



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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Data Protection (GDPR)

The Management Committee would like to thank all members who have replied to Ted Hayward's email of 29 April returning their completed consent forms (or otherwise giving their confirmation by an email declaration). If you did not receive the policy and enclosures or have mislaid them, please contact Ted, wearing his recently acquired hat as the Association's data protection officer, as soon as possible.

2018 Reunion

A reminder that the next get-together will be held on **Monday 12 November**. Further information to follow nearer the time, including menu options for the buffed lunch which will again be available this year.

Obituaries

Brian Edward Robinson (1948-54): died 2 April. Brian was a founder member of the Association's Management Committee, having joined when it was re-formed in 2006; he resigned on health grounds in December 2016. During his time at the school he was a member of the Chess club, and also of Pepys chess team.

His daughter, Mrs Carol Wallace, writes: "He loved his time at Henry Thornton School and often talked to us of his experiences. He was an erudite and interesting man, with a wonderful turn of phrase, always ready with the *mot juste*; I know that he attributed much of his love of words and learning to his years at the Grammar School".

Reproduced below, with kind permission of his family, are edited extracts from Brian's own "obituary" (which he penned, the Editor understands, at their behest):

"Early years spent in the Brixton Hill area, evacuated to Burnham on Sea for short periods. Mostly in London during the blitz.

Attended Henry Thornton Grammar School, Clapham, leaving at 16 to become a police cadet at Brixton and Information Room, New Scotland Yard.

National Service in 1954 but signed on for extra year to be part of RMP's only signal company. A conspicuous failure as a soldier – used to laugh at the wrong moments and try to show the Army better ways of doing things!

Left the Army in 1957 and after a brief spell in a bank joined the NRP in 1958. After Lilayi posted to Lunanshya and Roan Antelope in uniform CID and admin. After the Congo independence it was clear there was no future in Africa.

Upon return to the UK I had several jobs in security, investigation and latterly in sales. We moved to Kent in 1965 and I was able to move into social work. I transferred to Kent Probation for 12 years, ending as Crown Court Liaison Officer.

After retirement in 1999, having realised how many people had trouble with reading and writing, I worked voluntarily at the village school with reading to try and help the less able and hopefully diminish the numbers leaving school without these essential life skills."

Terence William (Tom) Sharp (1938-45): died 26 March, aged 90. The following brief entry appeared in *The Times* (issue dated 13 April): "Retired HM Diplomatic Service and Japan Travel Bureau. Old Thorntonian, linguist, music lover and keen theatre and concert goer."

Near-contemporary Harry Spence (1940-44) adds: "When called up into the Army [Intelligence Corps], he was assigned to a Mandarin course at SOAS [School of Oriental & African Studies], commissioned and posted to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). On release, he joined the Foreign Office, and was sent again to SOAS prior to a posting to Peking (Beijing) and a varied subsequent career, culminating as Consul-General, Amsterdam."

Editor's note: Terry (as he was always known to me) was a long-serving member, having joined the Association in October 2016, and an active supporter of both the annual reunions and (even more devotedly) AGMs. He co-ordinated arrangements for and participated in the two "memory lane" visits to Chichester, in July 2008 and October 2009, by a group of OTs who were evacuated during the Second World War to the local High School for Boys; photos and reports of both events are posted on the website (select "Chichester 1939-43" from the home page menu). He was a school and House (Wilberforce) prefect; occasional contributor to *The Thorntonian*, also serving as editor in 1944; and a leading member of the Literary and Debating Society.

Colin Bench-Capon (1942-7): died 22 November 2017. He was, like Terry Sharp, a wartime evacuee to Chichester. His son, Trevor, writes:

"My father often spoke about the evacuation to Chichester and had some fond memories of his time there, not least because that is where he first met my mother: he was billeted on my grandmother and so stayed in her house throughout his time there. Colin was very keen on cricket and represented the school at this sport. He served in the Royal Navy for 11 years (2 and a half in Malta), before joining Lloyd's Bank in Portsmouth. Later he worked in local government, ending up as Secretary to the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth. He retired to the Wirral, where he died."

Richard Ponman (1954-61): died 3 November 2017. He was awarded a form prize for each of the years 1956, 1957 and 1958. He also received prizes for achievements in two subjects – Latin (1958) and Economics (1959).

Stan Parrack (1946-51): died 27 June 2018.

[Please contact Ted Hayward if you have any memories of these OTs you'd like to share with other members. Ed.]

Reminiscences

Terry Lawlor (1951-6): issue no 40 included an appeal by Terry, as a postscript to his reflections on Ernie Williams (1940-5), for the identity of the master who gave 100 lines – "He who keepeth his tongue in his head saveth his soul from sorrow". The winner of the £10 prize Terry offered is Geoff White (1958-65), who correctly named Mr Solly May as the source of the quotation.

Terry adds: "I think the idea of alternate colours was to thwart the 'professional' writers of lines who did them in their spare time and sold them to miscreants. I remember that I could tape together three pencils and write lines three at a time – not that I was ever given 'lines', of course. The humiliation of having them torn up in front of you would now be termed as mental cruelty."

1949 School Inspection

SUBJECTS OF INSTRUCTION

English

The senior English Master [*Mr E L Hillman*], a First-Class Honours graduate of London, was appointed to this post in 1946 after experience in a similar school in Surrey. He is an extremely able and incisive teacher in the classroom and has brought sound ideas and a clear sense of purpose to his organisation of the department. Four other Masters share in the teaching; of these one is a recently appointed History graduate who takes only one form; one holds a Welsh general degree [*Mr W R Davies*], and the other two are non-graduates. None of them has previously taught in a Grammar School, though three have had considerable experience in other types of school. It is no reflection on the valuable and devoted work which these Masters are doing to say that their best contribution is likely to be made in the junior part of the School, perhaps as teachers of more than one subject to the same form; but, if this be true, then there is need of rather more specialist help for senior and Sixth form work.

A very carefully planned syllabus has been drawn up; it makes good provision for oral work and for progressive training in grammar and composition. Specific library texts are not prescribed in detail, but choice is left to individual Masters from a reasonably wide selection of poetry, prose and drama. In the matter of prose texts an interesting departure from conventional practice is being experimentally tried: instead of the single novel or collection of essays, studied rather slowly in class throughout a whole term, small sets of prose readers have been ordered and boys will be expected to read three or four of them, mainly at home, in the course of a term, while class study of prose is chiefly confined to long extracts from a variety of authors. This practice has much to commend it, though, with the less able Forms at least, it will probably be most effective if a certain amount of class time is devoted to discussion, both oral and written, of the books being read at home.

The work which results from this well-thought-out scheme has some admirable features. The boys in general speak and read well, and as they go up the School they make visible progress in the power of expressing themselves accurately and correctly in writing on topics within their scope. This in itself is a discipline of great value. But there are none the less certain points which invite criticism. It is perhaps a pity for a syllabus to describe its aims quite as frankly as this one does in terms of external examination tests. It may be answered that such language is only a *façon de parler* and that the objectives remain the same, whether the work is examined or not, but it is doubtful whether this is wholly true; there is at least a danger that aims will become distorted if that which should be incidental and non-essential is explicitly conceived as an end in itself. Moreover, there is discernible, perhaps because of this pre-occupation with external tests, a certain rigidity of approach, a tendency to over-emphasise form at the expense of content, and some failure to cultivate imagination, sensitivity and reflective thought. To say this is not to belittle the good results which are being achieved on the formal side; it is rather to draw attention to other, perhaps more specific, values of an English course which ought not to be neglected.

In the Sixth Form nine boys are preparing to take English as a Main subject in the Higher Certificate examination. A total time allowance of six periods a week is quite insufficient to meet the needs, necessarily diverse, of Upper and Lower Sixth, and this may partly explain and excuse a concentration on examination requirements which is even less desirable at this level than in the Main School. The senior Master's teaching is clear and scholarly and the response of the boys, especially in the Lower Sixth, is excellent; some very sound and well-documented critical essays were seen. But a Sixth Form English course, especially with boys and Master as able as these, should aim at something more ambitious than the careful study of a few prescribed texts – valuable as these can be. One very promising Upper Sixth Form boy is being encouraged to read widely in English Literature in preparation for Scholarship Examinations next year, but for the rest there was no sign of any broadly planned programme

of reading or of any attempt to pursue general topics outside the narrow limits of the examination syllabus. One period a week is given to ‘critical appreciation’: that is, to the study of selected passages and the answering of critical questions upon them. It was not possible to see a lesson of this kind during the Inspection, but a scrutiny of the text-books in use and of the written work produced suggested that an important piece of literary training, calling for sensitive treatment and a certain degree of maturity and experience in the pupils, is being debased by *ad hoc* preparation for an examination test.

Sixth Form boys following Science and Economics courses give one period a week to English language. More time is essential if work of any value is to be achieved. It is strongly urged that the aims of this course should be reconsidered; that it should include some general reading of a literary, philosophical or historical kind; and that the training in language should be given through purposeful exercise in the writing of connected English, rather than through the study of unrelated examples of vocabulary and usage from arid manuals of composition.

The English section of the Library contains a quite useful nucleus of books, but their value to the School as a whole is diminished by their distance from the main building.

From the Pages of *The Thorntonian*

Further extracts will be published in the next issue.

The Editor welcomes contributions for future issues. Please post or email them to:
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