

SEPTEMBER 2007 NEWSLETTER

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CRICKET

OW v RGS 1st XI

It was remarkable that at the time of a very wet period, the match for the Duncan Moore Trophy was not affected by rain. It was a very enjoyable game played in a very spirit, as always.

The OWs scored 254-8 in their 40 overs, with John Stevens scoring 77, Richard Royce 47, and James Cousins, 58* including 5 sixes. The School made a spirited reply scoring 212 all out, with Blane Abraham scoring 88. It was good to Nick Moore, Duncan's father again and he presented the trophy. It was good also to see a number of OWs making their debut in the game, as well as those who have played in every game for the Duncan Moore trophy



The OW team was: Bobby Dix, James Howlin, James Cousins, Nicholas, Andrew Bentall, Richard Royce, Dave Chapman, John Stevens, Tim Woodstock, Adam Francis, and Ed Harris.



If you would like to play for the OW team next year, please let me know.

THE SIGNALS HUT

Unfortunately we were not able in the last newsletter to print Andrew MacTavish's article that should have accompanied the photographs of the Signal Hut. So, here it is.

In John Mitchell's photographic record of the RGS in the "Images of England" series, the 1948 aerial picture of the school buildings on page 57 includes the somewhat cryptic comment "At the far right of the picture can be seen the signals hut". It certainly can be seen, and for a number of OW's, this must be the most significant building in the whole picture. Indeed, many of us would have put a capital letter for "Signals", or even capitalised the "The".

I knew it from 1948 to 1956. The hut had been erected in the Second World War as a triple emergency classroom. The two end rooms had outside doors, and the middle room was accessed from one or the other of the ends. I have three small, grainy pictures of the building. One is of John King examining the large hole in the wall of the middle room, which was the result of Signals Sgt. Regan's losing control of his car in the summer of 1954. (The picture is

looking towards Terriers; the tennis courts are just visible between John's belt and the wall). This shows the construction: the walls were of 4' x 3' cement units', bolted together, two high. They sat on a bare concrete floor and a wood and felt roof was clapped on top. We always assumed it had been heated by coke stoves in the war, but there was no sign of them when I first saw the hut in 1948. By that time the whole building was owned by the Army Section of the CCF. The end room (nearest the main buildings) and the middle room were the main CCF Army Section stores. The third room (facing Terriers and locked off from the rest) was the Signals Hut. And the key of the Signals Hut was held by the Cadet Signals Sergeant. And to hold a key, legally, to a room on the school premises was a unique privilege.



The Signals was a platoon of between 20 and 40 members who paraded separately from the rest of the Army Section. On occasions the CCF had a Signals Officer, but usually it didn't, so the Signals' organisation and training were, again uniquely, in the hands of the NCO's. Thus the Signals was more than a Thursday afternoon session. It was an exclusive, all-the-week club. It was tribal. It was a strong and powerful clan within the school. The Signals NCO's were demi-gods who gathered round their electric fire (yet another unique privilege) and were not to be crossed. Small lower school urchins who dared to peer through the windows into the holy sanctum might well find themselves dragged inside, lashed to a table Stonehenge-wise, and used to test the 75 volt output of the hand-cranked generator on the telephone exchange.

In those days, CCF was compulsory from the 4th form (Year 9) when everyone had to join the Army Section. After the basic examination -Certificate A Part 1 - had been taken in the 5th form (Year 10), cadets could stay in the Army Section, transfer to the RAF or Naval Sections, or move to the Signals. If they took this option, they were prepared for the Signals Classification test which involved a large number of skills with telephones and radios. Much practice took place in the lunch hours. Younger signallers would wander round the field, back-packing the No.18 wireless sets, while the seniors would supervise them from the comfort of the Hut, using the mains powered heavy sets - the No 12 transmitter and the R107 receiver, each a packing-case sized, two-man lift. The second of my grainy photographs shows a group round these sets: Small, Galloway, Chandler and Willatts (l to r) demonstrating how to use the sets; the neat mains wiring; and the notice purloined from the Risborough Show.



This was the world of the thermionic valve. None of your sissy mini electronic chips, or even diodes. The 18 set had 8 man-sized glass valves the size of shotgun cartridges Even bigger were the banks of light bulb sized valves that powered the 12 set. When it transmitted, a blue electronic haze enveloped the master oscillator valve, a visible cloud of power. Operating the set involved first manipulating heavy rotary switches and then adjusting dials with delicate care. The aerial terminal stood out on a stout ceramic insulator. Brush it accidentally with the back of your hand and you would get a white burn. It was an exciting world, because then, ordinary people didn't have access to transmitters, or walkie-talkies, or mobile phones, or anything like that. The '12' was supposed to have a range of 200 miles, but with a 100' aerial raised 36' high on two sectional masts, we even made contact with the USA once. This was strictly illegal. Most of the time, we chatted with other schools. Sandbach School in Cheshire

(Callsign 56) ran the schools' network. We were Callsign 5 Charlie. There were 3 voice frequencies (Lima Uniform 5205 m/cs; Whisky Lima 4914; and another that we never used). When we made a contact with another school, we exchanged 'QSL' cards. The wall of the Signals Hut was plastered with them.

What other equipment did we have? There were 4 chest pouch No 38 radio sets that were supposed to have a range of 1000 yards, and were wholly unreliable at any distance much further than you could shout. The 4 No 18's already referred to would transmit about 3 of their supposed 9 mile range if you were very lucky. There was also one No 19 set. This ran off a large accumulator, and was the set that was fitted to tanks and other fighting vehicles. Our one had been destined for the Russian front, and had all the dials and indicators in that language. On the telephone side, we had a UC10 line exchange with the old jack plug system, and 10 Type D telephone sets. We had drums of cable, cable layers, mattocks (to bury the cable under paths), and a crook stick (to lift the cable into trees). Part of the training involved learning how to run wires across roads, railways, and rivers. We also had two lamps - "Lamps, Signalling, Daylight, Short Range" - and their tripods. We had no idea when these were used by the army. They looked as if they had come from the Boer War. Incredibly, one tripod is still lying in the roof of the CCF stores in 2007.

The Signals came into its own at camp. We would lay a telephone cable from the Officers' Mess to the Cadet tented lines, and we ran the control radios in all the exercises. At other times of the year, we might be called on to help outside organisations. The Burnham Motor Club called on us to control a weekend hill climb event; the Princes Risborough Show asked for a network of eight telephones with the exchange; and Wycombe Rugby Club 7's competition had a single line from the Control Point to the changing rooms. That was the only time we ever crossed a working railway line - the old Wycombe to Bourne End branch. We didn't really have to cross it at all, but for practice we crossed it, and crossed back a hundred yards lower down.

The Hut itself was known to the members of the school as "The Fag Hut". Certainly some smoking did take place there, most likely after school, but not very often. The fact that it was possible to smoke there, and that it occasionally happened, meant that it was generally believed to be a noxious den of never-ceasing vice. People could smoke because the building was remote, its door so positioned that any member of staff who might decide to visit it, would have to pass the windows, and would have to knock for admission. Had this ever happened, then the door would have temporarily jammed while a length of field telephone cable insulation would have been burnt. The fumes from this would obliterate any smells known to man, and would certainly camouflage mere cigarette smoke. But most lunch times it was the preserve of a select group of Sixth formers, gathered round the fire, putting the world to rights, with a music station playing quietly in the background. Small boys who peered through the window with their hands cupped against the glass might find themselves accused of spying and could end up on the table. Normally the NCO's had better things to do, but if they were bored, then little ones needed to keep away. Bullying? Today it would be headlines in the popular press: "SCHOOL THUGS ELECTROCUTE 11 YEAR OLD". But it never went too far and it was never vicious.

The Signals were proud. At one time, there were 36 cadets holding the technical Signals Classification exam and wearing crossed flags on their uniforms. Most weeks there was an inspection. Uniforms had to be pressed, belts blancoed, brasses cleaned and boots polished. "You're the Signal Platoon. Walk tall!" And they did. And when the Hut came down, it wasn't only concrete and wood that hit the dust. It was a cherished part of the RGS's history.

Andrew MacTavis
Signals Sgt 1954-6

REUNION OF 1947

Can you recognize yourself, your father or grandfather in this photograph?



Ed. Iris Davies, widow of Mervyn Davies, who was Head of Uplyme House, and German and was Secretary of the OW Club for many years, gave me this photograph. It was great to see her recently. She was certainly in good form, and was able to name many of the teachers on a 1937 School photograph, the year when Mervyn joined the school.

LETTERS/EMAILS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Ian,

I have a question about the school crest (is that the right word for it or should it now be logo?). Tony Hare's website shows how it looked up until about 1961/2, but my website shows how it used to appear thereafter. This is appropriate because Tony concentrates on the RGS in the 1950s and I concentrate on the 1960s*. I notice that the modern representation on the OB website has the same basic design as in the 1960s but in colour. Some of the Grey Book covers for the early 1950s (on Tony's site) show an even earlier, more elaborate, design.

Does anyone know about the history of the school crest, when it first had one, who designed them, etc? It might be nice to see all the designs somewhere on the website, with a brief history attached.

Another question for old boys: the new PM quoting his old school motto prompted me to try and think whether the RGS had such a thing. As far as I can recall, it didn't. Nor can I remember a school song. Or is my memory failing me?

John Saunders

(1963-70)

P.S. *When is somebody from the 1970s going to start doing what Tony and I have done for the 1950s and 1960s? Maybe they haven't entered their (anec)dotage yet...

Ed: I consulted Roger File, who has been associated with the RGS since the 1940s, about the Crest. This is his reply.

Dear Ian,

Apropos the inquiry concerning the school crest, Charles Hills, whose erudition ran to such things, once told me that heraldically speaking the school crest was a complete abortion defying all rules of heraldry.

Overlapping tilted shields could not be done. My very quick research indicates that the details of the current 'logo' have been varied for over 100 years according to whoever is printing or sewing it - more or less making it up as they go along, especially with regard to the colours employed on the shields. Perhaps John Mitchell could find amongst the archives some 19th century documents showing the 'logo'. The oldest I can find is on the school prize cover dated 1899.

Roger File.

Dear Ian

Andrew Priestley is the photo on website. He works for the Home Office.

Roy Page

Dear Ian,

I am doing research on the two Wycombe schools I attended, apart from the RGS, and I would invite anyone who attended Gordon Road School (1900-1971) and Spring Gardens School (1909-1984) to contact me and let me have their recollections of attendance at those schools.

My address is

Postfach 106,

D-55561Bad Sobernheim,

Germany.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jack Slade.

Dear Ian

I hope you are well. I noted the request in the newsletter for something more recent and hope the early 1980s counts. I thought I'd send in a couple of memories of the sporting side of things.

The RGS is rightly proud of its sporting traditions, and when we read of schools reducing physical education and selling off sports fields, it is refreshing in the aerial photo to see the big green space is still behind the school and being used. And, of course, Matt Dawson and Luke Donald are just two examples of old boys who became top sportsmen in their fields.

So with all the tales of sporting talent we read, I thought everyone might be interested to hear the memories of someone who had none at all.

It was a cold September day in 1980 that I first stood on the rugby pitch. In our new ruggie gear (purple shirt and white shirt - both worn at the same time - blue shorts, enormous socks and boots too small) we marched in single formation onto the pitch.

Now I didn't know the rules of rugby (I still don't) but I did know two things. One - you have to pick up the weird shaped ball and run with it. Two - the instant you picked up the ball, the entire opposition will jump on you. We all put our valuables in a small square tin that became so familiar. In our days it was watches and glasses. I guess now it is mobiles and ipods (how times change!). Someone once put a glass eye in there for a laugh and we spent the whole game looking at each others' eyes to see who was missing one.

I didn't think much of Mr. Gamester's selection process ("You! You're big! You can play second row") which condemned me to years of the indignity of placing my head between two hips, and having it cracked like a walnut while pushing hard and looking down at flying boots and sometimes the ball might pass by. This inevitably resulted in a collapsed heap and staggering to one's feet trying to work out where the ball had gone and in which direction our team are playing. Even now the words 'knock on' send a shiver down the spine.

My only visit to Matron was as a result of a rugby game. After one year and four months successfully avoiding the ball, some fool threw it to me and I, without thinking, caught it. Immediately the opposition jumped on me (see rule two above) and some flying elbow, of which Alan Shearer would be proud, caught my eye and put me in a daze with a fine bump. I was accompanied back to the office by a fellow pupil, who was delighted to get out of games early. The two Matrons (that I could see) had a look, both asked if I could see all right, and both said, as a consolation, I could get the bus home early despite walking wobbly. No school paid for taxi? No lift home from a member of staff? Didn't they have health and safety in Mrs. Thatcher's day?

Now here's a secret. One reason I chose to go to the RGS was the fact it had an outdoor swimming pool. My primary school took us swimming one afternoon each week and I dreaded and loathed getting in that pool. My logic was that, as the RGS had an outdoor pool, then presumably swimming classes were only in the summer (not even Big D Smith would put mischievous boys in there in January). John Hampden, on the other hand, had a big sports centre across the road and could go swimming all year round.

My reasoning was correct, and I was successful in spending as little time in the pool as possible. Despite six years of efforts by various teachers at primary school and the RGS, I succeeded in remaining unable to swim. I am reminded of the words of Spike Milligan when he was called up for the navy. "Can you swim?" the officer asked him. 'Why?' Spike replied, 'don't you have any boats?'

Cross country was always dreaded, but once you got the five minutes of jogging out of the way, a nice stroll through the countryside wasn't too bad. The only drawback was that when you got back to the changing room everyone else had gone on to the next lesson. Mr 'Eggy' Holmes was not impressed when I staggered into his music lesson ten minutes late. I explained I wasn't very good at running. He looked at my round shape and immediately understood.

The oddest sport at the RGS is fives. I had never seen it before and have never seen it since. It doesn't turn up on Sky Sports. Basically it's like squash using your hands and a ball bouncing off at odd angles. Never quite understood the logic but I think you had to hit the ball above a line. I did try it out but never quite succeeded. I expect there is a world champion somewhere. (The internet informs me the game's name comes from the expression 'a bunch of fives' by punching the ball. That's a bet from 1982 cleared up).

Athletics was like Dad's Army meets Celebrity Fit Club. No, Mr. Stubbs patiently explained, you do not throw a discus like a Frisbee and you do not throw a shot-put overarm like a cricket ball. I wasn't too bad at the 100 metres. Always happy to do anything that only involves 18 seconds of effort. But the longer races were a bit difficult. The 400 metres is a lot longer than it looks on the telly.

The gymnasium (of which we had two!) fit the stereotype exactly - with bars around the walls, a wooden horse and those blue mats, and various PE masters shouting at boys standing two feet away from them. Can't say I enjoyed this much. However I do recall a moment of great triumph and pride when I was successfully able to do a forward roll.

My one sporting achievement was when I discovered I was actually not too bad at hockey. I even played for the school second team in a sort of midfield Owen Hargreaves sort of role. This was the only sport I took with me into university where I played a few games there as well. And if you can count chess as a sport, I was a regular in the various teams and still have my half colours tie.

Of course I didn't do all sports. Never in my RGS days did I hold a snooker cue or throw a dart. Nor (thankfully) did I ever put on a boxing glove or wave a fencing sword. And of course the 'F' word (football) was only raised during lunchtime kick-about with a tennis ball ('jumpers for goalposts' etc).

However I did wave a tennis racket, swing a golf club and bounce a basketball. I look back with wonder as to how many sports. I played in my schooldays despite not being any good at any of them.

So the moral of the story is that athletic ability and sporting prowess is not necessary at the RGS in order to enjoy a wide range of activities and try out some new sports. I guess that is the way it should be.

Keith Nevols (1980-85)

Dear ex-RGS Men,

A few new items to enjoy at the [RGS 1960s photo website](#)

1. Photo of the 1962 rugby 3rd XV sent in by Peter Archer, who is looking for identifications of the people in it.
2. Grey Book lists for 1961 and 1965 added.
3. A high resolution scan of the 1967 senior school photo (in five separate files) may now be downloaded from the site. It is a new (and much better) scan than the one used to create the website and I think you'll find it much easier to work from it when trying to identify people. Best to download to your hard disk and then use an image editor (or Windows Explorer) to look at it. In due course I will use it to replace the older scan currently displayed on the website.

Whilst taking a trip down memory lane, it is also well worth reading Tony Hare's new tale of his first visit to the RGS in 51 years, told on his website - <http://www.rgs.tonyhare.co.uk/> - click on the 'RGS Revisited' link near the top left-hand corner. Some very nice photos of the old place too.

Regards

John Saunders

Dear Ian,



Here is the photo of the 1961/2 RGS rugby 3rd XV which Peter Archer sent to me. I have asked him if he would like this to be posted also on the official OW website and he said yes.

With Peter's email, he sent the following text:

"Would you be interested in a copy of the photograph of the 3rd XV 1962? Captain was Geoff Boireau (tragically killed at Mossdale Caverns in 1967), and Roland (Roly) Beresford Smith also appears. Unfortunately Roly died in a flying accident some years back while serving in the Royal Air Force.

"I am in the back row 2nd from right but cannot remember any other names. Can anyone help please?"

Peter's dates at the school were 1958-62, by the way. He tells me he was always known at school as "Dan".

I've had a look through old Wycombiensians and found the following about Roland Beresford Smith. His years at the school were 1955-62 and he died on 2 Feb 1966, aged 22, in a flying accident in Caithness, Scotland. He was a Flying Officer in the RAF, (Wycombiensian, May 1966, p82). In the photo I think he is 3rd from the right in the back row (I have compared with Tony Hare's 1956 school photo and I'm pretty sure of this).

Geoffrey Boreau's story is a very tragic one. He died with five companions in the worst caving [what we used to call pot-holing] accident in British history. This occurred on 24 June 1967 and I recall that it made the national news at the time. Geoff Boreau's years at the school were 1954-62 and his date of birth 6.12.1942, making him 24 years of age at the time of his death [note: the Wycombiensian, Sept 1967, p265, has both his age and date of death wrong].

I know nothing of caving, but reading various articles about Geoff Boireau on the web, it is quite clear that he was, and still is, held in the greatest esteem by the caving community. He must have made quite an impact in his tragically short life.

He and his companions were eventually buried where they were found in Mossdale Caverns, and monuments were later put up to them. Also, there is a cave at Mossdale named after him: the Boireau Falls cavern (or chamber). So he has a measure of immortality. It might be appropriate for the school to think of ways to commemorate him further.

I noticed that Geoff Boireau also appears on the [OB website](#) in the feature on the 1962 visit by the Queen. He appears in senior scout uniform, standing next to Pat Taylor similarly attired, in the 5th photo down the page.

Regards

John Saunders

Dear ex-RGS men,

Just to let you know that I have just posted the 1962 Senior School photo at my RGS photo website. ([or access it directly here](#)).

It is divided into nine sections and I've devised a new way of referencing people (if you want to report an identity). To be honest, it still needs a bit of work (the accompanying list of names is still not even half- finished) but that is no reason not to enjoy the photos. Not many people identified yet because I was not at the school in 1962.

Does anyone happen to know precisely when the photo was taken? Most school photos give the month but this one doesn't.

Regards

John

John forwarded on to me this email:

Dear John,

Like many others of my type, (grey-haired, balding i.e. it's all gone, overweight and with too much time on their hands now that they're retired) I have much enjoyed the web sites associated with RGS, particularly yours with the Grey Books it contains.

It has always struck me that the Grey Book was an inspired idea. Does anyone know when it started? Was it copied, like so much else at RGS, from a public school? Is it still produced? As a young boarder I used to be fascinated by the distribution of surnames and that fact that my own was greatly over-represented compared with the national statistics. Fortunately, however, puberty intervened, my brain shut down, hormones took over and I became normal. Keep up the good work. This kind of memory exercise and the Times crossword are the cornerstones of my 'Beat Alzheimer's' campaign.

Regards,

Peter King (56 - 62)

Ed. Anybody know when the first grey book was published? The oldest one I have was published in 1910

First day at RGS - 2007

September 3rd 2007 was the start of their career at the RGS for around 200 eleven year olds.

They spent their first morning looking around the school, meeting their Head of Year, Mr Parsons, and form tutors, being photographed, receiving many bits of paper and deciphering their timetables ready for the start in earnest on Wednesday.

Welcome to RGS!



Mr Page, Headmaster, introduces himself to the boys



being photographed



first look at the timetable



Meeting my form tutor

DO THESE PHOTOGRAPHS REMIND YOU OF YOUR FIRST DAY AT THE RGS?

Ed. If you want to have a look at other activities of the RGS, [please click here](#)

THE RGS IN WARTIME

Bernd Koachland continues his account that was started in the July newsletter:

At the end of the first year, pupils would be allocated to one of four second year classes. Two were express, one science and the other language, leading to taking the School Certificate (precursor to O level) a year early. The other two were slower classes. The language class introduced a choice of Greek or German - a dilemma: I chose German, my original mother tongue. In later life Greek would have been extremely useful for my BA. Another compulsory subject was Physics to represent Science. I found it difficult and was bored by the teacher, always good to blame the teacher! Comments on my reports show that I was almost bottom in the subject most of the time.

Overall the teaching was excellent, even though some staff replaced those on active service. A few stick out in the memory. There was Mr. Jones, the Maths teacher, who would inculcate the finer issues of the subject by holding the pupil in an arm lock, march the wretch round the room while the head was being "dusted with the board-duster. Bad work in Geography was treated in an unusual manner. Mr. Morgan would sit on a window ledge with the window open. As pupils showed their work, unacceptable work would lead to exercise books being thrown out of the window. Mr. Shaw, the Art teacher, founded new mathematical theory by

marking work out of 10, with marks such as 14,13 etc. The additional marks came in handy for class position for our fortnightly report. While the 1944 Education Act was not yet in force, exemption was granted for Religious Education: it meant sitting in the classroom and theoretically doing one's own work.

Homework was de rigeur - no excuses were accepted, such as "the dog ate it" or "I left my book at school." Failure to hand in work was severely dealt with; nobody would sensibly omit to do it a second time.

There were a number of out of school activities which could be joined at the appropriate age. One was the aircraft spotters' club. I cannot recall the exact name, but we were taught to distinguish allied and enemy planes, knowledge which might possibly come in handy, which it never did. But then who was to know the way the war would go? For those interested the club also involved making our own models. Balsa wood for their construction was available for members, though in short supply.

In an appropriate year, one could join the cadets, either RAF or Army. The CO was Major Tucker, the Headmaster. In fact early in my first year, when I saw him in uniform at assembly I nearly cried. Here was a lovely Head Teacher off to war just after getting to know him; my mistake. He was dressed for a cadet parade. Officers for the cadets came from the staff; sergeants to Lance-Corporals were senior pupils. I found the year that I was in the cadets a most enjoyable experience, including rifle drill with an ancient Lee-Enfield 303, dismantling a Bren Gun and even "square-bashing"; map-reading on an Ordnance Survey Map was most fascinating.

The school building itself was safe from the war. There was a near-miss of a V1, the jet-propelled bomb launched from across the Channel. No damage was caused.

Unfortunately with the end of hostilities, I had to leave the school as we moved to London. Looking back at my three years at the RGS, they were happy ones. The foundation they gave me, and no doubt all pupils, was solid and basic to future academic achievement, of whatever nature. If there were failures in the system of the RGS, one must not blame wartime, but oneself, as the teaching under the circumstances was superb. I, for one, have always been and always will be proud to be an Old Wycombiensian, who is now in his 77th year.

1979 4EP FORM PHOTO



Howard Sharp very kindly emailed me this form photo. Many thanks, Howard. If you were in the 4th form, can you recognize the faces and put names to them? He also sent me the school photos of the time. Have you got your form or team photo that you could send me for publication.

SAD NEWS

We have just heard that Martyn Mackrill (1939-1945) has died. We extend our deepest sympathy to his family and friends.

MARK PEASLEY

Mark Peasley sent me an email some months ago. Unfortunately the email was lost before I could read it. If you read this, Mark, could you please send me this again.

REMINDER

The date of the Annual Dinner, Hockey and Shooting is: Saturday 26 April. Book the date NOW!

NEXT NEWSLETTER

This will be published on Dec 8th. Please send in your contribution, your memories, and your photographs to me, [Ian Clark ianrclarkuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ianrclarkuk@yahoo.co.uk). Ian edits the Newsletter, Judy De Gelas embellishes it and Martin Berry ensures that it appears on the website.