



# 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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## **Bob Larbey**

The obituary in the last issue has prompted reminiscences of Bob (and John Esmonde) from several OTs.

Peter Watling (1949-54) writes: "After leaving school I played football for the OTs' 1st Eleven with memories of Bob Larbey, John Esmonde, Eddie Myers, Trevor Dingley and Syd Perl. We had so much fun after the match: a group of us would go from Rose Hill to the Crown pub at Morden for a couple of pints, with John and Bob starting off the comedy. They were incredibly witty and had us in stitches, and the rest of us would join in. The after-match drinks always left us feeling something was missing if either of them was unable to join us. It was evident they had a strong rapport, inspiring each other; it was a pleasure to be in their company and enjoying some of the seeds of their brilliant careers as script writers. I partnered John Esmonde in the school fives team doubles in my last year. He was a superb all-round athlete, achieving Victor Ludorum in the school sports."

Wilf Finbow (1931-6): "I met them after their two years' National Service as they played in the OT cricket XI. I was a pleasure to meet them, but their new venture into the seedy world of showbiz was calling them. They were very brave ...forging that new and unusual career. The two female leads in *The Good Life* have survived but the two male leads have departed into a 'green world'. Is there a moral here?"

Colin Hudnott (1960-6): "When I left Henry Thornton School in 1966 I played football for the Old Boys, where I first met Bob and also John, both of whom had been playing for the team for a number of years. Bob was a defender with an uncompromising style and John a speedy forward. At that time I did not know they were aspiring scriptwriters. However, I do remember how funny they were in the pub where we retired to after each game, and it was no surprise when they started to pen successful TV comedy shows. Despite the glamorous showbiz circles they finally worked in they still enjoyed their football every Saturday and continued to entertain us with their wit and humour."

## **Annual Reunion**

The next reunion will be on **Saturday 4 October**, at The Windmill. The usual information is attached. As indicated, the proposed tour of Lambeth Academy has had to be postponed.

## **Membership**

The present tally, allowing for renewal subscriptions for this year received by the 1 June deadline, is 87. A recent joiner is Mrs Adele Wright, daughter of Mr C W Gribble (1920-54); she hopes to be able to come to the reunion.

## **Reminiscences**

Ernie Williams (1940-5) writes about his time at the wartime emergency school, National Service experiences, and subsequent career: "I became a Thorntonian in September 1940, attending the old School building. It had been renamed the South-West London Emergency Secondary School for boys and included pupils from The Bec, Battersea Grammar, Strand and others in the area. The total number of boys was approximately 400. We were all in the same situation, being those who preferred to avoid evacuation and remain in London. In the main we had no idea which of the other schools was their individual choice. The 1940 blitz was then at its height and we spent a considerable amount of time in the air-raid shelters and the reinforced cloakrooms with their bricked-up windows and supported ceilings. Teaching was not easy but the staff did what they could. During the 'buzz bombs' period in 1944, when we could hear them overhead, we would wait for the explosion when we heard the engine stop. If we heard it we knew it had missed us and we were once again safe! On one occasion, however, we heard the explosion and carried on as usual, but about ten minutes later one of the staff came in, looked around, pointed to a boy and called him over. The teacher explained that the bomb had exploded just beyond Clapham South in Balham and his mother had been killed. When the all-clear sounded he was taken back to his home, left with friends or relatives, and never returned to school.

When the ATC Squadron was formed in 1945 I was in my final year and one of the 46 who joined. We paraded on the playground and I remember on one occasion a group of us in uniform being marched by the Warrant Officer to a building near Clapham South, where we collected old rifles (no ammunition); these were used for appropriate drills and training. That year I left school and began my working life.

I passed my School Certificate exams but did not stay on for the sixth form. I was not academically minded but very good at technical drawing and woodwork. After discussing my position with Mr Rawlings, the Handicrafts master, I took an apprenticeship with a firm called Higgs & Hill Ltd.

Apprentices at that time were allowed to attend the Brixton School of building one day a week until they were 18. The company's Apprenticeship Management Team were forward-looking: they considered well-trained and qualified apprentices would become general foremen in future years and allowed their apprentices the day off to attend school until the age of 21. I gained a Full Tech City & Guilds in Carpentry & Joinery, and in Building Science & Construction. Within two months of completing my apprenticeship I was called up for National Service.

On leaving the school's ATC Squadron I had joined 1481 Norwood Squadron for the next five years, attaining the rank of Cadet Warrant Officer and also passing ATC exams. After National Service square-bashing I was interviewed regarding the work I would be doing in the RAF for the next 18 months. I was shown a list of openings available and because of my ATC background was offered a free choice. No carpenters were wanted, so I chose another practical activity, that of motor mechanic. I did a three-month theory course and then spent the rest of my NS working with well-qualified mechanics in the transport section. I learned a great deal.

On demobilisation I returned to Higgs & Hill and quickly became disillusioned thinking I could do better. I applied to Loughborough College to train for teaching and was accepted for the handicraft course. I gained my teaching qualification and also the Diploma of Loughborough College, which at that time did not have university status.

My first teaching post was at a Tulse Hill school with more than 2,000 boys. It was purpose-built and took all the boys from five secondary modern schools that had closed down. I stayed there nine years. My next post was at St Thomas the Apostle School in Peckham, where I was Head of the Craft Department. During my time there the Open University was started, and I was accepted as one of their first year's intake. Three years' part-time study gained me a BA. The following year I was appointed as a Senior Master. I continued as Head of the renamed Technical Department, having additional responsibilities within the Management Team. I remained at St Thomas the Apostle for 13 years. I had expected to stay there until retirement, but another post I saw advertised attracted me. I applied and got the job: Director of the ILEA Teachers' Centre for Design and Technology. I thoroughly enjoyed the work. In 1990 Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister, decided to abolish the ILEA as she had already done with the Greater London Council. The schools and all staff were transferred to the 13 London boroughs and the Centre was closed. The Council made no effort to find posts for the Centre staff and I was declared redundant – along with my deputy, the Librarian, two technical assistants and office staff. As I was approaching 61, the decision was made to pay me a full pension. I rode off into the sunset.

My wife and I enjoyed spending the nest-egg over the next 20 years, travelling extensively. She died in November 2012, and I have adjusted my lifestyle to suit. Over the last 60+ years I have never met another Thorntonian whom I had known. I do have a friend who is a member of the Association, but I met him as a playing member when I joined Dulwich & Sydenham Golf Club.

## **1949 School Inspection**

### **SCHOOL LIBRARY**

The Library is contained in an old house, which also serves as a dining centre. [*Perhaps, in retrospect, an unduly formal designation? Ed*] It is situated about 150 yards from the School. Three rooms are used, and together they constitute a Library which is both dignified and attractive.

There are more than 3,000 books, well housed, on open shelves. Standard works of reference are well represented, particularly in English. The fiction section, which numbers slightly less than 500 books, includes a useful collection by modern authors, popular with boys. As more of these books are added, some of the less attractive might be withdrawn. In addition, there are between 40 and 50 books whose condition is such that early removal is probably desirable.

The Library is in the charge of the senior English Master, who is assisted by the subject Masters of the various sections. He delegates the work of the lending of books to the prefects. Boys are able to borrow books during the lunch-hour, on each day except Wednesday. Between September 1948 and March 1949 approximately 700 books were borrowed. The system of recording the books borrowed tends to be slow, and with only one prefect on duty leads to some disorder. It might, perhaps, be better to have a Library Committee, consisting of representatives from each Form, responsible to the Master in charge for the general conduct of the Library routine.

Apart from its function of lending, the Library does not appear to be used. This was largely the position at the time of the last Report. The reasons given then and the solution

offered still obtain. In view of the great importance of the Library in the life of the School, it is clear that the issue must now be resolved.

More extracts will be published in subsequent newsletters.

## **From the Pages of *The Thorntonian***

Summer 1932

**Correspondence**

To the Editor of "The Thorntonian."

Clapham, 26/6/32.

Dear Sir,

I wish to bring to your attention a few misapprehensions in connection with the rule about School caps, which I think should be abolished.

The tight-fitting School cap makes itself a burden in hot weather. It gives most people a headache, and their work suffers in consequence; it ruffles the wearer's hair and his temper; this also has no good effect on his work. It will not even suffice properly to keep the sun out of his eyes while playing games or while walking.

The dull black of the cap is not at all the colour that should be chosen for a school cap. "How nice and neat," some people may say. But, surely a school cap should be distinctive, so that the scholars from one school can easily be distinguished from the scholars of another school. Every boy knows that black absorbs heat more than any other colour. Why, therefore, has the School cap so unsuitable a colour?

The reason put forward that boys do not wear a school cap because they are ashamed of their school is, I am sure, quite wrong. Most boys, even though they do not wear a cap, wear a blazer plainly displaying their school crest. I have never yet met a boy who was ashamed of his school, and I don't think I shall. , for most boys, however much they disagree with the school rules or masters, are proud to belong to a school.

I think the real reason for the dearth of wearers of school caps is the uncomfortable cap itself. The wearing of a school cap is, in fact, "a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance."

Yours

"AVEC CAP (DANS MA POCHE)."

Editor's comment: possibly a tongue-in-cheek protest (which at least equates "boys" with "scholars"! ) as I can find no published response from either the magazine editors or the Head Master.

## **Finally, For the Golfers...**

Ray (Sammy) Paton (1950-6), who with his wife Joan founded the Hemingford Abbots Golf Club, Huntingdon, Cambs, in 1991, is offering a special concessionary rate to OTs. If you're interested in learning more about the club and the offer, visit the website: [www.hemingfordabbotsgolfclub.co.uk](http://www.hemingfordabbotsgolfclub.co.uk); or e-mail Ray on [astroman.ray@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:astroman.ray@tiscali.co.uk)

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