

## Trunk recalls . . .

**W**hich are you? A ruthless disposer of junk? Or do you keep everything, because one day it might be useful? When does keeping become hoarding?

It's a standing joke in Voyager Towers, that I keep everything. Maximus, who, after ten years away has just returned to France, was heard to mutter as we recently moved the contents of my shed, "What did he keep that for?" Easy peasy. Dispose today, regret tomorrow. It's a universal truth known to all shedders.

I'm not talking about things like excess paper, the 21st century's wolfsbane: useless bank letters with terms changed in their favour, junk mail, promotional newspapers, and redundant debit card receipts, though I recently learned from the wireless that even they can be useful. The programme was addressing false allegations and one man interviewed had been cleared of a crime by proving with receipts that he could not have been where he was alleged to have been. No, rather I am talking about screws, nuts that don't fit bolts, or that bit of cable that will be useful... and eventually is—20 years on.

The problem arises when you move. When my parents left Kings Langley in 1989 after 30 years, the furniture was a doddle, but not the garage. They moved from Toms Lane to Pound Cottage in Common Lane in the early 70's and Dad added a narrow garage, just about wide enough to open the car doors. It was to become a miracle of compaction. So much "will-come-in-handly" debris was therein thrust that the removal men had to order up another half-pantechicon. They filled it too. Clearly then, I'm doomed. Doomed. It's genetic. Or perhaps it's coming from the last generation for which "waste not, want not" was a reality.

Actually, I'm unrepentant. My Dinky toys and O-gauge clockwork engines are now collectible, not to mention the bellows' cameras, lead soldiers and memorabilia of empire... Not that I would sell them. All have been lovingly moved from house to house over forty-five years.

Thus, when we quit Manchester 30 years ago, among other detritus a rusty trunk accompanied us. At some time it had been forced open because the keyless padlock was (and still is) on the twisted hasp and staple. It was always in my mind to restore it. It still is... (I hear a hollow laugh from without.) Over

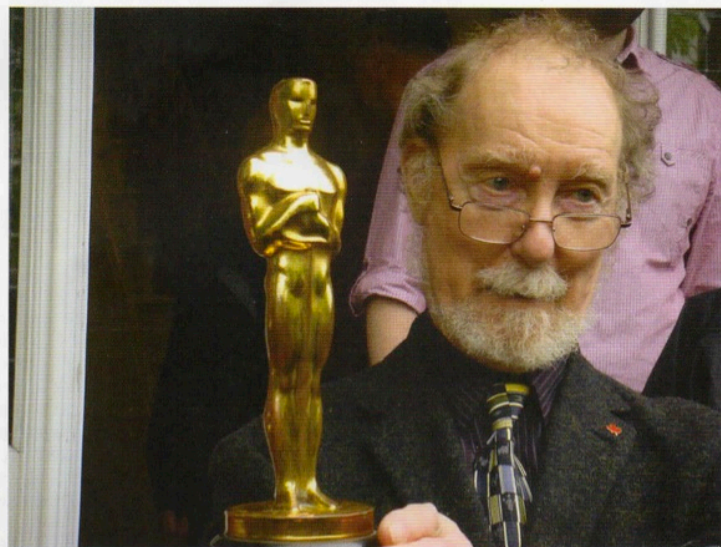
the years it has proved its worth as a portable glory hole, so when we moved to deepest Brittany in 2008, it descended into the cellar awaiting resurrection. And this month, it and its contents (several years' worth of the legendary 1950s' comic, Eagle, just 4½d, for those that remember pre-decimal money and real comics) finally came in from the damp.

With it came a flood of memories. For one, I had falsely remembered that it came from my mother's empire-trotting family. In fact, it had belonged to one Lily Shalom, the previous occupant of 10, Everett Road, Withington. Her name still appears on the front in faded white paint. Are we the only ones who remember it now?

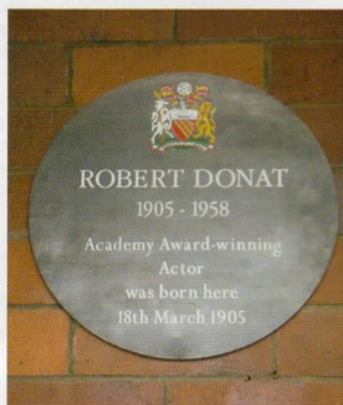
Everett (late Albert) Road was built around the turn of the 20th century. (It's not clear why or when the now obscure Everett displaced the late Prince Consort.) Thirty years on, the road is a grainy film, scratched and faded, but I recall that the red-brick terraced villas on the left are a bit smaller than their lighter counterparts on the right, which in turn are smaller than those in the little cul-de-sacs on either side. I can imagine TS Elliot's carbuncular, small house agent's clerk with one bold stare describing the houses as in "a variety of styles available to suit every taste and pocket".

Because no. 10 was falling down, we only paid about £7,500 for it in 1978, a knockdown price, but still a stretch. Evidently Miss Shalom had lived frugally since the 1920's and little had been "modernised". The original marble and tile fireplaces were mostly intact, encrusted with layers of crinkled, grey paint, as was everything else. A mazuma graced each doorframe; in my ignorance I didn't know they carried a prayer scroll to be touched as you enter, that is until Stan Goodman, our Jewish doctor, explained. There were even two attic bedrooms for the maids, but, if they had ever existed, they were long gone...

In fact, no. 10 mirrored the state of parts of the road at that time. Some houses (homes in today's ghastly touchy-feely parlance) had been let as student flats: big rooms brutally divided and exteriors left to moulder amid unkempt privet. It was a street that had seen better days, as we learned from our near neighbours, a charming elderly couple, who had moved there in the late 40s. He was a retired plumber and having been "in



Brian Donat with his father's Oscar



Donat plaque



Robert Donat

trade" they were scorned when they arrived by the posher, post-war petit bourgeois. Forty years on their house was among the best maintained.

It was a nice road, unpretentious and friendly (as was and is Withington village). Some longstanding residents who had hung on by their fingertips were beginning to see a process of regeneration. And there were characters. The Misses L..., who lived in a house reputedly devoid of furniture, but with windows so clean you thought the glass was missing. One of them would obsessively pick up litter on the street, but wouldn't engage in conversation...

**Peter Sellers said  
"I think he was God."**

However, Everett Road has a claim to fame that few knew of

when we were there, but that was finally celebrated in 2011. The actor/manager Robert Donat, who died of a brain tumour aged 53, was born at no. 42. I always knew he was, but I didn't know where.

Admired by Laurence Olivier, Donat said of himself: "I never found any security in life until I discovered the false security of stardom." However, the plaudits of his peers say it all. Charles Laughton called him "The most graceful actor of our time," while Peter Sellers said "I think he was God." Since 2011, no. 42 has carried a plaque commemorating his birth. It was organised by the Withington Civic Society (which was formed as we left) and Donat's son and daughter attended the ceremony. Mum would have been delighted, for she adored him. I just wish I had been there.