



THORNTONIAN DAYS

Newsletter of The Old Thorntonians Association (Clapham)

"Education is the leading of human souls to what is best, and making what is best out of them."
John Ruskin (1819-1900)

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Obituaries

John Bagshaw (?1946-51): died 6 May 2009. Mike Surridge, 1947-52, recalls: "John, known to his friends and sporting colleagues as 'Baggers', played for the Old Thorntonians at both cricket and football in the 1960s and 1970s. A very humorous person and one who frequently propped up the bar after a match, recounting the day's play and previous encounters, with often the opposition joining in. At the Old Dorkinians Club a long stay could be guaranteed with John holding forth. His 3rd XI football team which he skippered was also known as 'Bagshaw's All Stars'. When I was first asked to do cricket umpiring duties, John took me aside and gave me this simple advice: 'Count to six and only give an LBW if he is plumb in front'. Simple, and it worked. In later years we didn't see him but he liked to be informed of the latest news, although he wouldn't come to reunions. He used to say, 'I like to remember as you all were.' " [*John's brother David has kindly provided two photographs of him, one in the c1950 school cricket team and the other, probably from the 1980s, with "Arly" Rose; both are on the website, in the Pupils (2) gallery. Ed*]

War Memorial Plaque

The replacement plaque was formally rededicated at a short ceremony held at Lambeth College's new Sixth Form Centre, South Side, Clapham, at 2.30pm on Saturday 31 October. The Reverend Deborah Matthews, from St Paul's Church, Rectory Grove, officiated, and attendance included 20 OTs, with relatives and friends; Peter Wright, also an OT (from the 1970s) and nephew of Leslie R ("Bobby") Wright, whose name appears as the final entry on the plaque (Peter is the only surviving relative who has so far been traced); the Mayors of Lambeth and Wandsworth, the school being in the latter borough until London local government re-organisation in 1965; Richard Chambers, Principal of Lambeth College; Keith Hill, the local MP; and representatives of the Royal British Legion and The Clapham Society. The programme and Order of Service, and selected photographs taken by the College staff photographer, have been added to the website, together with a report which appeared in the 6 November edition of the *South London Press*. For members without access to the internet the photos are reproduced on the attached sheets. Let the Editor know if you'd like to have individual prints and/or copies of any of the other documents mentioned.

Annual General Meeting 2010

The next AGM will be held at The Windmill on Saturday 20 March, starting at 2pm.

Membership

Currently 120, including three Associates.

Annual Reunions 2009 and 2010

The sixth get-together took place on 26 September 2009 – the usual convivial ambience prevailed, with about 45 OTs present. The guest of honour was "honorary" OT Warwick Hillman, son of Mr E L Hillman, who served as senior English master from 1946 to 1952. The Management Committee has agreed that next year's event will be held on **Saturday 25 September**.

Second OT/OC meeting

Once again held at Chichester High School for Boys, on Thursday 8 October 2009, and ably organised by Terry Sharp (1938-45), who was accompanied by eight other OTs: Geoff Ainsworth (1940-3), Peter Lawson (1936-43), Keith Weston (1938-45), Monty Clarkson (1935-42), Doug Ward (1938-45), Harry Spence OBE (1940-4), Les Garrett (1938-42) and Don Appelbe (1938-43); the event was hosted by Richard Porter, one of the High School masters. A photograph of the group has been posted on the relevant page of the website.

Reminiscences

From **Brian Harris** (1943-9): I have only the fondest memories of my old headmaster, W D Evans. He appeared to me at the time to be an elderly, etiolated man with white hair stained by brown cigarette smoke, but he ruled the school well.

I owe him a great debt for having taken three or four boys from the Sixth Arts stream to join him in his study once or twice a week to examine the Platonic dialogues. We each read a short passage and were then required to challenge or defend the propositions which it contained. The experience left me with a lifelong admiration of the classics and, I hope, a questioning intelligence.

I wonder where my fellow students are now?

"Honorary" OT **Warwick Hillman** remembers his father and the 1952 school trip to Switzerland : An appreciative reference to "Mr Hillman's English lessons" in issue No. 8 of *Thorntonian Days* led me to contact Ted Hayward. Mr Hillman was my late father, and as a skinny nine-year-old I had the great experience of accompanying my parents and 40 decidedly older Henry Thornton boys on the first of the two Brunnen school parties Dad led in 1952.

More of the trip later. Dad left Henry Thornton that summer, and, having been Head of English at Ealing Grammar School and Worthing Technical High School, retired in the mid-1970s. In retirement he indulged more fully in his passion for crosswords, twice coming second (on each occasion to a professional lexicographer) in *The Times* annual Cutty Sark national crossword competition. His regular appearance in the top half-dozen ensured a plentiful supply of whisky on our visits, tempered, alas, by the need to drive home! He died in his late seventies, very suddenly, in 1990.

Although he led school parties to various countries for the next ten summers, he always used to say that it was a miracle that he did, given the things that nearly or actually went wrong on that first trip. For a start, apart from the splints, he was required to use every item of the First Aid equipment. Then, when we arrived, Herr Steidinger, the proprietor of the Hotel Weisses Rössli refused to allow the party to stay in the main hotel, resulting in Dad's colleague, Dr. Aufricht, and 37 boys being banished to sleep in an annex some distance away through an overgrown meadow behind the main building.

When I rang Ted Hayward I was amazed to discover that he had actually been on the same trip. I think he must have been the quiet (bespectacled?) boy who sat on Greenberg's right on our table at meal times. He must have been exceptionally well behaved as I can remember nothing else about him at all! [*Accurate if limited recall, Warwick! Ed*]

Meals consisted of the same soup at every meal – clear, thin with bits of vegetables floating therein. Thank God I liked soup. Puddings always consisted of ice-cream, often of the most garish colours, which, like any vaguely normal nine-year-old, I devoured with alacrity. On my right sat a first-year boy called Gavin Starey, whom I later ran into at the City of London School, to which he had transferred, as a platoon-sergeant who was much keener on the CCF than I was. He liked very little of the food on offer, which suited me fine.

It was three other first-year boys, Marshall, Clayson and Lovelock, who alone were privileged to have a room in the main hotel. I think it was Lovelock who put his knee through their wash-basin, which probably made Herr Steidinger wish he had banished everybody to the annex.

Others who ate on our table included Davidson, who had a loud voice, and two other second-year boys, Watkins and McGregor. The latter collected matchboxes with such enthusiasm that Dad had to pull him out from under a train on Basle station where he had spotted a rarity too good to ignore. Greenberg, from the same year, was unforgettable. Although presumably only 13, he had outstripped his contemporaries in height and girth, and to a nine-year-old dominated our meal table like the Buddha statue on Lantau.

At the other end of the age range were the Prefects or Group Leaders, each of whom had nine other boys to account for at important moments on the journey or on excursion trips. They were Wotton, Field, Mellon and Larbey. The last of course went on to co-write *The Good Life* – incidentally Dad was convinced that the supporting characters were all named after Henry Thornton staff after a PC Hillman appeared in one episode – and the less acclaimed but wonderfully perceptive *Ever Decreasing Circles*.

Their Group Leader role was vital in ensuring that nobody was lost. As an Arts man, Dad would not trust himself to count 40 boys accurately, while poor Dr. Aufricht, bless him, was not only the antithesis of the stereotypical German disciplinarian, but he wore such thick glasses that one wondered if he ever knew which of the boys was which!

Several other names of boys in the middle school spring to mind: Steuer, who fainted on the outbound overnight train and had a studious friend, Felix Bruckner, who spoke with a German accent; Lavin, Knott and Enoch, the last two of whom joined us in a rowing trip on the lake one evening, which degenerated into a search for shelter from the wake of a passing paddle steamer, which, in the event, didn't pass us at all and headed off back towards Lucerne; Connelly, whom I remember playing cricket on the summit of Fronalpstock, which for some reason didn't have the pointed top that all self-respecting mountains should have; and Pillai, who was the first black person I had ever met, a quietly spoken, friendly boy who, I think, boasted the first name Nat, which I later discovered was almost exclusively reserved for taxi-drivers and band leaders.

That just about exhausts my memories of the participants, and I don't know whether I need to apologise to those I have forgotten or those I can remember. Other memories still refuse to go away: my first encounter with the 24-hour clock – our train to Basle left Ostend at 18.03; the thunderstorm on our first evening in Brunnen and another the next afternoon that forced us all to shelter in a barn at Morschach; going inside the Rhône Glacier, which was many times the size it

now is, as I discovered when I took my own children to see it thirty years later; and visiting the chapel built on the spot where William Tell leapt ashore to escape the tyrant Gessler.

It must all have made quite an impression, as in 1970 I spent my honeymoon on Lake Lucerne, and we revisited the area 25 years later. Brunnen has changed little. A by-pass tunnel has spared it from the ravages of heavy traffic and the Hotel Weisses Rössli has not changed in appearance at all. The imposing Schweizerhof Hotel opposite has disappeared and the little tram from Schwyz that used to terminate outside the hotel has been replaced by a boring and unromantic bus.

Happily five of the characterful paddle steamers survive, three now over 100 years old, with their spotless innards and graceful dining rooms. The area remains a joy to visit and, currency exchange rates permitting, who knows where we might end up in our Golden Wedding year if we get that far?

From the Pages of *The Thorntonian*

The first extract offers the "reminiscences" mentioned at the conclusion of the "retirement of Mr Evans" article reproduced in issue no 10.

Summer 1951:

MR. EVANS AND H.T.S.

When first our new Headmaster came to see the site of his new school, he found that South Lodge had been the home of a member of the Gorringe family, well-known still as drapers. The Thorntons had lived in the next residence, which later formed part of Nôtre Dame School. Henry Thornton School was built in the grounds of South Lodge, which were still gardens when Mr. Evans first came. The lawn is nearly as originally laid down, and the truly magnificent copper beeches, one of which is as fine as any in our country, partly separated the lawn and little summer house from the kitchen garden, on the edge of which grew the fruit trees still surviving in the playground asphalt. A pool lay where the school now stands and below it was a paddock which now forms the school field. In the earliest days the kitchen garden was used by the Head for its original purpose and he will tell you that a marrow he grew on the School site was so big that it had to be carried home in a clothes basket. The beds of shrubs round the school were planed when the school was built. The writer well remembers his first visit to the school while it was under construction. The floor of the Gymnasium cum Hall was being put down and specialists were fixing the recessed boxes so familiar to the boys in their exercises. What sort of a school were we to become? And what sort of a building had the authorities given us?

Our new home was found to satisfy most desires; the newest idea was a geography room, perhaps the first in England specially designed, and the product of the fertile imagination of one of the School's characters, Mr. Leonard Cundall. His brain it was that later provided the germ of the idea of the Clapham Exhibition in 1939, much of the work of which was done by Mr. W. R. John under the Headmaster's chairmanship. [*Selected extracts from the brochure appear on the website. Ed*] By the untiring efforts of all the Staff a tremendous exhibition of Clapham's industries, history, and all branches of education was staged in co-operation with the Chamber of Commerce. But this triumph soon faded into oblivion as the second world war uprooted the School and transferred it to Chichester. There in some degree of adversity we came to know the Headmaster very well, for the force of circumstances threw Staff and boys into very close contact.

But to return to the Geography room. We found it fitted with many new devices; and on the floor above were Science laboratories of the latest type and an Art room of modern design. Looking back we can see the need of a Music room, a special Prefects' room, and a Library nearer than that at South Lodge. Indeed, when war broke out, the building of a Library on to the School was projected, but alas economy prevents this. We have however received a Hut to house the A.T.C., a new and important feature of the post-war period.

When we were safely housed in 1929 in our new abode, many were the discussions that took place on names, colours, and dress. In the outcome the new Headmaster quietly decided on the black and silver we know so well, rejecting the gaudy for the neat, and obtained the permission of the Thornton family to use the Thornton crest for the School. Hence the three thorn trees of our badge. Famous men associated with Clapham provided the Head with his new House names, while the name Thornton had been commemorated by an annual School service, and by the name of the School. Between the towering block of new buildings we can still see the pillared summer house at the bottom of the Thornton garden where Pitt once took tea.

Then came the search for a School song and eventually the boys were introduced by Messrs. Cundall and Cooper to a new composition by Eric Gilder, a boy of the School, who won a scholarship in music. The words we believe to have been by the Headmaster though his modesty forbade him to have his name printed on the copies of the music. Gilder eventually joined the B.B.C. and was broadcasting recently as the conductor of a girls' choir. [*Brief obituary published in issue no 2. Ed*]

Fives courts were built, unfortunately unprotected from the weather, and tennis courts marked out on the asphalt. Though the Head is a shrewd judge of tennis and played it a lot in his youth, he showed more interest here in Fives, at which game he and Mr. Cooper formed an unbeaten pair for many years, but alas! time marches on.

To the Staff, a happy one, the Head is memorable for his encyclopaedic knowledge and phenomenal accuracy of memory. *The Times* crossword quotations are soon dealt with, and the most obscure reference usually evokes an echo in his mind. The mention of his word-perfect memory recalls an occasion on which he picked up an examination paper

in the Hall containing a passage for translation from English into French, and said drily that he supposed the third sentence was too difficult as it had been omitted by the examiners. In his platform remarks to the School the lower Forms are often impressed by the dry, unsuspected humour which drives home his point more clearly than would the usual solemn warning. With the Seniors his range of knowledge often leads him into divagations from the main theme, while his interest in philosophy leads him to weld all into a composite whole. The Vith forms readily affirm that the Head's clear-cut judgement allows nothing indefinite or vague, and find that the older members of the Staff will long recall the philosophical discussions round the lunch table that followed the dismissal of the boys.

The School has much to thank him for, and we remember with pleasure the graciousness of Mrs. Evans at our functions. "Haec olim meminisse juvabit."

*C.

Probably Mr Cooper, given the Latin quotation in the final line, from Virgil's Aeneid ("Perhaps one day we will remember even these things with joy"). Ed

"Common Voices" Heritage Project

Tricia Holland is Co-ordinator of a recent heritage project, "Common Voices - Past and Present", delivered by Big Up Films in partnership with The Clapham Society and Lambeth Archives and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The first stage of the project enabled pupils at Bonneville School to interview older people about life in post-war Clapham and participate in creative heritage activities. This culminated in a film, illustrations and a mixed-media map of Clapham Common, which will be distributed to local schools and community groups as a learning resource. OT Mike Surridge (1947-52) took part in this initial project.

Tricia is developing a second stage of the project (using the successful models from the first), which will be focusing on childhood memories and life in Clapham during World War 2 to link with history unit 9 ("What was it like for children in the Second World War?"). She is keen to know if any OTs 43 would like to be involved. If so, please contact her direct at: 12 Allard Gardens, London, SW4 9QA; 020 7720 0695; or triciaholland@talktalk.net

Teaching Staff

The list of substantive appointments dating from the 1930s and 1940s is attached. Please advise Ted Hayward of any amendments or additions.

The Editor welcomes contributions for future issues. Please post or e-mail them to Ted Hayward, 31 Linfields, Little Chalfont, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9QH; ted.hayward@btinternet.com

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