

A Life at The King's School

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I entered King's School in the Prep. Form in the Michaelmas Term of 1943. The Granthamian for that Term records, in the Salvete, the names of those who entered with me. This was the beginning of friendships made which lasted for eight or ten years within the School, and for a lifetime after it. In my own Form those contemporaries included John Brentnall, Alan Gould, Colin Holmes, Julian Holt, Keith Nightingale and Geoff Trueman; in Form I, the Form above, they included David Neal, Robert Cullen (my two next door neighbours at 25 and 27 Gorse Rise) and Geoff Dale; and in Form II, two years older than me, they included Paul Harris, Howard Imber, John King, Pat Oubridge, Don Ramsden and Geoff Winter. Those of us who have attended the occasional reunion, even sixty and more years later, have still greeted each other warmly. The most recent one which I attended, organised by Robert Locking in November 2006 at the Angel Hotel, was very agreeable, and fifty or more friends were there.

The Prep. Form and Form I, for 9- and 10-year-olds respectively, were both housed in a large light room at the north end of The Hut. That room occupied the whole width of the building, and it was therefore next to the Workshop which abutted onto Brook Street by the main gate. I believe this room also served as the Art Room, and I recall having Art lessons there, given by an attractive lady (Miss Holtby?) whose attributes did not go unnoticed by my fellow pupils.

The Prep. Form Master was W. McNeill, who taught us every subject, according to my School Reports, for all three Terms in my first year. He must have been versatile, but of course I just accepted that as the system. His is the only signature on every one of my twelve individual subject Reports for those three Terms. (All thirty of my Termly School Reports for the ten years 1943 to 1953 survive). I remember McNeill to be a rather stern figure, wearing gown (as was common) and mortar board, who kept a visible stock of short stout chair-legs with which to administer retribution if it were needed. I may have avoided that type of punishment, because the content of my subject Reports would have conveyed quite a positive impression to my parents. They were paying £4 - 6s - 8d per Term for me to attend The King's School in those first two years 1943 - 1945, before the 11-plus came in.

I was a day-boy living at 26 Gorse Rise. This was near enough for me to go home for “dinner” (always cooked) each day, and be back in time for afternoon School. My mother had to juggle the timings to cater also for my two sisters (Kesteven and Grantham Girls’ School) and father (Boys’ Central School) whose dinner-times were always slightly different from my own. This terminology of “school dinner” did not change to “lunch” at our level in society during my school-days, so there may have been an implicit class distinction lurking there. Incidentally, I remember well that I did not envy the boarders their long exclusions from the comforts of home, or their lack of privacy in the School boarding house.

I believe the School time-table structure was unvarying throughout my ten years at King’s. The bell rang at 8.40 a.m., after which latecomers were recorded at the gate. Pupils assembled in the “Quad” and trooped off to the Old School, shepherded by Prefects, and entered by the side door at the west end of the building. We stood in rows of about ten pupils on each side of a central aisle left clear. The Masters came onto the stage at the east end, and sat in a couple of rows at one side. The Head Master, W.J. Huggins, occupied an imposing high-backed chair at centre stage, and the Second Master, Billy Rowell and then Harry Marks, sat in a special chair to the south side, with the piano behind him. The pianist was a Master, or more usually a boy (e.g. Leahair or Winter). The proceedings always began with a hymn from the slim red School hymn book (of which every boy had a copy, and which for the Prefects was a useful implement for hitting ill-behaved boys on the back of the head). A Bible reading (“Lesson”) was next, by a Prefect who walked up the central aisle to a Lectern on the north side of the stage, and then back again afterwards. Next was the Lord’s Prayer, followed by notices or other remarks by the Head. The Masters departed, and after Prefects had also delivered notices we all trooped off to classrooms for lessons which started at 9.10 a.m.

Lessons always lasted forty minutes, and changeover was signalled by the Bell Monitor, a Fourth Former appointed for the year, whose duty was to excuse himself from his lesson, and go to pull the bell-rope and so toll the School Bell which was mounted above the gable at the south end of the Quad. So the first three lessons ended at 9.50, 10.30 and 11.10. Then there was Break until 11.30, during which a 1/3 pint glass bottle of milk was consumed by each boy, via a straw through a hole in the cardboard top. The milk was provided by Milk Monitors who brought it in crates, one to each classroom. Boys then relaxed in their various ways for twenty minutes, compulsorily outside in the Quad, or in their classrooms if it was wet. Masters retired to the Staff Room (Room 3 in the Brook Street building, and at one time in Room 9 in the Hut if my memory is right), for a coffee, or tea, or a smoke (very evident to the outsider from the haze to be glimpsed if the door of Room 3 was left open for a minute or two).

One of my strongest memories of morning “Breaks” was in the January and February of 1947, the year of a prolonged and hard winter. The snowfall in the Quad was used to construct a very long slide across the whole length of it, from the offices under the bell on the south side to the main Brook Street building on the north side. Dozens of boys queued up to progress, with widely varying levels of expertise, down

the slide, and at great speed if possible. No doubt there were many mishaps, but boys were not deterred.

After Break there were two more lessons until 12.50. Then it was dinner-time until the return to School, for two more lessons from 2.15 to 3.35 except on Wednesdays and Thursdays. There were also five normal lessons each Saturday morning.

Wednesday afternoons were for Games, at the School Field on North Parade. This meant Rugby, Athletics or Cricket, according to season. Such Games were a high profile feature of School life, and they included matches against other schools, especially on Saturday afternoons. There were also internal competitions such as House Matches, and all this activity was zealously recorded in *The Granthamian* (the School magazine) each term. There was also Tennis, and Swimming using the open air pool in Wyndham Park. We checked the water temperature on the way to School. If it was more than 60 degrees Fahrenheit we deemed that acceptable, but barely so if it was less.

Thursday afternoons were the time when the army cadet training took place, and this was another prominent organised feature. The School had a contingent of what was initially called the O.T.C. (Officers Training Corps) which transmuted into the J.T.C. (Junior Training Corps) and then the C.C.F. (Combined Cadet Force) by the end (1953) of my schooldays. Membership of the C.C.F. was voluntary, but those who did not join were found menial tasks such as weeding the School tennis courts on North Parade.

After that description of the general pattern of School life, I return to the fact that in 1944-45 I moved up to Form I, when some new initials appeared on my subject Reports. These included V.R.W. ("Beaky" Waterhouse), a specialist in Latin and chess, and T.H.B. ("Tom" Brunyee) as House Master. Tom was a Physics teacher, whose strongest term of rebuke was "you mutt". McNeill was still my Form Master, and his initials appeared on eight of my ten subject Reports. Unfortunately I have little explicit recollection of those first two years. Plainly my contemporaries and I were still leading a quiet life in that large Hut room, well sheltered from the main School.

In 1945-46 I moved up to Form 2E, under J.Lockyer (a tall and stern-looking man with gown and mortar board). We moved to the next-door Room 11. This, and the adjacent Room 10, were two large square light rooms facing the Quad. The teaching was less in the hands of generalists, but now more subject based with specialists. These included D.O.Childs ("Doc") for English and German, J.T.C.Golding ("Gus") for history, P.J.Stokes ("Purge") for French (never my forte) and, very significantly for me, H.F.Marks ("Harry") for mathematics. From Harry Marks I learnt so much. Sixty years later I wrote a biographical article about him, which was published in *The Old Granthamian* for 2007 (Issue 30, pages 19 - 22).

By Easter 1946 we had C.G.Drennan ("Drip") for history and geography, Waterhouse for Latin, M.E.Shipley for Divinity, and "Freddie" Francis (back from the War

where he had won the Military Cross, and we had a half-day holiday on the strength of it) for mathematics. In the summer I was “showing promise as a cricketer” (H.F.M.), and Mark Raymond (“Pedro”) was teaching us English. Brunyee, Shipley, Stokes and Waterhouse had taught my father at this same School in 1920, which perhaps is an indication of staff stability. I wonder if they felt a sense of “déjà vu” when I turned up.

Curiously, it was only after I left School, when I had conversations with those teachers on an equal footing, that I really saw them as having the same hopes and fears as everyone else.

In 1946-47 I was in Form III, still in The Hut but now in Room 10 with Drennan as Form Master. I remember a nice light room which I enjoyed being in. On one occasion during a Latin lesson, the door opened on a zephyr, and V.R. Waterhouse said “A ghost, Redmile, shut him out”. Drennan taught us geography, and I still remember the agreeable (Bartholemews?) atlas which was issued to us, with the local crops printed in red on the map of each country.

By 1947-48 I was aged 13 and embarked on the three-year School Certificate course, in Form IV under W.L. Rowe as Form Master in Room 4 in the main Brook Street building. We went to other Masters’ rooms for individual lessons on a peripatetic basis, instead of remaining in one room as we had begun School life. Tom Scrayfield had arrived and was teaching us Divinity and Physical Training. “P.T.” was often in the Old School, and involved all the “equipment” associated with that subject, after the obvious change of “kit”.

In the summer of 1948 I played for the School Under 14 Cricket XI. I remember, when we went to play at Lincoln, that Rowe was extolling the virtues of good fielding, citing the Australians who were in England that summer as an example. Bradman was their Captain, and I saw him get a hundred at Lords against Middlesex. My cricket learnt at School (and from my father) stayed with me until my last season as a playing cricketer in 2002 (for Reading University Academic Staff Cricket Club).

In 1948-49 I was in Form V under M.H. Raymond as Form Master, upstairs in Room 6. The initials of F.V.A. Wells appear for the first time, in my Art Report for the Michaelmas Term. In the Summer Term I was a member of the School Second XI, but Golding said “He has the strokes, but defence, at present is rather unsound”.

I was in Form Remove for my School Certificate year 1949-50, and encountered Stan Nussey (an Old Boy from about 1933) as my physics teacher, who reported “remarkable progress” in the Summer Term.

In my General School Examination for my University of London School Certificate I achieved six Credits and three Passes, an adequate but not brilliant result. A Whole School photograph was taken in June 1950, and I have a copy. This is a very evocative photograph because it shows all the teachers who had such a significant role in my education, not only in that year, but in the very important two or three years both before and after that date. This includes the School Certificate years on

the one hand, and the Sixth Form life on the other. This photograph also shows all my contemporaries, and those pupils in the two or three years above and below me who I remember best.

I entered the Sixth Form in September 1950 to study Pure Mathematics, Applied Mathematics and Physics. I enjoyed the whole scene, and my Termly Reports show that I was plainly responding to the responsibilities, including leading roles in Burleigh House and in the School. In the C.C.F. I passed the Certificate A examination in April 1951, but in that area I eventually progressed no further than the Sergeant in charge of Platoon 5, the youngest cadets.

Termly Field Days for the whole Corps in Belton Park were fun, however. We all marched there along Belton Lane in a column of five platoons led by the splendid band. The leader (Drum Major) of this carried a mace with a large silver head, and he swung it around in various exotic ways as we marched along. Behind him were four kettle drummers, a side drummer, and a large base drum carried on the chest of the drummer, a cymbals cadet, and about a dozen buglers. Years after I left, this band fell into disuse, which I thought was a great loss to the School, but I do not know the background reasons. When we arrived in Belton Park for each Field Day there were various military activities to be performed. We paraded on the circular cricket field in front of Belton House, and we formed up to be inspected by various dignitaries such as a Brigadier from the real British Army brought in for the purpose, the Head Master in his gown, and the Mayor of Grantham in his, and others of that ilk. Then we had “exercises” and “work” to do. One particular wood was “cleared” of the enemy, yet again, so that the resident rabbits must have become well acquainted with that procedure each Term - “Oh dear, not them again”. We ate our sandwiches in our “positions”, while noticing that Captain, later Major, later Lt.Col. Raymond and his Adjutant Lt. Wells retired for theirs to positions in the Belton Park Golf Club House. The golf course was out of bounds to us.

I was beginning to grasp the Physics, which I never found easy in spite of the proximity of some of its content to the Applied Mathematics in my Advanced Level course. Progress with Pure and Applied Mathematics taught by Walter Cheeswright (an Old Granthamian himself) and Harry Marks was encouraging. By Summer 1951 (age nearly 16) I was “a 1st XI batsman with plenty of strokes” according to Gus Golding. In the Autumn I was Burleigh House Captain. I was said to be “speedily coming to the fore. He has the right ideas” (Head Master), with a “good attitude towards the School, and influence upon it” (W.L.Rowe). I suppose I had, by then, instinctively understood how the School “worked” and felt comfortable with it. I did find that the termly School Reports were candid and constructive, and I looked forward to them. The attention to detail which Harry Marks displayed in marking our Sixth Form mathematics homeworks was remarkable. It seemed as if he might have spent most of each weekend annotating our homework scripts profusely in his tiny hand, and those remarks were very thorough indeed. Incidentally, Rowe was quickly assigned the unfortunate nickname “Fishy Rowe”, for obvious reasons of ruthless schoolboy humour.

Corporal punishment was always an underlying feature for the enforcement of discipline in the School in my time, as a last resort for both Prefects and Masters to use. A very serious transgression could earn the ultimate sanction, namely a visit to the Headmaster's study to receive "six of the best". I never had that experience, so my evidence is only second-hand. Mr. Huggins seemed to devote himself largely to the administration of the School, and my only subject Reports by him were for English in the three terms of my Third Form year. (In the Sixth Form there were regular comments in the Headmaster's "box" on the Report). Individual Masters plainly had different attitudes to punishment. Some used a foot ruler across different parts of the hand. One Master in particular was known for the projection at high velocity of a piece of chalk or board rubber across the room, a perilous act in my view. Written "impositions" were imposed by some Masters. Others just used force of character to enforce discipline. Harry Marks would never use physical retribution; instead the dread words "Keep your Saturday free" would crackle across the room. This meant two hours of Masters' Detention on a Saturday afternoon.

School Prefects also had disciplinary procedures, such as Prefects' Detention or, much more frequently, a "coddling" with a plymsoll on a bent-over "behind" at the back of the Old School after morning Assembly. The latter was once tried on me, but my vigorous indignation at the prospect meant that the attempt went off very much at half-cock.

Athletics was a strong sports activity in the Spring Term. It included sprints, relay races, middle distance running, cross country running, field sports like throwing the discus, javelin and cricket ball, high jumping, long jumping, and hop, skip and jump. My own ability in these things was limited, but the ethos was good, and it all came together on Sports Day near the end of the Spring Term. The differently coloured House Flags were hoisted on a flag pole, in order of the points currently acquired in the events, so that the order of the flags could be changed after each event. Megaphones or a loudspeaker administered the proceedings, and results were recorded by Mr. Drennan at the desk on the field, near the winning post of the 1/4 mile circuit.

Rugby games, home and away, were the emphasis in the Autumn Term, for First and Second and Under 14 XV's. In the Summer Term cricket was dominant, and we visited other schools, all part of a good education. Internally there were House competitions in all these sports. Tennis and swimming were also strong in the Summer Term, and the House Swimming Competition was a big event in that Term. I was eventually Captain of Cricket, in 1953, and our great feat in that season was to beat the Old Boys in the annual Founders' Day match. This was an unusual result. I remember the bowling of Butch Griffin and Mike Harby, which gave us an exciting finish when the stubborn bat of John Pacey finally failed to prevent our victory.

There were some more intellectually oriented Societies of which membership was voluntary, and whose meetings took place after afternoon School which finished at 3.35 p.m. These included the Chess Club, the Debating Society, and the Music Society. They did not attract me as they did others.

An obvious strong, but unspoken, influence in some sense was the proximity of St. Wulfram's Church. This splendid and historical building stands right next door to the Old School, and from time to time we had services there. Such events gave us, at the very least, an awareness of the dignity of some ceremonial occasions, experience (for senior Prefects) of speaking in public by reading Lessons, and the different musical experience from singing in the Old School.

In my final year 1952-53 I was Head Boy, responsible for some aspects of discipline within the School, and expected to take a lead in various respects. I was supported by an able and helpful team of eleven School Prefects, and I do not recall that we had any serious difficulties in carrying out our responsibilities. It was a character-forming exercise for us, as it was meant to be. I believe we earned respect from the boys we had charge of, and from the Masters whose support was implicit in the background.

Senior boys also had responsibilities within their respective Houses, via a system of House Captains and House Lectors, responsible to a House Master in each House. The Houses were Burleigh, Foxe, More, Newton, Country North, Country South and (for boarders) School House. The first four names commemorated famous national figures associated with the School. Each pupil was assigned to membership of one of these Houses for his whole School life. These Houses provided a long established basis for internal academic and sporting competition within the School, and also a sub-layer of training in the exercise of responsibility.

A major event near the end of each School year was Speech Day, at which prizes which had been competed for were handed out. The location was the Drill Hall at the Barracks on Sandon Road. Masters and dignitaries occupied the platform, and the Hall was filled with parents and boys. Many certificates and much silverware was handed out by the Guest of Honour. Surviving photographs show that in 1952, as House Captain of Burleigh House, I was the proud recipient of the House Cup for general all-round excellence by members of the House, and the Academic Cup for academic successes by them.

School uniform was not a simple issue. Uniformity in various ways was expected, and not only during School time. For example, there was a rule that caps should be worn in the street even outside School hours. This was hardly reasonable, and particularly not so for 18-year-olds. But Prefects were expected to set an example, and even to try to enforce it with sanctions; not an agreeable situation. I believe it was not unknown for Mr. Huggins himself to patrol the streets to discover culprits.

There was a flowering of sartorial decoration as a reward for achievements. This included silver and gold braid outlining the front segment of caps, and tassels on top for Prefects. Maroon blazers with suitable breast pocket badges were awarded (at parental expense) for established membership of the various cricket and rugby teams.

I was very pleased, in 1986, to be invited back to The King's School by the then Head Master, Mr. Derek Lee, to present the prizes at the Senior Speech Night at the Finkin Street Methodist Church on 12th December.

