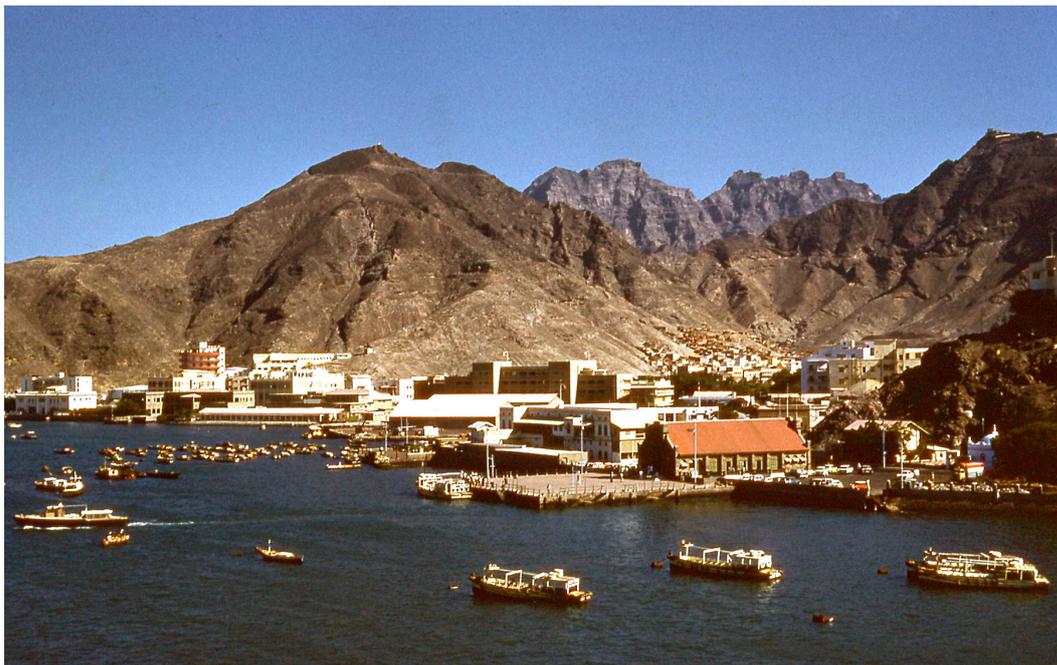


View from the Mt. Lavinia Hotel, Colombo

The port of Aden came next. A British colony on the tip of Saudi Arabia, until the 1960's it was one of the busiest refuelling and duty free shopping ports in the world. The locals would position their small boats alongside the ship and call up to the passengers to buy cheap trinkets, leatherware, and a myriad of small items which were raised in a box on a rope; the money, once the purchase was negotiated, was returned to the vendor the same way. These purchases' only value was in their exoticism and they would collect dust in Australian living rooms for the next twenty years. Duty free items available in the shops along the portside in Aden included, as well as the usual cameras and portable transistor radios, electrical goods such as washing machines and stoves which were trundled aboard and stored in the ship's capacious hold.



Aden, looking left



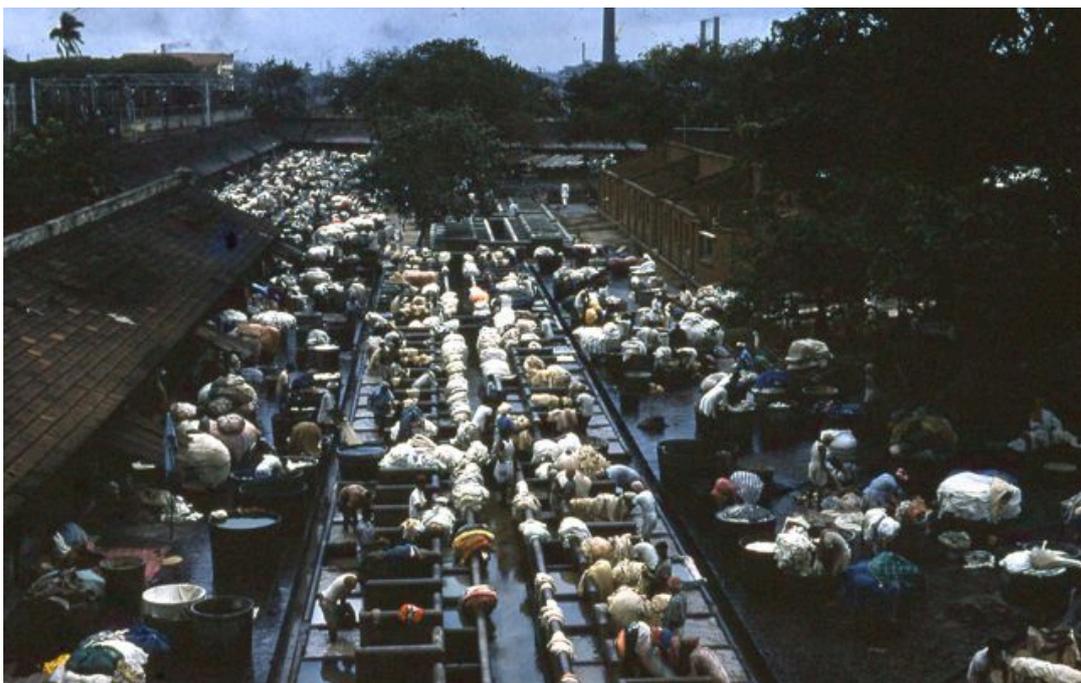
Looking right

In 1967 Aden gained its independence, becoming the People's Republic of South Yemen. The British departed and from being a by-word in the lexicon of sea travel, the port and its duty free cornucopia vanished into the world of Middle East politics.

From Aden the ship steamed to the Suez Canal. While it made its way through the canal, the passengers boarded buses in Suez for a day in Cairo, returning through the desert in the late afternoon to Port Said.



The Nile Hilton, badly exposed. So modern, with its marble and turquoise décor, it was jaw-dropping.



Doing the washing in Cairo



Where are the tourists



Here's one

Finally, after the calm of the Mediterranean with stops in Naples and Marseilles and a wild ride through the Bay of Biscay often beset by gales, there was sea journey's end at Southampton.

An end and a beginning.

\*

Australians travelling to Europe in this period made London their base. Because it was easy and cheap to get to Britain there was little interest in going to America, and even less in Asia, although many young Australians came home overland from London through Yugoslavia, the Middle East and into Tibet, Afghanistan and Thailand, Burma and Singapore. In this brief political breathing space after the end of the Second World War, it was possible to go to places which have long been off the tourist agenda.

# LONDON





New arrivals moved into bed sitting rooms or run-down flats with friends or acquaintances. There was a verbal network among young expatriates which meant that cheap and practical accommodation was handed on as people came and went in the ever-revolving world of exploration.

Earls Court was the most popular address for the young of empire, and it became a derogatory byword for the insularity of colonials mixing only with each other. Indeed in Earls Court it was hard to hear anything other than an Australian, New Zealand or South African accent. For those who wished to avoid this banal fraternity Kensington, South and West, Knightsbridge and Chelsea if you could afford them, and North London – Hampstead and Swiss Cottage – were popular.



Life in a bed sitter. Straining the rice for a dinner party



Godfrey Street Chelsea



49 Warwick Road Earls Court, top floor



5 Mornington Ave West Kensington, also top floor



The first call on arrival was to The Bank.

The Bank of New South Wales, which occupied a Georgian mansion behind the two hundred year old plane trees of Berkeley Square, was the heart of the enterprise. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this solid, reliable organisation to its customers. Funds sent ahead from home were held here, and so trusting was the bank that it would advance cash on the word of a customer that the money was on its way, even if it had not arrived. The bank provided the service of a poste restante to a peripatetic horde of travellers who moved accommodation so often that mail would never otherwise catch up with them and who sometimes were months on the move and out of the country. The Bank held the mail, cheerfully handing over great bundles of it whenever the traveller returned.

Within its dark green, watermarked-silk walls young Australians in duffle coats and desert boots did their banking at mahogany counters on the ground floor, then climbed the thickly carpeted stairs to the first floor, where they collected their mail and the cardboard boxes of colour slides from Kodak at Hemel Hemstead. On the leather sofas provided for their comfort they read letters from home and met up with pals. "See you at the bank," was heard from London to Skopje, from Corfu to Copenhagen.

After opening their account at the Bank and collecting mail, travellers set out to find work. As a British subject - "British passport, Australia" the passport said – there were no restrictions for Australians in the UK and jobs were plentiful, so work supported the time away, allowing funds brought from Australia to be saved for travelling.

There was work in pubs, relief teaching, behind the counter in the big department stores, and typing and secretarial jobs acquired through a temporary employment agency - an agency for temporary employees. On the one hand Australians were treated with suspicion because they were always departing without notice to fill up a combi van and do Europe; on the other hand, they were hard working, resourceful and generally cheerful, so they were popular temporary employees. The work, never arduous, could generally be done in a third of the day, leaving plenty of time for planning outings, meeting friends etc.

Between jobs, and at night and on the weekends there was time to explore London. To discover the famous stores – Harrods, Harvey

Nicholls and Selfridges, to window shop in Bond Street, the Burlington Arcade and Regent Street's Jaeger and Acquascutum which sold classic English wear, beautiful to look at but expensively out of reach. The pubs were a revelation, cosy and comfortable where women were as welcome as men, unlike Australia where the male-only, hose-out public bar was still the way public drinking was done.



Bond Street



The roof garden at department store Derry & Tom, above the traffic in busy Knightsbridge

Weekends were filled with day trips to picturesque pubs on the river and visits to the laundrette where everyone did their washing, there being no laundries in the bedsitters of inner London.

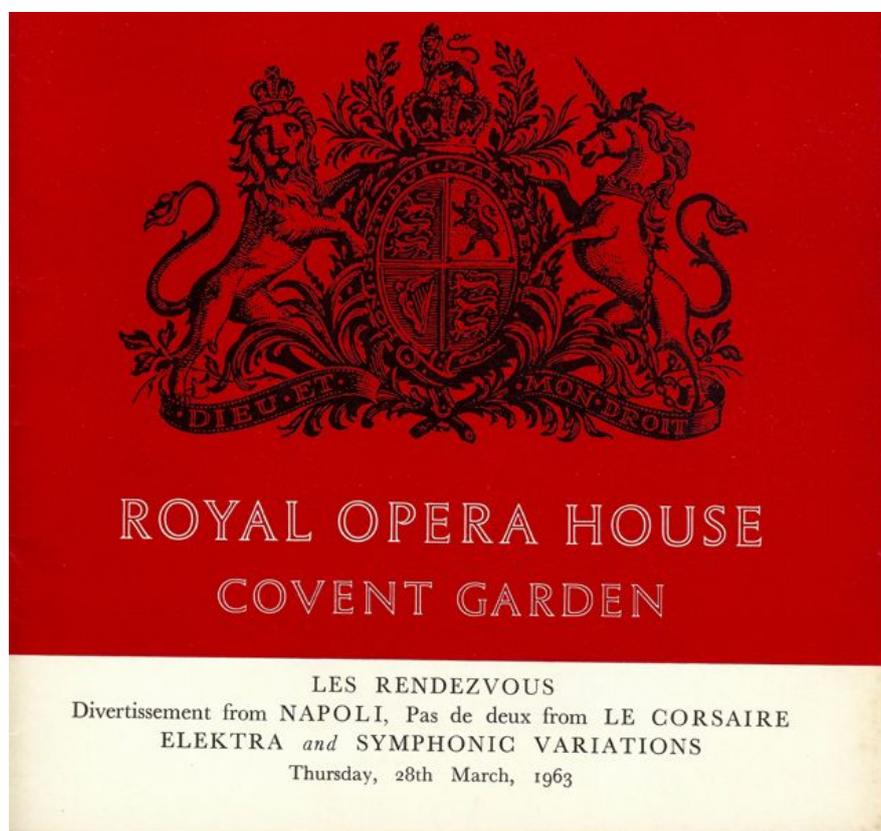


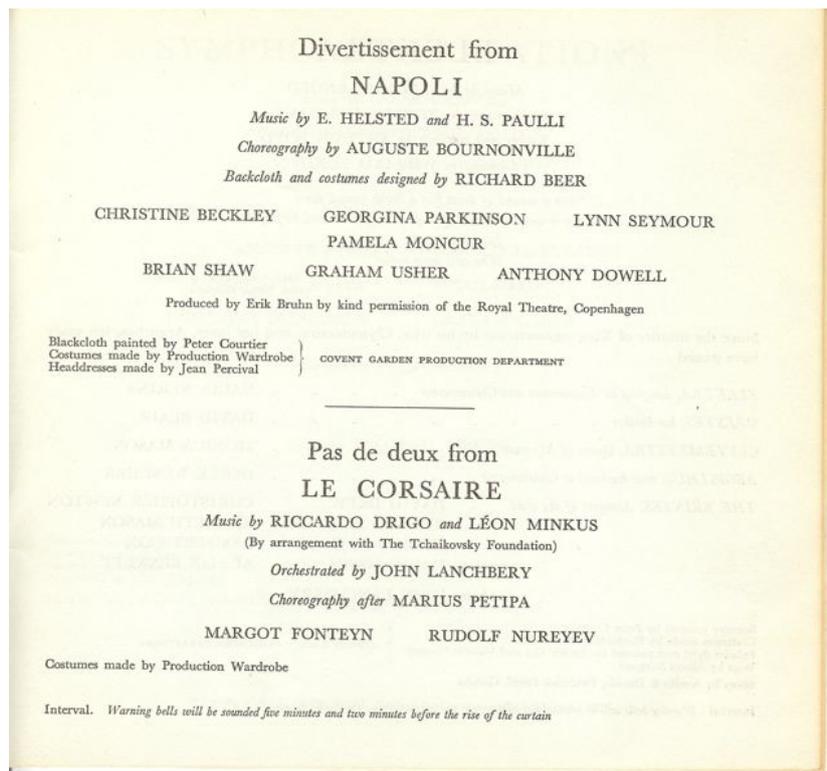
The Trout



Constable country

Nights were for theatre, ballet, opera and concerts, the best in the world. Cheap tickets were readily available. Yehudi Menuhin, Victoria de los Angeles, Sutherland, Pavarotti, Ashkenazy, Gielgud, Alec Guinness, Sir Malcolm Sargent - a smorgasbord of timeless legends, to be had for a few pounds. For performances by Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, then at the height of their transcendent artistic partnership at the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden, queuing for returns an hour or so before the performance might land you in the sixth row of the stalls (next to Princess Margaret and Antony Armstrong Jones) or at worst, standing room at the back of the stalls, with a perfect view of the stage. At the curtain call the audience would go wild when Nureyev selected one red rose from his bouquet, kissed it, and handed it to Fonteyn.



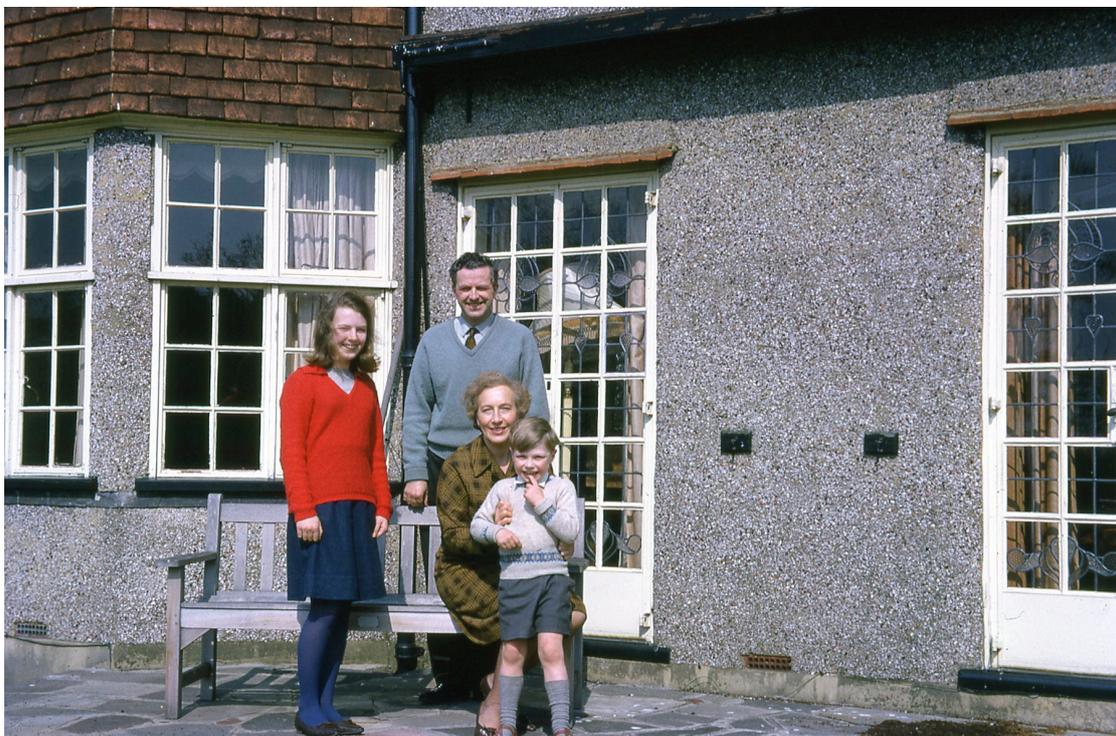


In the mid-sixties the Beatles arrived on the pop music scene and the four neat little mop top singers in choirboy collars performing on black and white TV signalled what was to come. London began to swing, and the world was never the same.

Most Australians in that post war period had family connections in the UK and the young visitors were expected to make contact and report back. Hopefully the relatives would be a source of hospitality, a square meal and a new experience. I was lucky. My father's first cousin, Helena, was married to a Scottish accountant and they lived in the stockbroker belt in Surrey, a convenient train ride from London. The family made me and my friends welcome and we were delighted to be out of the bedsitter on weekends and to eat something other than rice.



The Milnes, Banstead, Surrey



Upstairs, bedridden, resided Helena's mother, my great aunt Martha. An ancient shadow tucked under quilts in a small room in the attic, she had last seen her sister, my grandmother, more than seventy years before. "Go up and talk to mother," Helena would order me and her children. In the way of youth we were reluctant, which is now a matter for regret, for the stories Aunt Martha might have been able to tell.

James Milliken, my paternal grandfather, emigrated from Northern Ireland to Australia in 1873, and took up land on the north coast of NSW, where the family farmed for the next one hundred years. Eight years after emigrating James returned to N. Ireland and found himself a wife, Helena Hill, sister of Martha. They returned to Australia and the Wallamba, where they raised eight children. Like so many immigrants, the family's ties remained strong with their homeland but two world wars and a Depression meant that there had been few personal contacts in the following seventy years. They had stayed in touch by letter, and so when I visited Northern Ireland there was a lot of interest in my visit. Backed up by some briefing from cousin Helena (who it can be deduced was named after her aunt, my grandmother), I spent a happy two weeks in County Antrim. I met a lot of elderly relatives whose interest was polite but curious, and I did my best to understand the soft northern Irish accent, although it was often unclear which "James", "John" "Thomas" or "William" I was talking to, as there seemed to be few other male names in five generations. All of these names had been faithfully transferred to my father's Australian family.



The farm at The Point, Islandmagee, County Antrim



Cousin William and wife Kathleen



The Coast Road, County Antrim

Back in London, Princess Alexandra was getting married.  
Naturally, we attended the wedding.





“Can't have any horse poo on the Television.”

After working for a while, it was off again, to explore England and Scotland.



Windsor



### The last of the duty free ciggies?

Renting a car was a new innovation. Youth hostels provided cheap accommodation, and were often in remarkable buildings and locations, although spartan inside. In England they thought that if you were travelling by car you could afford a hotel, so impoverished travellers in cheap rentacars had to park around the corner and pretend they had arrived by bus or train. In Europe no one seemed to care how you got there.



Not a youth hostel. No annoying security at Balmoral Castle



Ilfracombe, Devon

At Christmas, London lit up with decorations, and if you were lucky, it snowed.



Regent Street, Christmas



Before Mohamed al-Fayed

After Christmas, skiing ...

A travel company called Inghams Snow Sports provided a weekend train from London to the Austrian Tyrol. Sleeping accommodation was provided in couchettes - narrow bunks six to a cabin with who knew who else of either sex, and a special carriage with a bar, a dance floor and loud recorded music. The bar, packed with dancing, drinking, partying skiers, rocked at high speed through the night across France to Innsbruck.

There has never been a better way to go skiing.





Uncrowded slopes



single chairlift and no queues



Where are they now?



Picture perfect Mayrhofen



With the arrival of spring the weather began to warm up and work was again forgotten as groups coalesced, vehicles were acquired and the guide book *Europa Touring* purchased and pored over. Youth hostel sleeping sheets, a generic sleeping bag made of unbleached poplin cotton with a slot for a pillow, were dug out of cupboards where last year's travellers had abandoned them and given a quick flick through the laundrette.

Down to Dover, on to the cross-channel Ferry, and away!

Ten weeks travelling to France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Austria, Switzerland and back via France in a Mini Minor with a second hand tent on the roof, expenses one hundred pounds. There were camping areas in every town, conveniently located, well appointed

and cheap. The shop at the camping area in Barcelona sold a litre of wine from a keg, siphoned into your own bottle, for one shilling.

When the weather turned inhospitable, there were the youth hostels to rely on.



The road south



Biarritz



Castile



New friends made in the camping area  
Toledo



Pint sized



A Guardia Civil enjoys the sun



Madrid



Benidorm, minutes before the developers



Bull fight, Nimes (they don't kill the bull there)



Antibes





Cote d'Azur glamour



Cannes. I think they are building out the beach so they can Put all those restaurants on it. The Carlton Hotel is centre frame.



Picturesque but unidentified



Monte Carlo



Travelling party - Sue, Jack, Lesley, Marion, Colleen



Camping in Florence



Florence





Does it lean more now?



Possibly, Assisi



Arch of Constantine & the Coliseum & no traffic  
& no chain fence to keep people out



All roads led to - and around and around - the wedding cake.  
The memorial to Emperor Victor Emmanuel in Rome



St. Peter's on Pope Day



Pope



The Trevi Fountain. A late night swim led to temporary arrest



Pont St. Angelo



The Coliseum



The Forum



Two views of Naples





Enzo, the Neapolitan policeman who was engaged to Pikey, but that's another story, gave us a tour of Pompeii



Gone forever - the state of the art "Canberra" near Naples



The ferry from Brindisi, Italy, to Patras, Greece, with more new friends



Mt. Olympus (apparently)



Some of the first Olympians. (At Olympia.)



And a well preserved ancient statue



The Parthenon





The temple of Apollo, Corinth



The temple of Apollo, Delphi



Skopje, Yugoslavia, and isn't that Karl Marx



Venice



St. Mark's Square, empty. Well it was only June, not August



What was I doing behind that unsuspecting man?



They were shooting a movie in St. Mark's Square. I had no idea what the future held.



Achensee, Austria



Zell am Ziller



A youth hostel. Tent and red washing up dish not required



The Zugspitz, Bavaria



Mad King Ludwig knew about position



The Palace of Schonbrunn, Gardens



This photograph is remarkable for Kodachrome's delicate handling of the colours, and for a way of life which had not changed for three hundred years



Opera house, Vienna



Welcome to Switzerland



Not really skiing at the top of the Jungfrau, Interlaken

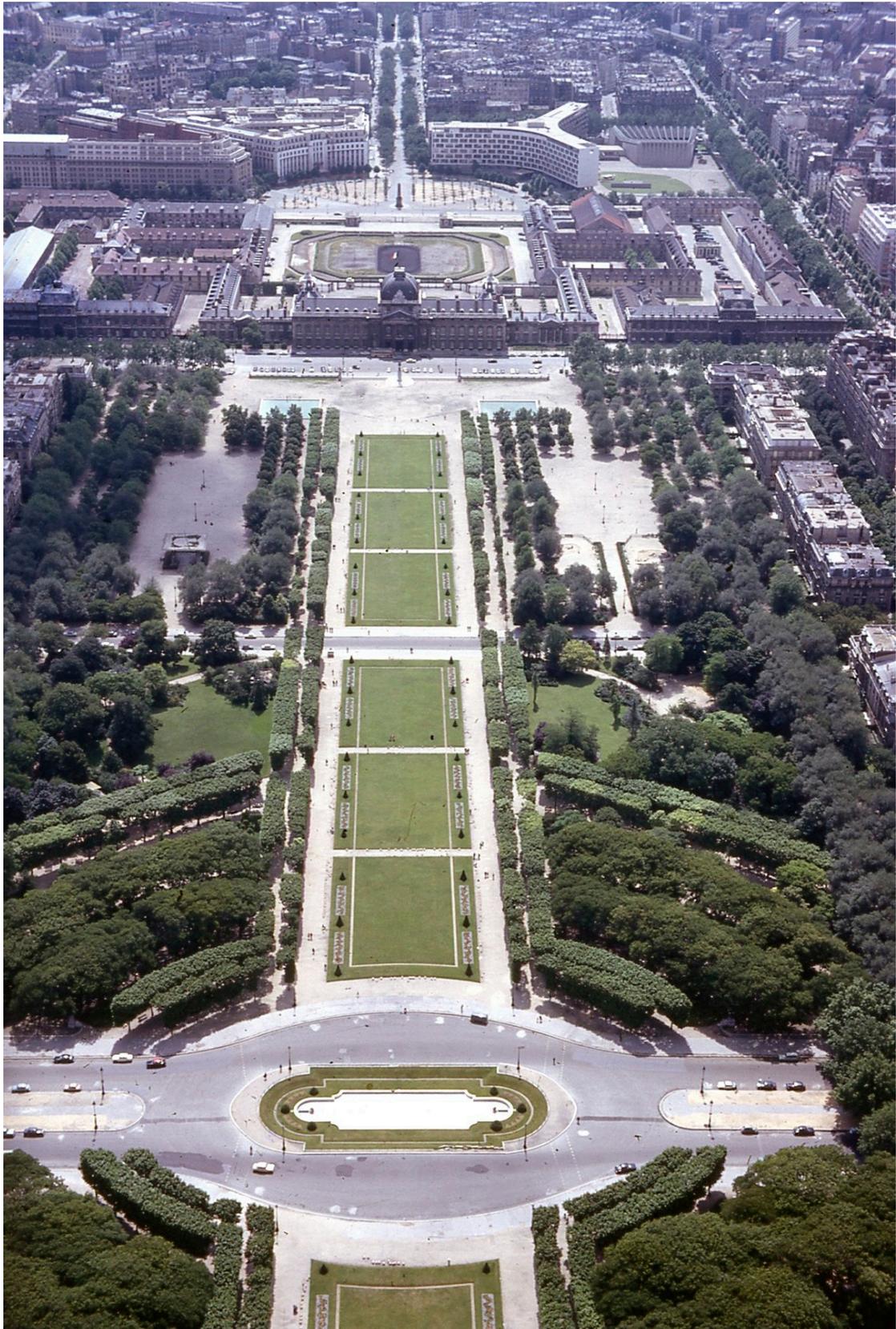


Kodachrome just loved red

We saved Paris till last



From the bottom



From the top



Montmartre

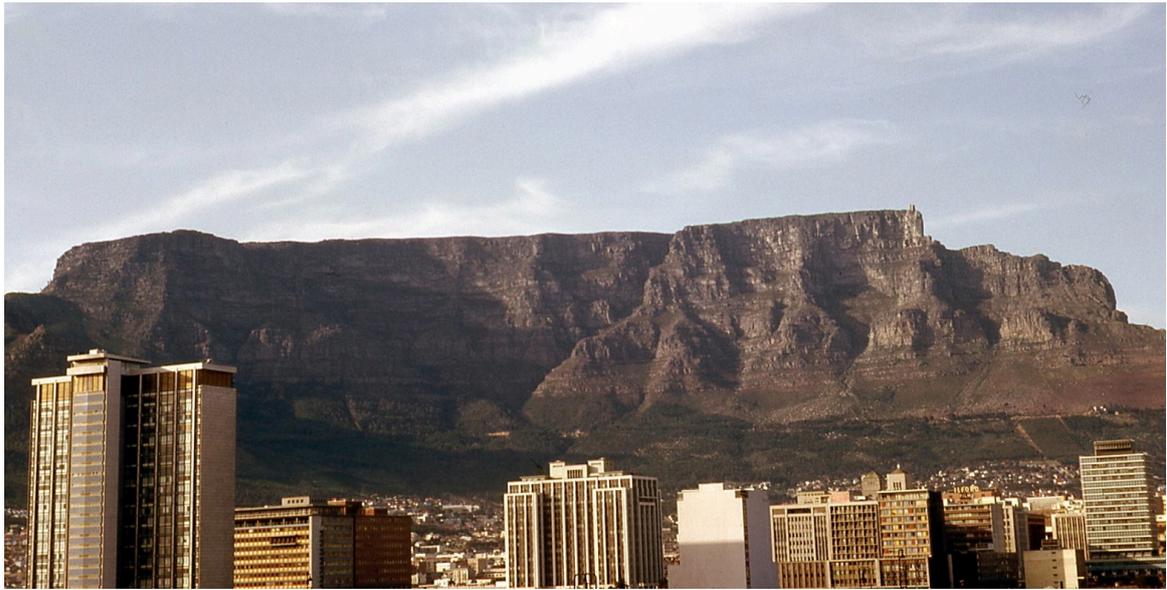


Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, without the chandeliers – yet to be restored?

After a year, it was time to come home.



The Northern Star was a new ship, purpose built for the trade



Its route was via Capetown, South Africa





and Durban



A new set of shipboard friends from New Zealand and the last appearance forever of that dress



Finally, Sydney...



Nothing can beat Sydney Harbour on a summer's day,  
even without an opera house



Or the calm waters of the Wallamba River



Back in the real world, life was not all serious.



Tamarama was still there



and there was still skiing

\*

After a few years, quality prints from colour negative at an affordable price became a more accessible and user-friendly way for home photographers to view their photographs, and the use of Kodachrome for home photography faded into history.

The colour transparency continued as a reliable and important medium for professional photography until digital subsumed everything, and Kodak closed down its processing labs.

Nothing is forever. But the colour slide, carefully archived, might come close.

c 29 September, 2016

