



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 20

August 2012

2012 Reunion

This year's event will be held on **Saturday 6 October**; the usual reminder/invitation is enclosed.

Obituaries

Kenneth Raymond Andrews (probably 1932-9): died 6 January 2012. Awarded Matriculation prize, 1938; Captain, school gymnasium team, 1939; played for 2nd XI cricket team; House prefect (Stephen); "...he recalled shocking his schoolmates and masters by forecasting the downfall of the British Empire" – from obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, 27.2.12. [See also relevant extract below from a report of the proceedings of the school's Political Society.] He had wartime service with the RAF in Kenya. There are two HTS honours boards entries for him: BA (Lond), First Class Hons (1948) at King's College, London, where he took a History degree after originally considering languages; and he gained his PhD at King's in 1951, on "Elizabethan privateering". After a year as lecturer at Liverpool University he taught at a college of further education in Ealing, subsequently moving to Hull where he became Professor of History in 1976. He was a Fellow of the British Academy.

From The Thorntonian, Spring term 1937:

Andrews gave the second paper, on "The Future of the British Empire". He prophesied its fall within twenty years and gave as his reason that, with the growth of the nationalist spirit throughout the world, the Dominions would also wish to become independent. Chaotic conditions would result from the encroachment of the dissatisfied powers upon them, and apparently the fall of the civilized world would follow the fall of the British Empire. He modified this absolute pessimism, however, by saying that it might be avoidable if there were closer-co-operation between the Mother Country and the Dominions. His audience disagreed with his statement that British trade would diminish if the Dominions became independent, and somebody pointed out that without the Dominions the Empire would still be considerable. The necessity for communal defence would also keep the Empire together.

[A partly fulfilled prophesy, ie, as regards the steady diminution of the Empire. Ed]

Alexander Donald Cyril Jamieson (also 1932-9 – confirmed years): died 28 March 1945. A fuller entry, based on information recently provided by brother Ken, also an OT (1934-9), will appear in the next issue.

Reminiscences

Gordon Holt (1952-9) offers a few more reflections on Harold Smethurst (see valette item reproduced in issue no 18):

Recent reminiscences of music master Harold Smethurst reminded me that I subsequently found out that he was producer and musical director at the Wimbledon Light Opera Society who in 1954 put on *Merrie England* and in 1957 *The Mikado*. This explained to me why us boys were frequently set to warbling such ditties as "Yeomen of England" and "Three Little Maids from School". Yes, he did have a bit of a sudden temper (and a glittering eye to go with it). The time when he was trying to drum up custom for the school choir was for me the most terrifying example. No one in my particular class put their hand up, at which he exploded volcanically. Smethurst then made all 30-odd of us sing solo a verse from a hymn. I can't remember whether he found any willing "voices" by this method. However, looking back, Music lessons otherwise provided an enjoyable break from the school day, and the poor man did his level best without a dedicated music room (one of the many accommodation inadequacies of HT at that time).

From **Ken Dobeson** (1938-43):

I attended HTS in its last pre-war year in form 1A. I remember some of my form mates who like me were all Junior County scholarship winners. Form 1B were mainly Free Place winners and form C people whose parents paid for

them to attend HTS, or so I believe. Our classroom was the one next to the geography classroom so I can remember Mr. Cundall very well, particularly as he taught us in Chichester until the return in 1943.

My father had to promise to allow me to stay at school after 14 years of age (the then legal obligatory school age) and had to pay to keep me at HTS, a relatively small amount which was reversed after his death in May 1942 when he was killed in action on HMS *Hood*, after which I received a grant paid in quarterly if my memory is correct. I believe it was called a means test measure.

Other pre-war memories: during the Munich crisis air-raid shelters were dug on Clapham Common which soon became waterlogged and therefore completely u/s. We had to attend school, during a period prior to an evacuation which never took place, complete with clothes, toothbrush, etc, and the first issue of gas masks which were returned after Neville Chamberlain came back with his "Peace in our time" message. We school children were kept quiet every day with all sorts of entertainments. .

After the invasion of Poland, we were evacuated via Balham station by electric train to Bognor Regis. I remember the discussions we had as to our destination, with everybody else in my compartment thinking we were going north until we saw Arundel Castle – when I was totally vindicated. I suppose it was rather unfair as I had travelled previously on the line . Balham Tube station was later the terrible scene during the blitz when a bomb missed the bridge but exploded in the street beneath, leaving a giant crater into which a double-decker bus fell, smashing the water main. Over 100 people sheltering in the underground station were drowned in total darkness.

I was billeted with the Billinghurst family. Mr Billinghurst was the Head Gardener of the Bishop's Palace., the beautiful grounds to which my billet companion and form-mate David Gianotti and I had almost complete freedom to visit and play in. From the New Year of 1940 we lived in the Palace Lodge, which included the Gateway at the end of Canon Lane. What a lovely place in which to spend a war!

From the Pages of *The Thorntonian*

Here's the valette for Mr Gaskin mentioned in the last issue. The author is not identified but is likely to have been Mr Jeremy or Mr Cooper.

Autumn 1956:

MR. D. B. GASKIN

At the end of last Autumn Term, Mr. Gaskin left to become Headmaster of Moseley Grammar School, Birmingham, and although we were pleased, for his sake, to learn of his promotion to a larger school, the news of his departure was received with deep regret by Staff and boys.

Mr. Gaskin became Headmaster of Henry Thornton in 1951. His tenure of office was therefore much shorter than that of our previous Heads, yet it was long enough for him to impress his personality on the School most strongly.

The burden of administration work leaves the modern Headmaster little opportunity for teaching. Mr. Gaskin perforce spent in his study much time which he would have preferred to spend in the class-room or on the playing fields, for he possessed three of the most obviously desirable qualities in a schoolmaster: a liking for boys, a love of teaching and an enthusiasm for all sporting activities. Those boys who were privileged to attend his classes cannot fail to have been stimulated by contact with a man of such lively intelligence and varied interests. A far wider circle of parents and boys benefited from the untiring care which he devoted to the consideration of their needs and the solution of their problems. One of the first changes he introduced was the enlargement of the Time-table to give boys as wide a choice of subjects as possible, and the innovation was, in part, responsible for the expansion of the Sixth Forms in recent years.

On stage and screen, and in novels, schoolmasters have frequently been portrayed as dry, solemn, intolerant and pedantic, sometimes as inhuman. No one could have been further removed from this caricature than Mr. Gaskin. His range of knowledge was wide, but he wore it lightly. His sense of humour was so keen that he abhorred pomposity and pretentiousness. An avowed supporter of the democratic ideal, he preferred persuasion to dictation, and in his dealings with those boys who, being human, fell short of perfection a natural kindliness induced him to temper justice with mercy. To his colleagues he was invariably courteous and considerate.

We should like to express our gratitude to him for his services to the School, and our sincere hope that he and his family will find happiness and satisfaction in his new sphere of activity.

Spring 1938:

JAMES COOK

James Cook, the son of an agricultural labourer, was born at Marton, in Cleveland, in 1728, and having, in the intervals of cow-tending, received some education in the village school, was at the age of twelve bound apprentice to a shop-keeper. After some disagreement with his master, his indentures were cancelled and he was bound anew to a firm of ship owners of Whitby. In 1755, at the beginning of the war with France, he was mate of a vessel lying in the

Thames and volunteered for the King's service. Although he entered as an able-seaman, his promotion was rapid and he soon obtained a warrant as master. He sailed for the St. Lawrence and was employed in surveying. During the winter months he applied himself to the study of mathematics and obtained a sound practical knowledge of astronomical navigation. Later he was appointed "marine surveyor of the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador". His results were published as volumes of sailing directions, which have maintained, even to the present day, a reputation for accuracy.

The Royal Society decided to send an expedition to the Pacific in 1769 to observe the transition of Venus. Cook received a commission as lieutenant and was appointed to command the ship "Endeavour" for the purpose of the expedition. The transit was successfully observed on 3rd June, 1769, at Tahiti. On the homeward voyage six months were spent on the coast of New Zealand, which was for the first time sailed round, examined and charted with some approach to accuracy. The whole east coast of Australia was examined in a similar way; New South Wales being so called by Cook from a fancied resemblance to the northern shores of the Bristol Channel. After further exploration, Cook arrived back in England in June, 1771.

The success of the voyage and the importance of the discoveries were universally recognized, and Cook was promoted to Commander's rank. He was appointed to the command of a new expedition for the exploration of the Pacific. This expedition consisted of two ships, one of 460 tons and the other of 330 tons. The primary object of the expedition was to verify the reports of a great southern continent and, with this object, the ships were kept along the edge of the ice, passing within the Antarctic circle for the first time in January, 1773. After a cruise to Tahiti, Cook again sailed south, passing again within the Antarctic circle, and in January, 1774, he reached his greatest southern latitude at 71 degrees ten minutes. All attempts to penetrate further south were in vain, and Cook turned north; after visiting Southern Georgia, the South Sandwich islands, and Table Bay, he arrived at Plymouth in July, 1779.

The geographical discoveries made by Cook on this voyage were both numerous and important, and by proving the non-existence of the great southern continent, which had for so long been a favoured myth, he established our knowledge of the Southern Pacific on a sound basis. In fact, the maps of that part of the world still remain essentially as he left them, though, of course, much has been done in perfecting the details. Within a few days of his return Cook was promoted to the rank of captain, and received an appointment at Greenwich Hospital.

A most important discovery was the possibility of keeping a ship's company at sea without serious loss from sickness and death. In his first voyage of nearly three years, the ship lost thirty men out of a complement of eighty-five, and although such a mortality was not at that time considered excessive, or even great, it gave rise, in Cook's mind, to serious reflections, which afterwards bore most noble fruit. In the second voyage, notwithstanding its great length, duration and hardship, only one man died of disease out of a complement of 118. The men throughout the voyage were remarkably free from scurvy, and the dreaded fever was unknown. Of the measures and precautions adopted to obtain this result, a detailed account was read before the Royal Society in March, 1776. The Society acknowledged the addition made to hygienic science, as well as the important service to the maritime world and humanity, by the award of the Copley Gold Medal.

Shortly after Cook's return it was decided to send an expedition into the North Pacific to search for a passage round the north of America. Cook went in command of it, and sailed from Plymouth in July, 1776. The ships went via the Cape of Good Hope to Van Diemen's Land and New Zealand and spent the following year among the islands of the South Pacific. In December, 1777, they crossed the line, discovering the Sandwich Islands on their way. They reached Icy Cape in August, 1778, and, being unable to penetrate further, turned back.

In January, 1779, the ships anchored in Karakakoa Bay for a fortnight, during which time the crews were well received by the natives. On 4th February the ships put out to sea but had to return owing to a storm. During the previous visit the natives had stolen many things from the ships; this time the thefts increased and the cutter of one of the ships was stolen. The natives were punished, and Cook went ashore intending to bring off the native king as a hostage. The boats were attacked and Cook was killed. Many stories of the attack have been invented and circulated, but there is no reason to suppose that the death was due to anything more than a sudden outburst of savage fury, following on the ill-will caused by the sharp punishment inflicted on the thieves. In November, 1874, an obelisk to his memory was erected in the immediate neighbourhood of the spot where he fell, but the truest and best memorial is the map of the Pacific.

There is no evidence of Captain Cook's connection with Clapham. It was commonly reported that he resided at Clarence House, one of the houses near the Parish Church. This has a curious balcony at the back and someone gave the balcony the name of Captain Cook's quarter-deck. The balcony commands a magnificent view over London to the northern heights. It is also stated that Captain Cook planted several trees on Clapham Common. One of these trees, in front of Deane's shop on the Pavement, was blown down in a violent gale in 1893, and the stump has been covered with a zinc plate to prevent its decay. This stump, now covered with ivy, is known as Captain Cook's tree or the seat tree. The tree has been said to be a cotton tree but it is a balsam poplar. Captain Cook's widow lived in

Clapham for some time and died there in 1836 at 93 years of age. It seems that the person who really planted the rare trees on the Common was her eldest son, who brought them from abroad.

J. Hart-Smith

(Also Spring 1938)

OLD THORNTONIAN ASSOCIATION *(FOUNDED 1913)

The firm of Messrs. H T. Oliver and Sons Ltd. have been entrusted with the work of constructing the new School entrance from Elms Road. This firm is largely composed of a family closely connected with the School, and includes the two well-known members of the O. T. Football Club of that name.

Our Silver Jubilee.

It is now just twenty-five years since the Association was founded, and, except for the war period, it has continued to increase in membership and the variety of its activities, despite the many changes that the School name has undergone since the old [Battersea] Poly. Days. Now that the present name of the School has become firmly established in Clapham, the growth of the Association has been more marked, and its value is being appreciated more and more.

Mr. C. E. Jeremy, who has probably the longest record of membership and service, continues his efforts to foster the well-being of the new Association through the medium of his position as a member of the School teaching staff.

**Editor's note: OTs will doubtless be interested to learn that the Association is approaching its first centenary. The OTA designation clearly predates the move to Clapham but was presumably adopted to reflect the need for a single organisation to include all OBs and staff of both HTS and the predecessor school in Battersea. Those attending the forthcoming reunion, on 6 October, may like to consider whether – and, if so, how – this milestone might be celebrated next year; the Management Committee will in any case be doing so at its next meeting.*

HOUSE NAMES

The inclusion of the extract, above, on James Cook leaves just one more famous name, **Samuel Pepys**, whose abridged biography will be reproduced in the next newsletter.

OTs may like to be reminded of the relevant magazine articles which have appeared in earlier issues:

Zachary Macaulay – no 6, July 2008
Thomas Clarkson – no 8, February 2009
William Wilberforce – no 10, July/August 2009
James Stephen – no 14, November 2010
Henry Cavendish – no 18, November 2011.

"THE THORNTON PLAYERS"

The Editor has received, from a non-Association source, an interesting collection of photographs and other memorabilia relating to four plays performed by members of the Dramatic Society of the now-defunct Clapham Literary Institute during the 1940s. They were known as "The Thornton Players" since the productions were, from 1938, all based at HTS, and the Institute's address was given as 45 South Side.

The material seems to have belonged to Maurice Smith, possibly a local resident at the time, who assisted with stage management as well as being a member of the cast. The productions themselves, with dates (Saturdays), were: "Poison Pen", by Richard Llewellyn (10 July 1943); "Johnson Over Jordan", by J B Priestley (15 January 1944); Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (10 November 1945); and "Wild Decembers", by Clemence Dane (6 April 1946). A copy of the programme for "Poison Pen" and a local press review have been added to the Miscellaneous gallery of the website Memorabilia page, and Ted Hayward would be pleased to provide extracts from, or further information about the contents of, the scrapbook to any OTs who may be interested.

The Editor welcomes contributions for future issues. Please post or e-mail them to:
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