



AUTUMN

NEWSLETTER

October 25th

First of all an apology. For technical and personnel reasons the August 25th was over a week late coming out, and one or two changes were made after it was published. Please let me know of any mistakes, or omissions. In this newsletter we publish a number of photographs from the past and extracts from old Wycombiensians, the school magazine. If you can recognise the faces on the photographs and can give me the names, it would be much appreciated. Similarly if when you read the extracts you are reminded of various characters or incidents, please do not hesitate to write about them and email me. (ianrclarkuk@yahoo.co.uk) I will publish whatever you write, unless it is libellous!

JOHN PRIOR

It is very sad to record the death of John Prior, who was at the RGS as a pupil from 1934-1940. He has a real stalwart of the Old Wycombiensian Club, and was a Governor of the school from 1964-1999, and Chairman from 1973-1997. Neil Cooper M.B.E., who taught at the RGS for 36 years and was Head of Classics and Officer i/c. the CCF, spoke at the funeral about John. This is a shortened version of what he said:

Heather and Jacquie, his daughter have asked me to say a few words about this remarkable and dear man, John, whom we miss with grief in our hearts and grateful admiration.

For some of us our most recent memories must be of John in that lovely home, St. Peter and St. James Hospice, peacefully and brightly looked after, schooling himself as best he could to that frustrating apparently passive life. We talked. Saying things might have taken a long time. We said, or were quietly understood to have said the most important things we wanted to. As always in however slow a way we spontaneously found things to make us all smile or even laugh. He was always good company. Yet we had to sit in the car afterwards and recover from the sadness.

John lived indeed – in many spheres, often overlapping. It would need many hours to begin to describe them all in any detail. Please forgive what must be mere inadequate glances partly from his own entry for the RGS Directory and some notes he has left:

SCHOOLBOY at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe 1934 –1940, Boarder, sprinter, librarian, drama, Drum Major, acting Sergeant Major, Deputy Head Boy of School.

SOLDIER, Gunner Officer, 92 Light Ack-Ack Regiment, Royal Artillery, The Loyals, Troop Commander, Brigade Staff Captain, with Montgomery's 3rd Infantry Division, from D-Day beaches through to North Germany – and then to the North West Frontier of India.

BUSINESSMAN Life long learning. He put that unceasing sense of duty and his main energies into helping people make the best of themselves, working his way up in The Prudential until he was responsible for the training of 22,000 people with a host of high positions and awards culminating in the Institute of Training and Development Gold Award. For his services to training he was awarded the MBE - "trustworthy and well beloved" as it says so aptly for us all on the document recording that Award.

HUSBAND on 21st December 1956 he was married to Heather. We think of them side by side - Heather to whom with Jacquie, Chris, little Jonathan and Elizabeth our hearts go out.

FATHER of Katie, Mandy and Jacquie.

FATHER- IN- LAW of Chris.

GRANDFATHER of Jonathan and Elizabeth.

YEARS OF ACTIVE VOLUNTARY WORK in a large number of societies for hobbies and for charity with The Cystic Fibrosis Trust as the foremost, I would guess, in his mind.

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS of his old school The Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe – RGS as it is known with affectionate pride - for well over 25 years.

It was there that we met – nearly 40 years ago, unbelievably – and over the years became friends.

May I just give a glimpse of John as a friend, which I hope will be the kind of reminder of the John we all want to remember at this farewell.

I first met John at the back door of Uplyme, a boarding house of The RGS. I was a very young, very green Housemaster who had discussed some ideas with the boys for the use of the "temporary" wartime building that was their Common Room and some outbuildings, and had then put these ideas forward to some higher level.

Shortly afterwards this person came – tall, upright –and quietly said he was interested, could we talk? So I found myself explaining what and why and where, in answer to detailed, friendly questioning. Anyhow it emerged that he was a Governor. He was interested, I was interested. He really cared for the boys and for the Staff – at that time Clare, my wife, unofficially and a dear Matron, Mrs. Connolly.

Most of these plans were eventually realised. I now know why.

Over the years we also had another very important point of contact – the Combined Cadet Force – the CCF. John had known the ingredients of war at first hand including the horrors. I had merely been a small boy, 11 in 1945, who recognised dimly at the time and now recognises fully that he owes his whole life and its great fulfilment to the people of John’s generation, including John himself.

By the time we met, though, I had done National Service – also in the Gunners. So we had that, too, in common and were secretly rather proud of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, our chosen arm.

John used to visit our Adventure Training and Annual Camps and exercises as well. He was always firmly considerate “I don’t want to be in the way – suppose I come on the Tuesday and stay the night would that be all right?” More and more we felt and said, “Look, John, you come any time you like.”

He came out on exercises, expeditions and other activities and he was there with successive encouraging Headmasters on ceremonial occasions at School. John was a constant support.

He could also be terrifying. Two examples:



He insisted on doing his first abseil with us when over retiring age, and with success. It involves walking backwards, over the top of a cliff and down. You are on a rope, which intellectually you know will hold you. I might have known it was no use trying to dissuade him. A few years before at the tender age of 56 he decided parachuting was the thing and made 2 jumps to raise funds for Cystic Fibrosis and, as he put it, “to see what it was like”.

He insisted on having a go at canoeing at a similar time when swimming was frankly not, if Heather will forgive my saying so, at that stage his strongest suit. I don’t know who pulled rank on whom, but the compromise was that it would be in a strictly confined space, by the shore with a magnificent, huge, expert Fijian Sergeant in close attendance. The wretched canoe turned over, John



disappeared in the muddy waters then
within seconds John and the Fijian
Sergeant landed spluttering and laughing.

As years went by, John with Heather and Jacquie had the unspeakable grief of the loss from Cystic Fibrosis of their beloved Katie and two years later Mandy – innocent, full of the love of life. With their family and friends Clare and I shared, as far as we could, in their grief. I do not understand suffering, let alone this undeserved and ultimate suffering.

Then we lost our own most dear son, also called John, - equally innocent, equally full of the love of life.

John and Heather were wonderful to us all and we live still in gratitude to them. They had kept going – unbelievably they had kept going. The strengthening that came from that simple fact was an immeasurable help. It could be done – and eventually not “got over” but coped with.

Another common strand emerged in our lives – the most serious concern over the future of the schools system in Buckinghamshire including the RGS and its sister school WHS where I happened by then to be a Governor. In retrospect it had the elements of epic about it – a prolonged struggle – 14 years with an intense final 7 - engaging every spare ounce of every kind of energy for a vital end. We tried to recognise the good intentions of those with whom we seriously disagreed and not to treat the matter as a battle. That actually made it harder still to handle. John, as Chairman of the Governors of RGS with all his other full time responsibilities and concerns was a key mover in preserving something excellent for children and young people in the area, a position which does now seem to be more securely recognised and which could have been lost for ever. He is rightly honoured with a splendid building (Language College) at RGS in his name. I know he took a humble pride in “The John Prior Building”

“Et lux perpetua luceat ei”: Let light perpetual shine upon him.”

Thank you, John, for all you have been and now, albeit in a different sense, still are for us.

A further obituary has been published on the RGS web site.

There will also be a tribute to John in the Old Wycombiensian magazine to be published at the end of January. If any of you have your memories of John, please write to me about them.

ANNUAL DINNER
DATE: SATURDAY APRIL 12th

VENUE: QUEENS HALL

DO BOOK THE DATE NOW!

OWs V RGS SPORTS DAYS

Next year it is hoped to arrange lots of matches in different games, some against the school. Rugby, hockey, rowing, and fencing, would take place on the same day as the annual Dinner on Saturday 12th April. Cricket, tennis and golf would take place on one day in June or July, with shooting a possibility. A number of OWs have already expressed an interest, but how many of these activities run will depend on the interest shown. If you are interested in playing rugby, do contact Ralph Miller (email rmiller@glencoecourt.fsnet.co.uk):

Hockey, David Stone (email david.stone2@ntlworld.com):

Any other activity, Ian Clark (email: ianrclarkuk@yahoo.co.uk). It would be great to have an early response. The more the merrier. More details on this website during the coming months.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Ian,



About four weeks ago, I went to the Haverhill Arts Centre (a building that holds about 180 people, so not that big!) as a last minute Friday night thing to watch Henry Sandon, the Antiques Roadshow “Potaholic”. Fascinating man! (his wife was just as) but what knowledgeable a surprise to find he went to the RGS around the end of the 1930s. I had a quick chat to him in the interval and he remembered Sam Morgan whom I remember from my time at the school in the early 1970s. He had a couple of slides of himself performing in school plays with other schoolboys.

Best regards,

John Burns.

Dear Ian,

Re the question you put about Old Wycombiensian Internationals, there is obviously Matt Dawson in recent times and Ted Woodward who was the hero of the first fifteen in 1960. In addition there was Ron Syrett, who I thought was Ted’s brother-in-law who got some England caps as a blind side wing forward in that period followed by Clive Ashby at scrum-half, both from Wasps and also Alan Brinn in the second row who played for Gloucester. These were all 1960-1970.

With best wishes,

Ralph Stockwell

Editor writes: I also heard that John Saunders who was at the RGS in the late 1960s played chess for Wales in 1997.

A reminder of what was written in the August newsletter.

ARE YOU A FULL INTERNATIONAL IN ANY GAME OR SPORT?

DO YOU KNOW OF OWs WHO ARE FULL INTERNATIONALS?

The RGS is considering an Honours Board for those OWs who have represented their country at the Senior Level. It is very important that we make sure that nobody is omitted. Therefore if you are aware of anyone in that category, please let me know as soon as possible. Lots of nominations please.
DO YOU REMEMBER IAN ORME?

I have recently heard from Mike Horswell (1963-1970) that Ian Orme, who was at the RGS at the same time, has recently been elected to Fellowship in the American Academy of Microbiology. This is a very great honour and was awarded because of all his research on tuberculosis. He is hopeful that some new drugs will be found to combat a disease that causes about 2 million deaths a year. Congratulations Ian!

If anyone is aware of any notable achievement of an Old Wycombiensian, do let me know. Ed.

ROBERT ADAMS.

It is very sad to record the death in Hong Kong of Robert Adams, who was at the RGS 1968-1973. We extend our sympathy to his family.

SOME STATISTICS

You may be interested to know that the number of entries in the [section giving details of individual old boys](#) has risen from about 150 last September to 498 this September. The number of entries for each period is as follows:

2002-1996 60

1995-1991 66

1990-1986 52

1985-1981 61

1980-1976 58

1975-1971 36

1971-1966 34

1965-1961 36

1960-1951 37

1950-1941 35

1940-1914 23

If you have not yet sent your details in, please do so, and encourage your friends to do the same.

EXTRACTS OF OLD WYCOMBIENSIANS

GEOGRAPHY FIELD TRIP – ABERYSTWYTH 1972

This year we left Wycombe in bright sunshine, Mr Samways rubbing his hands in prospect of the week ahead, but the weather turned so bad that the day up Cader Idris was cancelled. We stayed in a Hall of Residence at the University, where the highlight of the food was the bread and butter sandwiches in the packed lunches. Mr Hillier could not last the pace of coastal work, but others on the coast at Borth got particularly drenched, except on the last day when the sun shone and existing piggy-back and forward roll records on the sand dunes were broken by rugby players.

For once both coach and driver remained intact and Alan, the driver, will be remembered for his self-control and his darts. He and Mr Moffat formed a formidable pair, but the second team of Samways/Cook were no match for their considerable opposition. Little of the scenery could be seen from the coach as the windows misted up, but if the conversation was boring, you could always listen to holes in the floor or the incredibly grown-up singing from the back.



Mr Gill's polite conversation earned many cups of tea and although he was not always allowed into pubs, his rural studies were a particular success. In the urban studies one group found Alderman Price, who knew all the facts about Aberystwyth past, present and future. Mr Moffat trotted around studying various rivers and made some astute observations, such as: These rocks do not come from here at all, so we must talk in terms of their coming from somewhere else."

Tragic news reached us on Saturday night: Watford had been relegated. On Sunday, en route to the superb Mynach Falls. Mr Moffat was all but run over when trying to photograph an incised meander, and A Raja tried hard to commit suicide at Parson's Bridge. Here a sheep was rescued and subsequently gave birth to a lamb. One person was so overwhelmed that he could not find a suitable quote from Sparks. We returned to Aber by the Rheidol railway, except Mr. Cook who went by "buzz". One passenger in wellingtons, pacamac, waterproof cape and sou'wester caused a certain amount of mirth.

By the end of the trip everyone was exhausted, but there was a great deal to be learnt and enjoyed.

A.K.C. Wood

Editor: Some questions arise. What were the holes in the floor? What happened at Parson's Bridge? What's tragic about Watford's relegation?

If anyone has memories of any other Geog. Trips, do write and let us know.

Where are you now, Adam?

In the 1982 Wycombiensian there appeared the following pictures:

Gems from the Staff Revue

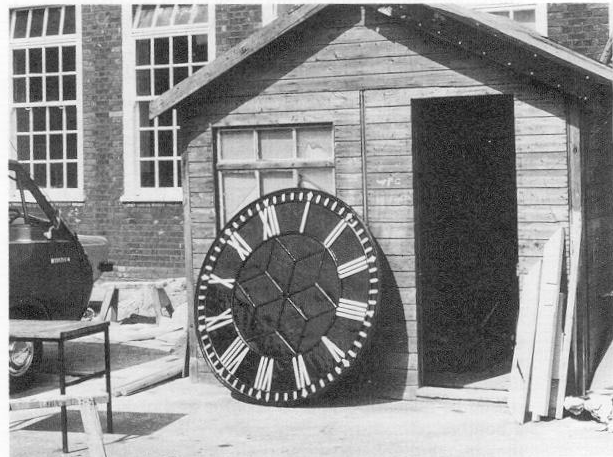
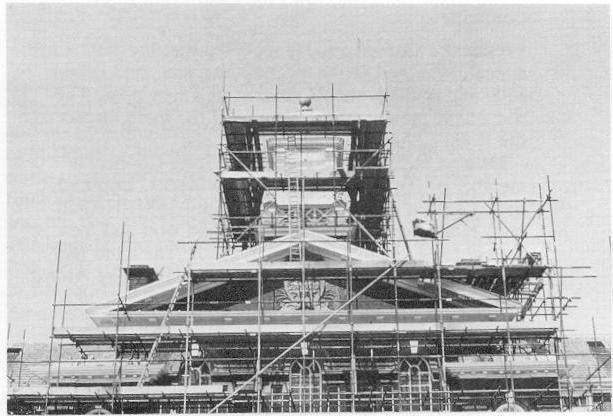
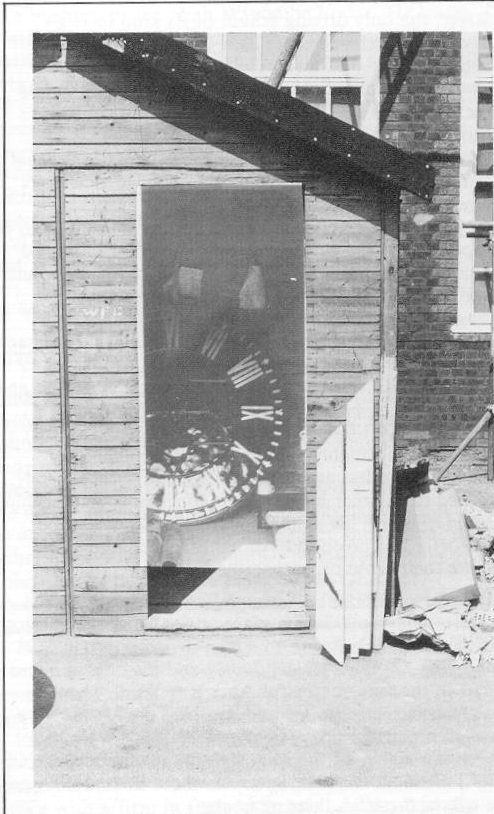
1981



If you were there, can you recognise and name the nine different teachers? What are your memories of Staff Revues over the years? Do write and tell me the best, worst or funniest moments.



One of the more interesting aspects of the external decorating of the school premises has been some novel views of the clock faces.



What are your memories of the clock tower? Have you ever been up there? When? Do write and confess!

The next newsletter will be published on December 18th