



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 8

February 2009

Annual General Meeting

As already advised, owing to bad weather preceding and over the weekend in question the Association's second AGM arranged for 7 February was postponed; it will now be held on **Saturday 21 March 2009**, at 2pm at The Windmill.

2009 Reunion

The amended date of the (fifth) annual reunion is **Saturday 26 September 2009**, from 1 until 6pm, at The Windmill. The usual advisory notice will be circulated nearer the time.

Membership

The current total is 108, including one Associate.

School Captains

Many thanks to those OTs, as mentioned, who have been able to fill the following gaps in the list which appeared in the last issue:

- 1945-6: Worby (from Derek Yandell)
- 1946-7: Godsave (ditto)
- 1947-8: Cox (Derek Yandell and Joe Keeble Pipe)
- 1948-9: Major (ditto)
- 1949-50: ?Pratt (Derek Yandell)
- 1968-9: R Chalklin (Brian Eady)
- 1970-1: M Caplan (himself).

Reminiscences

Another contribution from **Derek Yandell** (1945-52): I was fascinated by Ron Morfee's piece in issue no 4. We were close contemporaries, especially as he stayed a third year in the sixth form and preceded me as School Captain, probably recommending me to Mr Evans, the Head Master. Curiously, Ron left the school before the end of term so that I was acting School Captain for a few weeks.

This meant that I had to organise a collection for Mr Evans as he was retiring (he had been appointed Head before the school moved to Clapham in 1929). It also involved a walk to a jeweller's near The Plough with both Mr Evans and Mr Gribble, the Deputy Head, to purchase a watch. We must have been an incongruous trio! Finally, I had to give a farewell appreciation to the whole school from the stage – a very unnerving experience.

I was sufficiently younger than Ron to reach the age of 11 after the (Butler) Education Act 1944, and I must therefore have taken, and passed, the 11+ exam, although I have no recollection of sitting it. The Second World War coincided with my primary school years. I was five on 19 August 1939 and evacuated shortly afterwards, on 1 September, with my sister, aged 10. I had, presumably, started at Wix's Lane School (mentioned by John Simmons in issue no 5) and was evacuated to the village of Remenham, near Henley-on-Thames, where we attended the local school (and where I must have sat the 11+ exam).

On returning to London in 1945 I found that my parents had been informed that I would be going to a grammar school, and my teacher recommended that they should choose Emmanuel School, in Wandsworth. I was interviewed but not accepted. This decision resulted in my first walk to HTS, where my mother and I met the charming Mr Bennetton, the School Secretary, who (simply) gave us some information, including where to buy the school uniform.

So, in September 1945, I began my seven years at HTS. We were given some tests, after which I was placed in the A form, where I remained for five years.

I can remember many of the teachers; they were mostly excellent. Mr Yorke was my Maths teacher and I thought he was brilliant, though I doubt if he smiled once! I enjoyed Mr Hillman's English lessons and, as a result, I have become an English grammar purist! Mr Gribble was probably the jolliest master, and he made French fun for many of us. He was

fond of nicknames and so Doug Castle was “Le Château” and Richard Illsley became “Il se lève”. My first German teacher was Mr Baldwin. I liked his teaching very much and was sorry when he left. He was replaced by Dr Aufricht, who was not such an effective teacher and had difficulty maintaining discipline. His knowledge of English idioms was amazing but his pronunciation rather poor. On one occasion, when I was chatting at the front of the class, a comment came from the back: “Yindle, you are a chitterbox. In a minute you hef hed it.”

I recognise Ron Morfee’s comments about the sixth form teachers, although Mr Cossins [*Mathematics, 1935-52. Ed*] was relatively new to us. I agree also with his comments about Mr Read, known as “Beanhead” in my year. He was a delightful man and an excellent teacher. He was also very talented and could play the piano and flute. He also very kindly helped us with our physics studies as Mr Hofmann (as Ron says) was not at all organised.

Ron would have taken the last Higher Schools examination in 1950, as I did with the General School Certificate. I gained four A levels, but no grades were given at that time.

On a personal note, it appears from the entries on the school’s honours boards that Ron achieved a First degree, followed by a PhD. It would be interesting to know what he did then.

In retrospect, I am extremely grateful to HTS for, quite simply, changing my life. After nearly six years of evacuation, living in the countryside surrounded mostly by cows and corn and attending a school of about 20 children, London and a school of around 450 boys was an incredible shock. How I passed the 11+ and was then placed in an A form remain mysteries. The school changed me from a shy “country bumpkin” to a fairly confident 18-year-old. As Ron Morfee said, it was a considerable honour to be School Captain. (My wife thinks it was the high point of my life!)

I do have some reservations, probably brought on by being in Education myself for over 40 years. For example, I left the school knowing no more about music than when I joined. However, without the emphasis laid on study and passing exams, I would not have had such an enjoyable professional life.

Postscript: I was amused by the “Come here, Briggs!” story [*from Eric Wilson, issue no 4. Ed*]. Another of Mr May’s habits was to call out to the front any boy who made an uninvited remark by referring to him by quoting the remark itself. Once Mr May banged the blackboard with the board rubber to silence the class. “Come in,” said a boy at the back. “Come out, come in,” said Mr May. Some nose-pulling ensued...

From Peter Lawson (1936-41), on the wartime evacuation to Chichester: ...we met on Friday 1st September, 1939 at 8.30am and travelled to Balham (S.R) with haversacks and small attaché cases, to arrive in Bognor just after mid-day. In crocodile formation we marched, full of excitement, to the Social Centre/Theatre opposite the Pier Head, where we were “selected” by “locum parents” and put into small groups for billeting. I was lucky, being in a group of five with prefect Veryken, being billeted in holiday rooms over a restaurant on the promenade within a hundred yards of the pier. The weather was glorious, Bognor was still filled with holidaymakers – we had a fabulous time. The only sign of war was the black-out, with everyone colliding and jostling as they walked along the promenade; the only military prominence was a small Walrus flying-boat flying slowly along the coast at a snail's pace, once in mid-morning and again in the afternoon with the front gunner sitting half out of the nose. It was generally assumed it was a anti-U-boat patrol.

War was declared on Sunday 3rd September and, since one of our group, Koch, was a German refugee, after listening to Chamberlain at 11.00 am we tuned into various German stations, but could only find dance music!

The masters who were evacuated with the school I never saw outside school lessons, but I notice that you have omitted Mr Collings (“Coggs”), who taught German. The most memorable lesson he gave was when the Graf Spee broke the news and each class lesson for a week was a running report on the progress of the battle until the final scuttling - all in German.

The 1939 December freeze was incredible, with many of the telephone poles snapped in half, due to the weight of the ice in the wires; but what fun on the canal, frozen solid to Dell Quay, and slides on the slopes of Goodwood.

Only one bomb actually dropped on Chichester whilst I was there: a bomber returning from a London raid must have had a spare one and seeing the station must have thought it was a good target. It missed and dropped in a waste plot of land behind the new Law Courts, causing virtually no damage except demolishing an end-terrace wall in the next road, where one of our Second Year was still in bed on the first floor and exposed to the world at large at 7.00am. He was quite cheerful and chirpy about the incident.

John Jones (1963-70) recalls: Mr Taylor... drove a Jaguar and smoked big cigars – even in the classroom during the lunch break. He would take his gown out of the back of his car and put it on out in the street and walk into school that way. He had obviously taught undergraduates at some point in his career and styled himself “Professor Taylor”. Underneath it all, though, he had a heart of gold.

In 1968 Mr Linden arranged German pen friends for the boys studying German at the school. The German boys came over for about three weeks to London and stayed with our families. It must have been towards the end of the summer term because they came into class with us. They went home and shortly afterwards, during the summer holidays, a party

of about six of us travelled to Germany for the reciprocal part of the arrangement to stay with their families. They were from a small town called Bad Reichenhall which is just this side of Salzburg, so about as far as you could travel through Germany in pre-unification days.

While the German boys were with us, Mr Taylor took them home and took very professional photographs of them all as mementos for them to take home (he was clearly an amateur photographer as well as a printer!). He also invited my pen friend and myself (probably because I was one of his better music scholars) out for the day to Hever Castle in Surrey in his Jaguar. I remember there was steak and “French fries” on the menu at the restaurant where he took us for lunch. The latter were a very new addition to culinary terminology and my pen friend didn't know what the term meant. Mr Taylor helped out with “they're something like chips”, which of course my pen friend understood. “Yes, please, chips”, he said, whereupon Mr Taylor turned to the waiter and said the young man would like the “French fries”. I'm sure the waiter would have understood “chips” but there was an important difference, and Mr Taylor had to make the point.

From **Geoff Clark** (1957-64): In form 3J during the 1959-60 academic year, we had Mr Linden as our form teacher, but he plays no further part in this story. We had a visiting teacher for RE. I have a vague suspicion he may have come from California. This teacher was one of a new breed who believed in teaching us about ‘Life’ through the medium of RE. Week after week we discussed relationships, sex, violence and what X rated films we had seen or wished to see. This would not be surprising today, but it was little short of revolutionary then. Needless to say, his teaching was not part of the official syllabus. After some time – perhaps two or three months – all this must have come to the notice of Mr Dorrington, the Head, who occasionally stepped into the breach and taught RE when a teacher was absent. Perhaps he took us for a class but, anyhow, very soon after this he ordered that form 3J be subjected to a written RE test. We had one weekend to revise for it. We dug out our bibles for what may have been the first time for quite a while. It was quite a lot to digest in a weekend. When the results came in, the lowest score was 3% and the highest 16%. The teacher was not seen again... It occurred to me some years later that Mr Dorrington had contrived the test specifically as a pretext to fire the teacher. If true, that is a profound lesson in life that the teacher learned.

From the Pages of *The Thorntonian*

Autumn 1946:

CHRISTMAS

From the silent street
Saintly carols, sweet,
Though the night air are ringing;
Gladness follows after,
Bright with winter laughter
While Christmas bells are pealing;
Peace and Love on earth do reign
As the Devil looks on with shame.

The downy flakes fall,
Assimilating all.
A silver glory adorns the boughs and rims the trees;
Which hushes traffic of the town,
Lazily floating down and down
On to the town beneath the breeze;
Lighting in pale display
The white deserted way.

On Him we gaze
Giving our praise

While hearts are filled with thanksgiving;
The heavens are filled
With joy untold,
Because the angelic choir's singing,
With divinely cultured notes,
Their ecstasies denotes.

K.G. Cox (L.VIA)

Autumn 1952:

THOMAS CLARKSON

Thomas Clarkson, the English emancipationist, was born in 1760, at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, and died eighty-six years later. Intending to enter the Church, he studied at St. John's College, Cambridge. Whilst there, he won the Members' Prize for an essay in Latin entitled “Is it lawful to make slaves of men against their will?” His researches for this essay roused in him passionate antagonism towards slavery and the slave-trade; he therefore joined forces with William Wilberforce and the Quaker movement.

While the former advocated the cause in Parliament, Clarkson agitated throughout England – and at one time he even crossed over to France to enlist the support of the National Convention there – for the abolition of slavery. His agitation did much to help secure the prohibition of the slave-trade in 1807 and the passing of the Emancipation Act of 1833. During his life's campaign he also wrote many books and pamphlets relevant to the abolition of slavery.

R.G.J.Wood

Spring 1933:

Odd Thoughts on Leaving School

No more for me the daily hymn:
No more for me the weekly gym.
The bell no longer shall I hear,
Its ringing tones insistent, clear,
No more the usual daily zest
Of trying to find the bun that's best.
I have no more the nightly need
Of swotting Thomas, Clay or Gide.
Or any of the books galore
That filled my locker by the score.
No longer shall the ink flow fast,
In never ending streams go past
My eyes, which blankly stare
At the book before me there
On the desk. I do not really see
The words I write so hurriedly.
No longer need I call on Fate
To help me in a School debate;
When all my arguments seem to stray
And help the others win the day.
No more on Monday need I grouse
At the meeting of my House
To discuss the usual stuff
(Wednesday's game and slackers' bluff).
...Now to finish. I've been too long
With my somewhat doleful song;
But I'll try to make amends,
And my mouth this wishing sends:
Drink the sweets of success right up;
May the School eternally brag
Of the *S.E.L.A. flag.
I would add as one so fresh
From the close encircling mesh
Of the multitude of tasks
Which the rôle of schoolboy asks,
Good luck to the School, whatever be done,
May it keep its place in the sun.

#OLD THORNTONIAN

*South of England Lacrosse Association. #I have no record of the identity of the poet. Ed

And finally, also from Spring 1933:

Notice to Parents

Parents are requested not to give away or sell School caps and blazers.

***Speech Day – January 20th, 1933**

The spirit of economy prevailed at the Speech Day of Henry Thornton School, Clapham Common, on Friday evening. There were none of the usual book prizes on the table but a stack of certificates instead.

*Opening paragraph of report reproduced from the *Clapham Observer*.

[Plus ça change! Ed]

The Editor welcomes contributions for future issues. Please post or e-mail them to Ted Hayward, 31 Linfields, Little Chalfont, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9QH; ted.hayward@btinternet.com