



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 4

January 2008

Welcome to this first anniversary issue of the newsletter, which, the Editor hopes, continues to offer its readership an interesting and suitably varied collection of news and other items.

Third Reunion

Held at The Windmill on Saturday 22 September 2007, this event was attended by about 50 OTs, including four from overseas (see also relevant item below): Jim Brownhill and Mike Davidson from Canada, Geoff Brookman from New York, and Bob Jarvis, who made the trip once again from Cyprus. School entry years ranged from 1931 to 1980. The guests were Jim Henderson, Vice-Principal of Lambeth Academy (representing Stephen Potter, the Principal) and Alyson Wilson of The Clapham Society. Ruth Ling, the local Ward councillor and until recently one of Governors of the Academy, and Richard Chambers, Principal of Lambeth College, were unable to be present, but invitations will again be extended to them for this year's reunion, arranged for Saturday 20 September.

Website

As most OTs with access to the internet will know, the Association now has an active website:

www.oldthorntoniansclapham.org.uk

which serves as an invaluable means of publicising the aims etc of the Association and includes an extensive range of photos, as well as other associated memorabilia; a brief history of the school; references to the wartime evacuation to Chichester; and (on a password-protected page, accessible by Association members only) a full set of the newsletters.. The site has been developed using a commercially available program purchased for £35, with technical assistance provided by OT Chris Bishop.

(Primarily for the benefit of members not exposed to the mixed blessings of e-mail and the internet, future issues of the newsletter will occasionally feature, as an appendix, selected photographs and other pictorial items from the Association's website.)

Membership

There are currently 96 members, including two Associates.

Annual Subscriptions

The Management Committee has agreed (subject to formal endorsement at the AGM in March – see next item) that the rates for the year ending 31 December 2008 should be unchanged, ie, £10 for Full members and £6 for Associates. Payment is now due, and Terry Lawlor, the Treasurer, would be grateful if you would send your cheque for the relevant sum, payable to "Old Thorntonians Association", to him at:

Spring Cottage, Deepdene, Lower Bourne, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 3QP
(tel.lawlor@btinternet.com; 01252 724275)

Annual General Meeting

The first AGM will be held on **Saturday 22 March 2008** at The Windmill, starting at 2pm. The agenda and supporting papers will be circulated nearer the date.

"Missing Years"

Copies of *The Thorntonian* have been traced for most of the years between 1929 and 1963 inclusive, the exceptions being: 1930; 1948-9; 1953; and post-1963. It is of course possible that the magazine wasn't published every year (for example, 1953). Any OT with information which might help to fill the gaps is asked to contact the Editor.

Staff Lists

Ted Hayward has compiled lists of the teaching staff (excluding known temporary appointments) for the following periods: 1920s; 1930s/1940s; 1950s; 1960s; and 1970s/1980s; he can supply copies on request. Names, subjects taught and years of service have been obtained from various sources, primarily the magazine and OTs, but are not necessarily complete or accurate for each era.

The Overseas Contingent

The following are known to be living abroad. Contact details are available from Ted Hayward, subject to the prior consent of the OT concerned, and he would be interested to know of any others whose details (again, with their agreement) could be added to the database.

Geoff Brookman	1956-63	USA (New York)	Eric Jennings	1936-41	USA (Arizona)
Jim Brownhill	1952-7	Canada	Ron Marshall	1951-2, 1955-7	Canada
Brian Cook	1951-8	France (Dordogne)	*Geoff Olive	1974-5	USA
Mike Davidson	1950-6	Canada (Ontario)	Chris Rollins	1962-6	USA (Connecticut)
Graham Fellstad	1955-60	South Africa	Keith Seccombe	1955-60	USA (Michigan)
John Hawkes	1953-9	France (Provence)	Geoff Sloan	1948-53	Canada
Jim Humphrey	1950-7	Australia (Victoria)	Ray Wilkinson	1937-43	Canada (Toronto)
Bob Jarvis	1944-9	Cyprus	Eric Wilson	1946-51	Australia (Brisbane)

*Teaching staff

War Memorial Plaque

A progress report will be given at the AGM (see issue no 1 for background information).

Pupil Honours Boards

As for the preceding item.

Reminiscences

From Ron Morfee (1943-51): Like many working class parents of that time, my parents were convinced that “education” was the way to a better life for their children, and so when it became clear that I was doing well at the junior school it was taken as essential that I should “get the Scholarship” to go to the nearest grammar school, which was Henry Thornton School at Clapham Common, about two miles away. This was to be in 1943, the year before the 1944 Education Act that was to introduce the 11+ examination for all State pupils. The way for children like me to get a place at a grammar school was to win competitively a Junior County Scholarship administered by the London County Council. If successful, this provided free tuition and a small means-tested maintenance grant for uniform and other essentials. The examination consisted of several numerical and verbal reasoning papers, and an essay. Beforehand at school we practised on lots of previous papers. In 1943, just before I became eleven, I sat for this. As I recall, I quite enjoyed the exam and I was duly awarded a place and a grant.

So, from being the star in junior school, I found myself in the “A” stream of the first year with a lot of able boys. I still have all the school reports for the next eight years and so it is easy to track what happened. The environment was intensely competitive. Every two weeks there were positions in the form published, based on marks for all work done. End-of-term reports gave positions in the term and in the exam for each subject, with an overall position in the form.

At the end of the first year my brother and I were evacuated again, this time to Leeds, and I had to go to the nearby all-age school – not a happy experience!

Early in 1945 it was judged safe for us to go home, particularly since we not happy. In fact, it was not so safe as all that because by then the second weapon, the V2 rocket, was being used against London. The first of these supersonic rockets with explosive warheads was used on September 8 1944, but the authorities did not announce what they were until November 10. Because they came down almost vertically faster than the speed of sound, the explosion followed by the roar of their flight was the first you knew of it. On one occasion I was in a Latin lesson at school when a V2 struck not far from the school, and all the boys who lived in that direction were allowed to go home to see if home was still there.

When I got back to the grammar school from Leeds I had missed the first term and a half of Latin and so had to catch up. Progress or lack of it in this subject was made highly visible by the ultra-competitive arrangements favoured in his lessons by Mr Cooper, the Latin master. He had everyone seated in the order of performance in the fortnightly tests, and would even move people “up” or “down” at the time in class when the wrong answer was given to a difficult question and it was “offered” to the next boy in order who got it right. This method made progress very visible, but must have been demoralising to the less able.

The staff of the school were mostly dedicated and competent. The Head was a rather remote figure; a gaunt, tall, white-haired and distinguished-looking figure in his late fifties when I started, known as “Taffy” Evans – though he did not sound Welsh. Though I can remember the names and faces of all those who taught me in the eight years I was there, the ones I came to know best were the four teaching in the Science Sixth. There was Mr Yorke, a bluff, portly character of few words, who was a superb teacher of Pure Mathematics; then, dealing with Applied Maths, there was Mr Cousins, a great expert but not such a good teacher because he could not always get down to our level of comprehension. His “proofs” often missed out several steps because they were so obvious to him, but not to his pupils. Physics was taught by Mr Hofmann; he too knew his stuff but I think regarded actually teaching it as a bit of a bore and so had to be chivvied by us to deliver proper lessons. The greatest influence on me was the Chemistry master, Mr “Sammy” Read. His efforts to help and develop me went well beyond the call of duty, though he was a quiet, almost withdrawn man with whom the bond that developed over three years as I worked more and more with him never shaded into friendship.

Then in Summer 1950 it was time for the Higher Schools exams; I took four subjects, obtaining distinctions in Chemistry and Physics, and credits in Pure Maths and Applied Maths. By then it had been decided that I would stay on for a third year in the Sixth (which was extremely unusual) to be coached to attempt to get in to Oxford.

There was another incentive to me to go for this third year, which was that I was to be Captain of the School. This was a great honour, since the Captain, Vice-Captain and about a dozen prefects effectively ran the school outside the classroom. The day started with a “parade” on the main asphalted playground, where all the school lined up in forms until they were quiet and were then given the order by the Captain to walk in to the school building in form order to start the day's work. Discipline was then maintained at all times outside the classroom by a rota of prefects who had the sanctions of detention after school or written “impositions” to assist compliance with the rules.

From Derek Yandell (1945-52): Older OTs will remember the extraordinary weekly trips to Rose Hill for games. Current thinking on Health and Safety would surely eliminate any such procedure. I remember, when a prefect, that several of us were detailed early in September to station ourselves at Morden to direct the “First Formers” onto the right buses. Further, travelling “on the Tube” with some of them, we predicted surprise when the train came out into daylight. We were not disappointed!

From Eric Wilson (1946-51), recalling the “Come here, Briggs' incident”: It took place on the hard surface playground close to the school. The school was lined up, from Fifth year to First. Mr May was the duty teacher and had control. He was a stickler for pupils wearing the school uniform – mainly the jacket, tie and cap. Briggs's father ran a men's outfitters in Clapham, and on that particular day he gave his son a brand-new item of clothing on the market in the UK for the first time: the “Sloppy Joe”. This consisted of a brightly coloured, long-sleeved, high-neck sweater. At the same time Briggs wore a school cap many sizes smaller than the norm, perched on top of heavily greased hair and reflecting the style of the time – the Tony Curtis curl-top front and a DA (duck's anatomy) at the rear. It looked absurdly funny! Spotting Briggs wearing this unusual garb, Mr May shouted, “Come here, boy, and have your nose pulled.” It was one of his favourite lines. (Today such conduct would end up in court, but in the 1950s it was allowable.) Mr May used to pinch a boy's nose between his finger and thumb, while he himself would speak in a very nasal fashion. On this occasion, and with great sarcasm, he intoned: “Where is your tie, Briggs?” “Here, sir!” came the reply, as Briggs produced a school tie bearing a huge Windsor knot and about four inches of tie beneath. It brought the house down! It took several minutes for Mr May to restore order. Briggs was sent home to re-dress, but he had staked his claim as a fashion hero prepared to take on the powerful.

[More contributions, please! I hope this section will become a regular feature of future newsletters. Ed.]

Obituary

Mike Willett (c1943/4-?): died on 24 January 2002. Remembered by Colin Bench-Capon (1942-7) as “a very talented batsman” during his HTS days and who went on to play county cricket for Surrey. He joined the Oval staff as a teenager in 1950, and established himself in the early 1960s, hitting 1,000 runs three times in four seasons before a serious knee injury cut his playing career short. (A fuller biographical note appears in *Wisden*.) The Autumn term 1946 issue of *The Thorntonian* also records his “outstanding performance” as captain, at centre-half, of the Under-14 Football XI.

From the Pages of *The Thorntonian*

Autumn term, 1943:

EDITORIAL

Home! What a comfortable sound that word has, and how it compensates one for four years of evacuation!

Four years – of war – and this issue of our sadly-attenuated “THORNTONIAN” must strive, unaided, to record them.

Firstly, what are a “Cicestrian’s” feelings upon returning to school at Clapham? How does the School compare with that at Chichester? What will the war-time additions to the Staff be like? And the boys, who outnumber us by about four to one?

The building certainly compares favourably with the scene of our labour at Chichester. It is warmer, better equipped and seems to have suffered practically no damage. Indeed, the only apparent damage is the scarcity of glass in the windows at South Lodge.

As ten members of the Staff, including the Head Master, accompanied the evacuees upon their return, it cannot be said that we are more overwhelmed by different faces amongst the Staff than are those who did not accompany us on our long tour of a very small section of the South Coast. But when we come to the question of “The Boys” – there the “Londoners” have a decided advantage. Whilst there are comparatively few ex-evacuees, the numbers of the non-evacuees run into several hundreds. Nevertheless, the two sections of the School have become welded together in a fashion almost miraculous. Of course, the larger numbers mean larger forms, which is only an advantage in the case of the Sixth form.

At Chichester, the whole School had, at least, one game of football or cricket every week. It is to be hoped that this practice will soon be adopted at Clapham.

Next term, we hope to recommence the School Societies and Houses, though the Blackout will provide us with an almost insurmountable obstacle. A start has been made, by the opening of a Fifth and Sixth Form Debating Society, under the Presidency of H. J. Spence.

But, as is only natural, from the evacuees’ point of view the best factors of the School’s return are not these added attractions but the relief from living away, with all its attendant difficulties, and the reunion with their parents, together with the comforts of HOME!

J. T. Hiney*

During the four years of the existence of the S.W. London Emergency Secondary School, we have seen many changes. The emergency has perhaps gone, but, I think, many will remember its rather hectic existence. It started almost entirely from scratch but soon became an efficient working organization. Staff and boys came and went but by now we are quite used to changes. So now, when the old school comes back, to many it is just a change, but to others it is more than that. The old school is back in its proper surroundings. Many have gone but many familiar faces have returned, and it is good to see them back again.

R.A.B.**

*Editor **R A Ball, Assistant Editor

Autumn term, 1961: It is with great regret that we report the retirement of Mr. M. McQ. Bennetton, B.Sc. (Econ.), from his post as Secretary of the School. Mr. Bennetton has been at the School from 1925 to 1961, a period of thirty-six years, during which time he has served under four reigning Headmasters and through three inter-regna periods. In the course of his long and many-sided work for the School he has enjoyed the company of some two hundred members of Staff and nearly five thousand boys. It was Mr. Bennetton who introduced lacrosse to the School in 1926, and it is greatly to his credit that this vigorous game still survives as a distinctive feature of School life. Although it was he who was responsible for committing the prefects to the ordeal of reading the lesson at prayers, Mr. Bennetton was otherwise admired by several generations of teachers and boys for his kindness. He combined patience and good humour with a painstaking regard for detail in the running of the School’s affairs.

Same issue, from “Old Boys’ Notes”: On the 17th April, 1960, the Old Boys held their Annual Dinner. The Guest of Honour was Mr. S. V Yorke, who is retiring this year. There were forty people present and the evening passed very pleasantly. Mr. E. Gregory proposed the toast to The School in a witty and sincere speech. The School Captain, A. M. Rose, proposed the toast to The Old Boys’ Association, and took the opportunity to ask a few pertinent questions about the activities and organisation of the Association. Mr. F. Ensor proposed the toast to Mr. S. V. Yorke, who had been Head of the Mathematics Department for many years. In his reply Mr. Yorke spoke about his career; he had found untrue the evergreen statement: “Bread is the staff of life, but the life of the staff is one long loaf”. The evening ended congenially and informally as Thorntonians, past and present, exchanged reminiscences.