



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)

No 15

January 2011

Reminders

Two diary dates for this year:

- Annual General Meeting – 2pm on Saturday 19 March at Lambeth College, South Side, SW4
- Next reunion – Saturday 24 September at The Windmill.

The agenda and supporting papers for the AGM will be circulated nearer the date.

Henry Thornton Award

The Management Committee has agreed that, to foster an "academic" link with Lambeth College and Lambeth Academy (which occupy between them virtually the whole of the former HTS site), an annual award of £100 be made to each institution, for presentation to one nominated pupil for specific achievements, the latter criteria being entirely at the discretion of the College and Academy. The Association's award is for three years in the first instance and is in the form of book vouchers.

The initial presentation was made at Lambeth College's graduation ceremony, held at Battersea Arts Centre on Saturday 13 November 2010 and attended by Committee members Peter Greenwood, Ted Hayward, Terry Lawlor and Mike SurrIDGE. The recipient was Georgi Kovachev, from Bulgaria, who came to the UK in 2009 to study his A levels. He is in the Sixth Form and is now applying to take a Business and Marketing degree course at university.

The presentation of the first award to Lambeth Academy is likely to take place in June or July 2011.

Further details have been posted on the Home page of the website; if any members without internet access would like a copy of the certificate itself, please contact Ted Hayward.

Management Committee 2011-2

Attached for your information/action, as appropriate, is a copy of the nomination form for election of members to serve on the Committee for the year from 1 April 2011.

Membership

Currently 101, including two Associates.

Obituary

R G J (Bob) Wood (1946-54): died 14 August 1992. School captain, 1952-3; prefect; House captain (Clarkson); Flight-Sergeant and senior NCO, ATC. [*Editor's note: issue 5, April 2008, included an appeal from Eric Wilson, 1946-51, for any information about Bob's whereabouts. Subsequent research, including enquiries of his Oxford college, confirmed the sad news that he had died at the comparatively early age of 57. A fuller appreciation, with contributions from Eric and other OTs who knew Bob, will appear in the next newsletter.*]

Reminiscences

Ron Davies (1948-56) shares a couple of memories of **John Bagshaw** (?1946-51), whose death in May 2009 was reported in issue 11:

He was a larger-than-life character. All who knew him treasured his warmth, generosity and good humour. I knew him primarily through OTs' cricket where, in the 50s and 60s, he was an invaluable slow, left-arm bowler, reliable opening bat and excellent slip fielder in the 3rd XI side formed by Gordon Boast. Two stories about John I particularly remember around this time.

The OTs were a wandering team, which meant we played all our matches away from home as Rose Hill pitches had become hazardous. One Sunday, we were at Isleworth enjoying the post-match hospitality of Unilever. John was not feeling too well, so he asked Gordon if he could kip in the back of his car. Gordon naturally agreed, so off went John to Unilever's car park. When Gordon came out of the bar an hour or so later, John had completely disappeared. Where on earth was he? The answer came a few minutes later when one of the Unilever team drove back into the car park with a very sheepish John in the back. John had, of course, kipped in the back of the wrong car and frightened the life out of the poor driver when he woke up.

The second story is a personal one. On match days I used to pick John up at Balham station. He would casually sling his kit in the boot of my Mini and join me in the front. One week I traded in the Mini for a rear-engined Renault Dauphine. The following Saturday I picked John up as usual and equally as usual he slung his kit in the back. The disaster that followed can be easily imagined. As I tried to drive off there was a loud bang from the back as John's kit entangled itself with the engine. Whether we ever got to the match, I cannot remember, but I do remember how costly that episode was!

It was a great pity John decided not to come to OTA reunions. His reason was that he wanted to remember his OT friends as they were in yesteryear. I respect that decision, but in my opinion it was a mistaken one. What laughs we could have had together in The Windmill!

A follow-up from **James Hiney** on the "**Tiggy**" **Ainsworth** obituary published in the November 2010 newsletter:

We weren't doing *Macbeth*, but himself came up with an argument – possibly in Current Affairs, or something similar – on the very relevant subject of war. The Bard, he sought to prove, had served as a private soldier, in the British Army, because he'd found a quotation [*Act 1, scene 2*]: 'Enter a bleeding Sergeant', followed immediately by King Duncan's: 'What bloody man is this?'

Colin Walder (1968-72) recalls teaching staff from the latter years:

Mr Thompson, English (taught in one of the classrooms seen in Ron Bernstein's 1998 video on the website). First name Benjamin? – we used to call him Ben between ourselves. He was a tall, bespectacled man, in his eighties, with white hair and a jowly look to his face.

He ran a little thing called 'Penmanship', aimed at any pupil whose handwriting was poor. If you were a 'member', so to speak, you would have to submit passages of text to practise and improve your handwriting. I particularly remember his dreaded 'livener'! He had more than one, a light pine shade and a darker wood model; one was around 12ins long and the other about 18ins. They were shaped like cricket bats, and if you were caught either talking or not paying attention you got a whack in front of the whole class. Would not be allowed today, I think.

Mr David Crawley, Music: ran the school orchestra. A bespectacled chap, not your usual schoolmaster. He was a smoker who liked to light up in the high ceiling practice room, wore dark jeans or corduroy trousers and Ben Sherman shirts – a definite 70s-style man.

Mr 'Taffy' Williams, Sport/PE. A Welshman, obviously. I remember him being involved training the rugby team at Priest Hill; he always wore a classic royal blue tracksuit. My most vivid recollection of him, or more accurately, his right knee, was almost getting knocked senseless at rugby training when he ran in a straight line carrying the ball and we had to tackle him to the floor by grabbing his legs. Needless to say, I went for it and got a knee in the face. I took a while to recover and never brought him down either.

Mr Ackland, subject unknown. Another 70s-style man, bespectacled, smoked and wore corduroy jackets and jeans, similar to Mr Crawley in manner. Ran the rugby team, but I'm not sure if he taught anything else. I always remember school rugby matches were punctuated by him bellowing "You're playing like a fairy, [pupil's name]!".

Another fond recollection was 4th year sport. I chose cycling. This took place at the wonderful old velodrome at Herne Hill, London, which was used for the cycling in one of the early Olympic games. It still just about exists today

Those who did it rode fixed-wheel (single high gear) racing bikes with no brakes, except for your own legs! I recall wondering how the heck I was going to stay on the machine going up the banked curves – it looked impossible. But of course it was easy in the end.

A few more staff-related musings from **Derek Yandell** (1945-52):

In newsletter no 12 [*March 2010*] John Jones refers to "...the most miserable of men". This could have been Ted Field, the assistant caretaker in my time. I remember two of them. The first, whose name eludes me, was very distinguished and known affectionately as "Jeeves". He left and was replaced by an Irishman who was as unpleasant as Field. (I meet "Jeeves" again later when attending a dance at Battersea Grammar School, to which he had moved.)

John also mentions a "Mr Taylor". This must be a coincidence as what little I did in music was with a different Mr Taylor, who was certainly at the school in 1945 and was replaced by Mr Smethurst in 1945. Perhaps John's Taylor

replaced Smethurst? [*Editor's note: according to my staff records Mr A E Taylor was Music master from the early 1940s until 1951; Mr H Smethurst succeeded him for the period 1951-7; he was replaced by Mr A Chatterley, 1957-61; and the teacher recalled by John Jones would have been Mr F L Taylor, 1961-8.*]

Mr S A Owen [1946-55] was a bit of a mystery. He took my class for History for one year and, curiously, appears in an ATC camp photograph. Mr G B Wilson [1948-52] may have replaced Mr W R John, who taught History as well as Economics. Wilson contributed considerably to the ATC, even after he had left the school.

Here's the concluding part of the offering from **Tim Gee** (1951-60):

Catlin, the gymnast. Thomson (?), with his upper-class accent, from Belgravia; good bloke all the same. Michael Crombie playing Winifred Atwell rags.

A few more random names: Singh; Quintiliani; Skarpplik; Rasmussen; Nutkins; Brian Poole; "Percy" Potter; Gore; Greenwood; and Brian Wall – very mischievous: he once made a facetious remark to Mr Lambert, and was so cheeky that Mr Bramble raised a fist and threatened to deck him.

I must say I have unreserved admiration for Steve Kingshott when he declared [*issue no 5, April 2008*] that he failed all eight "O" levels, beat everyone at Chess and Fives, couldn't remember a single class-mate, and missed final assembly as he was in detention at the time.

And finally...: Roy Smith had a little bubble car that John Parr and I carried down to the bottom of the school playing field one night. We also hoisted my mum's corsets up the flagpole and painted "April Fool" on the washroom roof one 31 March – it rained, and the whitewash came off.

Our satchels were often our dads' kitbags, ink-stained from broken bottles.

Batger's sweet factory next door, and the smell of marmalade.

Back to Lacrosse: we dragooned a 19-stone goalie, Paul Woodley, who, suitably masked and padded, filled the goal completely. One problem though: there was a two-inch gap between leg-pads a, box and padded jersey, and the hard rubber ball whacked into his meaty thigh. He howled and executed a one-legged jig around the goal area. Undaunted, he resumed, and we won. He was replaced by Greenberg, a comparatively slender 18 stone. We were good: only two boys' schools played in the South of England, so we took on Oxford, Cambridge, London University, Kenton and Hampstead men's teams – and we won. We did make the mistake of going north once, into real men's Lacrosse territory, and were thrashed by Stockport Juniors. Our crosses were made by Lally of Quebec (of Indian origin, it was Canada's national sport).

Fives: I imagine many remember the prowess of Bowen and Bully.

Boxing: my dad had always bought me gloves for my birthday, and thanks to Mr Bramble I had a good straight left and right hook, when they were required twice in my life.

Some of the staff who were temporarily based at Chichester are remembered by **Monty Clarkson** (1935-42):

I believe the following were evacuated with the school: Messrs Evans, John, Jeremy, Gribble, Lambert, Haill, Bacon, Cossins, Collins, Collings, Cooper, Dix, Cundall, Read, Summerton, Wigley and Bramble.

Mr Morgan was seriously injured in a car accident near Oxford when driving back from holiday in Wales to rejoin the school for the evacuation. He never came back to teach but did visit us in the summer of 1940, when he was able to walk with the aid of a stick. I remember Mr Collings ("Cogs", to distinguish him from Collins), who taught German, being married in September 1939 whilst we were still in Bognor. I believe he was an Army Reservist and was called up fairly early in the war, presumably for *Intelligence, and do not remember him at Chichester. [**This posting is confirmed in the Autumn 1943 issue of The Thorntonian. Ed*]

Teaching was a Reserved Occupation (ie, not called for military service) for teachers over a certain age – probably 30, but perhaps 25 – and so most HTS staff were exempt. Two exceptions were Summerton (Physics) and Wigley (Biology/Music), who were called up in 1940. Summerton became an Instructor-Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and was on the cruiser *Manchester* when she was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean whilst escorting a convoy to Malta. Along with most of the crew he was rescued, and I understand that after he was demobilised he became a lecturer at a technical college, rather than returning to school teaching.

The last I heard of Mr Wigley (who lodged with the Read family in Chichester) was that he had left for South Africa or Rhodesia to train as a pilot in the RAF. An earlier newsletter [7] listed him as P/O Wigley, DFC, so he obviously was successful in that role. He was a talented musician and took control of the school orchestra from Stan Read when he joined HTS in 1937 (when "Sam" Read played bassoon – to support Terry Sharp's recollection).

Mr Wigley took my pal Bob Denby and me into the blacked-out cathedral one winter evening whilst he practised on the organ (with the Bishop's blessing) – quite a memorable experience for us boys.

Terry Sharp recalls [issue 9, April, 2009] Stan Read as a Home Guard officer. The Chichester Home Guard was a Company, divided into six platoons, each of which was responsible for a geographical area of the city. Mr Read, originally a sergeant, was later commissioned and became CO of no 4 Platoon to the south of Chichester., where he lived. Bob Denby and I were members of no 1, to the north, where we were billeted. Mr Bramble, who had been a serving officer before joining HTS, was the Company Sergeant Major, ie, in charge of all the local Home Guard members of some 450 men. I well remember him drilling us all together in the cattle market in preparation for a War Weapons Week parade, when we would be marching with regular Army, RAF and Royal Navy contingents; he was

determined that we would be as smart as them. This was probably in 1941 or 1942, by which time the Home Guard was really quite effective – despite the image portrayed in “Dad's Army” programmes!

Mr John led a small contingent of staff back to Clapham to re-open the School there.

After the war at least two HTS staff – Messrs Hail and Collins – decided to stay on in Chichester and transferred to the High School for Boys.

From the Pages of *The Thorntonian*

Autumn 1958:

Valete
MR. R. S. BRAMBLE

The retirement of Mr. Bramble from the position of Gym. Master, at the record age of 70, has brought to an end an epoch in the life of our school. For 33 years he has been one of our chief mainstays. During that long period thousands of boys have passed through his hands, always to their advantage, physically and morally, and there can be few who have not learned to love his gentle sway, with its combination of firm discipline and kind encouragement. His influence has passed far beyond the walls of the gymnasium, and permeated the entire life of the School. Still more wonderful, all these years he has been, strictly speaking, a disabled man, never having fully recovered from the wound he received at Mons in 1914.

Robert Bramble was a cavalry trooper when the first World War broke out, and was a member of the First Expeditionary Force to France, one of the most famous expeditionary forces in all history – the “Old Contemptibles”. The German bullet that shattered his leg ended his military career, but indirectly opened up to him a most honourable and useful scholastic life. It was a fortunate day for our School when he joined the Staff in 1925.

As Mr. Bramble's Headmaster for 24 years, I was in a unique position to estimate the value of his services to the School, and gladly do I testify to it. But I must also speak of Robert Bramble the man. The most striking qualities of this physical training instructor were his excellent mind, his sterling character, his deep understanding of human nature, his wise judgement of events. No one could have had a more loyal colleague or a more delightful friend.

May you live long and happily, Robert Bramble! We shall not forget you.

W.D. Evans

***Head Master's Letter (2)**

Extract from Mr B J F Dorrington's letter to parents, Autumn 1959:

The increase in the number of accidents to boys carrying out experiments at home is a matter of deep concern which calls for immediate attention. While no one would wish to stifle the spirit which prompts such experiments it does seem that more supervision and advice are essential. Parents should take a lively interest in their sons' hobbies and be aware of any experimental work being undertaken. If there seems to be any risk in such experiments further advice should always be sought.

Experiments which boys see carried out with perfect safety in a laboratory under ideal conditions may well prove to be dangerous if attempted at home. The making of fireworks, explosives, the dismantling of grenades, mortar bombs, etc., which can still be found in some districts, should be forbidden. Experiments with rocket propellants can be dangerous unless carried out under expert guidance.

**No 1 appeared in issue 14*