

BALLARDS DAYS

The Christmas term had already been in full swing for three weeks when I arrived at Ballards on Friday, October 4th, 1946. The delay had been due to my failure to win a place at a prestigious London public school in the summer of that year where there had been more than 50 candidates for only four places, and this had necessitated some speedy string-pulling on my Mother's part to wangle me a place at the Warehouseman, Clerks & Drapers' Schools. At the time she was secretary to one of the top directors in the John Lewis Partnership. It was not, as she explained to me many years later, that she had wanted to send me away from home, but merely to see that my future education was ensured for the next few years.

We were met outside the Matron's office by Matron herself, the formidable Primrose Jenkins whose build and stature were such that she appeared to have no neck. At the time, I believe, she had already been at the school for more than twenty years, and rumour had it that she had been a champion tennis player in her youth. Our favourite take-off of her was when, on at least one occasion, in her Scottish lilt, she had reproached some boys for running along the cloisters – "Don't run along the cloisters, you boys", pause, "Now run along." Sadly her career was to come to an ignominious end some years later when I had already left, and it was discovered that she had been embezzling school funds. In her defence one may say she did have a health problem (a form of eczema) and a drinking problem, both of which were probably linked. On this occasion she greeted us warmly enough. Some of this warmth evaporated, however, when Michael Strange, who had been delegated to show me around the school, turned up wearing his pullover UNDER his shirt!

After bravely bidding my Mother farewell, I followed Michael on a conducted tour during which I met my new Housemaster, Mr. Christopher "Tombo" Tombleson, who taught English from the Second to the Sixth forms, and Latin to the Second and Third forms. Tombo duly relieved me of my few scanty shillings of pocket money of which he meticulously kept account in an exercise book, and gave me my house number, CB43. We then arrived at the First Form classroom where a lesson was in progress with Mr. Stanley Rendall who, apart from being the then Housemaster of St. Andrews where ALL new boys were lodged, regardless of house, also taught Geography and Divinity, as Religious Instruction was then called.

I walked into the classroom to a thunderous round of applause, which was, it seemed, the customary way of greeting a new boy, and stood there grinning like a Cheshire cat, trying to exude a self-assurance and confidence I was far from feeling. Even if I had felt it, it would have then been rudely dented by the class comedian, Bruce Cuthbert, who, as the clapping subsided, called out "How are your pups?" The class dissolved into paroxysms of laughter, and that crack was to become part of our year's folklore for the rest of my schooldays. As it was, I managed to keep on grinning as I was shown to my desk, and Bruce received a stern rebuke from Stan, as he was called, who was good at lecturing people on showing kindness and consideration towards others, for what amounted to "taking the mickey" (an expression not yet in popular use at that time) out of a poor new boy.

I must explain the aforementioned incident and the amusement that it caused by telling you that I came to the school with my French-born Italian father's surname of "Bruno" (I only took my step-father's name "Bygate" after I left Ballards) which, although it merely means "brown" in Italian has, in the English psyche, always been connected with bears and dogs! "Doggie" was, in fact, to become another of my nicknames. In today's multiethnic Royal Russell School, such a surname would hardly raise an eyebrow, but back then, and during the rest of my days at Ballards, I was the only one to have a funny-sounding foreign name.

This factor was to cause me more discomfort during the next day or so in the form of frequent barrages of questions. My Mother had warned me about this, but I had still not expected it on quite such a scale. I fielded the questions as diplomatically as I could but did not, in the end, endear myself to some of the older boys when my exasperation began to show. With the strict pecking order which then existed in British boarding schools, being labelled as a “cheeky kid” was not an auspicious start. However, some innate sense of caution kept me, for the time being, from attracting too much attention, or arousing the ire of the prefects and other 5th and 6th formers, many of whom, to an undersized eleven year old, seemed positively gigantic. John Wilson, John Hone, John Smith (who, aged sixteen, already stood 6’4” in his socks!), Anthony Hope, Colin Finn and Derek Cheeseman appeared quite terrifying. It was actually rather funny to run into the last named at a Headmaster’s Open Day and discover, fifty-six years on, he did not seem nearly so awesome – perfectly normal and pleasant, in fact.

Another early shock was my first encounter with the School Cadet Corps on the following Monday. We were paraded on the small tarmac playground (now built over) at the end of the classroom block. There we were divided up into small squads to be drilled by a prefect who, for the purpose, had an acting rank of corporal or sergeant. It was my lot to be in John Dennis’s squad. Dennis was a St. Andrew’s junior prefect with a fierce, blue-eyed gaze, and a gruff voice and manner, which became even gruffer when he was drilling a squad! What was such an ordeal for me was not so much the marching up and down and trying to keep in step, but learning to stand stiffly to attention and not move, as was the order Dennis growled at us. Although it was early October, it was a warm Indian summer’s afternoon and the gnats and midges were out in force. I stood there gritting my teeth and trying not to move, while the little blighters crawled into my hair and feasted voraciously on my scalp. I had great itchy bumps on my head for days afterwards!

I must confess that I had a pretty undistinguished career in the Cadet Corps. I failed Cert.A Pt.I miserably both in Map Reading and also in Weaponry, when I told the examining officer that in, order to clean a rifle, one had to remove the firing pin! On the brighter side, I scraped through in Fieldcraft and, later on, proved to be a fairly good marksman which earned me the status of Rifleman First Class in the Empire Test, and a place on the School Shooting Team against the O.R.s. It was the only time I participated in any team sport for the School. A further bonus was the grounding it gave me for when I had to serve my two year stint in the Army a few years later. But that’s another story!

During my time at Ballards we had four different nurses. The names of most of them elude me, but the one I first came into contact with was the feisty, diminutive Nurse Harris who, although it was never confirmed, must have begun her nursing career either just prior to, or during the Boer War! Her stock treatment for every complaint was a sugar-coated cascara pill, and her standard form of address to all and sundry, excluding staff, with only slight variations, was “you (are a) dirty/nasty/ horrid little thing!” She eventually retired after a term or two, and was succeeded, I recall, by a much pleasanter, very plump, forty-something Welsh nurse whose voice used to rise to a shrill falsetto whenever she got excited.

For some reason, she only stayed for a couple of terms. The next one, Nurse Hastings, who stayed for about three years, was much younger still with a brisk, no-nonsense air about her. She nursed me and a number of others when the school was briefly affected by an outbreak of chickenpox. It was, luckily, the only epidemic we suffered while I was there, and the sanatorium was completely full one week. We were all quite sorry when she left to marry a young man with a big toothy smile, called Arthur.

Finally, we had the Irish nurse, middle-aged, soft spoken, but **very** stern. She once reproached me

most severely for, when reporting sick to the “san”, having the nerve and effrontery to actually *be* sick once I got up there! She was in the middle of sending me packing, telling me there was nothing wrong with me, when I had to literally push past her in order to get to the sink in time. She then insisted that “it wuz bendin’ over loik dat” that had caused it, although precisely what posture one was supposed to adopt whilst in the process of throwing up was never clearly explained! However, to her credit, she did relent sufficiently to keep me in for a couple of days.

Amongst the domestic staff, mention has already been made by Andrew Foot in his own reminiscences of the two sisters, Mary and Gladys, who were kitchen fixtures (no pun intended) there during the 40s and 50s. Mary, the elder one, was known as “Mad” Mary because her pale, bony face, surrounded by lank, brown straggly hair, did rather convey this impression. I found it was a case of appearances being deceptive because, when talking to her, I always found her perfectly coherent, and with even quite a sharp wit. Gladys, on the other hand, although not unattractive, seemed to take more of a back seat and to be the “simpler” of the two. One maintenance workman once swore to me that she had pestered him for a date, but he had told her in no uncertain terms that the only dates she would ever get from him “would be the ones in boxes!” Poor Gladys! I was so sorry to learn that she and Mary had been unknowing victims of Matron’s financial fiddles.

Other kitchen maids (called “sukies”- the origin and spelling are uncertain, although perhaps derived from the nursery rhyme “Polly, put the kettle on....Suky take it off again...”) of all ages, shapes and sizes came and went. There was a story going around when I was a junior, of a senior boy who had had an affair with a “suky” called “Haystack” (something to do with her hairstyle, I believe), but it was before my time. It was said they had actually been caught in the act in the pavilion down on the Bottom Field by Farmer King himself. I believe the field has now become another housing estate but, at the time, it was leased to the School by Farmer King as the main football pitch, and for some cricketing activity during the summer term.

There were, indeed, a couple of young kitchen maids who, at different times, set our adolescent hearts aflutter but, since any fraternisation was strictly frowned upon, neither of them lasted for very long. “Too sexed up with the boys”, as Matron was said to have expressed it. If Malcom Green (younger brother of Derek) is reading this, he may eventually be able to enlighten us a little more about Jean, a curvaceous sixteen year old with very expressive brown eyes, to whom he appeared to be rather “closer” than anybody else. In my last year, there was Jeanette, who was not quite as pretty, but she had a well-rounded figure and a slightly retroussé nose. For me it was puppy love at first sight, but as I was far too shy to try and even speak to her, she remained way out of reach, and blissfully unaware of my existence.

Matron, or “Matos” as we called her, ruled the Dining Hall and the kitchen area with a rod of iron. It had to be said that the kitchens were always spotless, even though the food left much to be desired. Sometimes even the bread tasted funny, and we had pet names for some of the dishes with which we were regularly served. “Swipe Pie”, for instance, a pasty which contained unidentified (and unidentifiable) meat and gravy which we swore were leftovers. Then there was “Fish Crinkle”, a puree of equally unidentified and unidentifiable fish baked in a pan with a crisp, brown crinkly surface. Hence the name.

Some particularly unpleasant tasting meat, which set us all grumbling more than usual, led to an most embarrassing incident for the Headmaster, Mr. F.A.V.Madden, on Speech Day a few days later. As usual, the whole School was present for the annual prize giving and awards of inter house competition cups, with staff, School Governors, parents, all dressed up to the nines, when the moment came for the Headmaster to deliver his annual report. When he got to the passage about

how healthy we all were “thanks to plenty of exercise and GOOD FOOD”, a mighty groan went up, accompanied by some tittering from the assembled parents.

One had to give F.A.V.M. his due. He did not turn a hair. He carried on reading as if nothing had happened. At the next School Assembly the following week, although he reproached us for having given voice to our feelings in such a manner, and on such an occasion, it was a mild reproach. Following our outburst, he had taken the trouble to enquire into the cause of it, and assured us that efforts were being made to improve matters. This did have some positive results, and we never again in my time had to complain quite so vociferously.

Returning to “Matos” and her domain, there was the daily parcel ceremony. We were allowed to receive food parcels from home, but these were all delivered to Matron’s office first. After breakfast each morning, the Master on Duty (M.O.D.) would read out the names of those boys required to report to her. Parcels were opened in front of her, and the contents inspected for what was *not* permitted. Namely, cake (except on birthdays), biscuits, chocolate and other confectionary, potato crisps and sauces. I remember one boy, Morris I, once leaving the office with just the brown paper wrapping in his hands after she had finished. We never knew for certain what happened to the banned foodstuffs she confiscated, but we could guess!

One of the irritating side effects of having one’s name called out too frequently, was that it was not always to collect a parcel, but sometimes other matters she had to refer to us. This, however, did not deter senior boys from regularly asking “You, why do you get so many parcels?” What answer could one give other than “my Mother sends them.” I was damned if I was going to ask her to stop! Cadging was also one of the hazards. “After you with something to chew” was the standard cry. Well, I suppose one could not blame us for seeking to nibble on something other than school rations.

On Sundays it was customary for the M.O.D. to ask after breakfast for four volunteers amongst the juniors to help Matron in the kitchens, since most of the maids had Sunday off. There was usually no shortage of eager hands going up because, after the chores were done, each boy was rewarded with a little tin of “compo rations”. These contained barley sugar, chewing gum and other assorted sweetmeats, and were, I believe, armed forces surplus. However, rules governing who did what in the kitchen had to be tightened up after a minor tragedy occurred on one occasion.

Two boys, Brian Mellor and John Lapthorne, were slicing bread in a machine practically identical to those used for slicing ham, bacon, etc., at grocery counters. With its circular, razor-sharp blade, it is an absolutely lethal device if not handled carefully or correctly. What happened exactly that day was never quite clear, but Brian Mellor lost the tips of the two middle fingers of his right hand. He made a good recovery, but it was a nasty episode which made us all wince.

On a lighter note, I recall once doing Sunday kitchen service without any serious consequences, but during my first year an order from Matron to go and help “Mad” Mary resulted in one of my first embarrassing experiences in front of the whole school. Perhaps the routine has changed a little since my time, but when the M.O.D. rang a bell at the end of a meal and gave the order “clear!”, plates were passed down to the end of the table to be piled onto a trolley pushed by a suky. At the time, I was on the longest table in the middle of the Dining Hall which was occupied by the whole of the First Form, and an overflow of Second Formers who could not be accommodated on other tables. “Matos” and her assistant, Miss “Cluny” Brown (“Cluny”, so named after a 1940s Hollywood film of that title) were frequently in attendance and, on this occasion, “Matos” picked on me!

Mary had already reached the far end of the hall by the stage, between the Upper Oxford and Upper St.Andrew's tables, with a full trolley. I was quite unprepared for what happened next. I had been sent to help Mary, but Mary, far from helping me, beat a retreat back to the kitchen and I was left to push the full trolley back by myself. I did not, alas, have Mary's expertise at manoeuvring trolleys, and the harder I tried to keep it on a straight course, the more it seemed determined to go its own way. I was not helped by seniors on the Oxford and St.Andrew's tables who deliberately impeded my passage by leaning backwards and narrowing it down. I zigzagged from one side to the other, crashing into obstructive shoulders and accompanied by hoots of raucous merriment from the rest of the school, until I finally made it back, more by luck than judgement, **without** any breakages, to the top of our table where "Matos", by this time also shaking with mirth, mercifully relieved me of my task. To this day, my relationship with trolleys of all kinds, whether in supermarkets, airports, or whatever, still reflects more than a hint of incompatibility.

If, as I mentioned earlier, Matron had a drinking problem, she managed to keep it well hidden most of the time. Nevertheless, late one evening when I was in Form Three and sleeping in the Oxford Lower dormitory (Oxford and Cambridge juniors were still mixed until they got into the Forth Form), we were aroused from our beds by the sound of loud singing from the quadrangle leading towards the old St.Andrew's House. We rushed to the windows to see in the darkness outside the unmistakable figure of Matron singing lustily, and in such an inebriated state that she was having to be supported by "Cluny" Brown (she truly was ASSISTANT Matron that evening) who was helping her back to her quarters. "Cluny", it must be noted, was the exact physical antithesis of Matron – small, bird-like, and almost skeletal by comparison.

At the time, we all found it highly comical. Although, in retrospect, there was nothing really very funny about a fat, middle-aged, and clearly unhappy woman, being seen in such a humiliating condition by those for whose well being she was supposed to be responsible. Whatever her failings during her lifetime, may she now be resting in peace. One of my contemporaries, Colin Johnson, has since told me that he had an ongoing feud with her throughout his time at Ballards occasioned, he told me, by a cuff round the head he received in an altercation over the contents of one of his food parcels. From his tone, he had never, even sixty years later, ever forgiven her!

Amongst other non-teaching members of staff who figured either directly or indirectly in our lives at the time were the School Engineer, Norman Crook. During the 1960s I remember meeting him again at several O.R.Dinners. I recall jolly Mr.Rogers, the School Carpenter who, surprisingly, turned out to have a rather good baritone voice and sang for us at one of the end-of-term concerts. I saw him the following term and, trying to be complimentary, I said "I didn't know you could sing". "Well, now you know I can't" he chortled back.

There was kindly Miss Norris who, ably assisted by Miss Plummer, ran the Linen Room. Dirty laundry was handed in and clean laundry collected every Thursday morning. Miss Norris used to stand in the doorway and meticulously check every boy's house number on each item of clothing to make sure they all matched. Only then could we go and collect our clean clothes. She was the only one who defied school tradition by not allowing older boys to push straight to the front of the queue. Everyone had to take his turn.

There was Mr.Willett, the burly, Cockney, cigar-smoking Maintenance Manager who once caused a few sniggers when he stood up after lunch one day to complain how someone (no names were mentioned), while experimenting with some device over in the Workshop (then situated adjacent to the Tuck Shop, between old St.Andrew's and the Top Field), had plugged in "is li'l motor" and blown all the fuses! Nowadays, thankfully, we tend to be rather more tolerant of accents and, even then, we had a variety of them from Scotland down to the West Country. At that time though, a

thick Cockney accent had the same comic value as that of black domestic servants in the U.S. More on elocution later.

The School Secretary who succeeded benign, white-haired, scholarly-looking Mr. Ridley on his retirement, was Mr. Scott-Jeavons, who was tall, thirty-something, and with chiselled, hawkish features. On Sports Day, or similar School events, he always found some witty way of introducing teatime. He left a year or two after I did and, sadly, I heard he contracted and died of polio not so very long after.

Finally, there was the sallow-faced, saturnine Mr. Scobel, the School Steward, who bred cocker spaniels for a hobby. He made himself extremely unpopular throughout the School when he opened fire on Tippin, our lively, little, russet-coloured mongrel mascot. Tip, as he was usually called, reputedly had owners, but spent most of his time up at the School. An article about him appeared in the Autumn 1948 issue of "Russellian" magazine, and he can be seen sitting at Mr. Madden's feet in a couple of the school photographs which were taken periodically.

Anyway, one day, it seemed that Tip was sniffing around a little too close to the thoroughbred spaniel bitches, so dear Mr. Scobel blasted off at him with a shotgun! Miraculously, although he took a few lead pellets, Tip was relatively unharmed and made a quick recovery. Feelings ran high though for a couple of weeks afterwards, and I would not have given Scobel much chance if he had been caught alone on a dark night by some of the older boys.

Earlier I mentioned Bruce Cuthbert who was, for the first year or two, the undisputed class comedian. Always with a ready quip, for a long time I envied his ability to raise a laugh. He had even fenced verbally with the formidable Nurse Harris, when she told him he would never grow big if he did not eat up all his greens. Bruce, ten years old and only half a head shorter, looked at her and replied "Well, you didn't eat your greens!" I was not present and Nurse Harris's reaction is not on record.

I only saw him bested once when travelling on a bus into Croydon. Bruce challenged the conductor to guess how old he was (one travelled half fare up to the age of fourteen). "In mind or in body?" asked the conductor. "Both" replied Bruce cockily, obviously not expecting what came next. "Then I'd say three and thirteen respectively" replied the conductor laconically as he moved away. A hoot of laughter (there were several of us present) rang round the top of the bus, and I felt somewhat vindicated for his "pups" crack of a couple of years earlier.

As with all our scrapes and escapades, sometimes we got away with it, and sometimes we were not so lucky. Bruce's luck ran out one day when he decided to explore the roof of the old St. Andrew's House. As many of us will remember, it was an old Victorian house ("Bugs'ole", as it was popularly called) with turrets and buttresses, and parts of the roof were flat. Bruce was in Oxford House and should not even have been over there. He was caught and punished but, not content with that, went up there *again* the following weekend. This time he tempted Fate just once too often by walking over a large skylight! Not surprisingly, the whole thing caved in under his weight and he crashed through in a shower of glass and wood onto the upper landing some ten or twelve feet below. Mercifully, no bones were broken but, apart from being badly shaken, he was terribly badly cut on his head and in various parts of his body. So badly, in fact, on the little finger of his right hand, that he was never again able to straighten it properly.

Some time prior to this disaster, I had myself broken bounds with Bruce, Anthony "Titch" Bellion (he was even smaller than I was) and one or two others, to explore an old, abandoned house in Upper Shirley. This, luckily, went off without incident, and we were never found out.

I was less fortunate during my third term one Sunday afternoon when Roy Jones and I discovered the rubbish dump behind the Dining Hall. To our great glee there were lots of intact empty bottles which we proceeded to render less intact by standing them up in rows and hurling stones at them. We were so happily absorbed in our vandalic pastime that we failed to notice the M.O.D. of the day, Mr.A.A.Pizey, materialise out of the woods behind us. "Gyffe" (some nicknames seemed to have neither rhyme nor reason) was about sixty-one years old at the time, but could move with a silence and stealth that a Native American Indian tracker might have envied. We were duly sent off to wait outside his study in the classroom block. Apart from a good ticking-off, I do not recall him actually punishing us, just that we wasted the rest of a nice, sunny afternoon standing in the corridor waiting for him to finish his rounds.

The next bit of mischief I became involved in occurred towards the end of the Christmas term 1947 when I was in Form Two. One Sunday evening after chapel, Peter Bellion (in Form III, and elder brother of "Titch"), Anthony Wilkinson, Godfrey Longmire and myself decided on impulse to break bounds and go carol singing. Anthony and Godfrey still had good treble voices and were in the School Choir.

We went about it in what we felt was the most courteous way possible. Namely, having selected our house, we would knock or ring, and ask "Could we please sing a Christmas Carol for you?" Although most people pointed out that it was rather early (it was the beginning of December), they always agreed. We would then give our rendering of "We Three Kings of Orient Are", collect a few pence at the end of it, and even some compliments on our singing. At the end of the evening we had amassed the magnificent sum of five shillings (25p in today's money), which divided equally into one shilling and three (old) pence each (7 1/2p).

We made it back into school in time for bed and all seemed well, had it not been for a classic case of Murphy's Law. I was told that "Tombo" had been looking for me all evening, and to report to him at once. As my housemaster, "Tombo" would from time to time want to check up on some mundane detail such as, in this case, "had I written my weekly letter home?"!! Of course I had, but it was the only time he ever asked me, and it just had to be THAT Sunday! The problem then was explaining why I had been incommunicado for two hours. I tried "well I must have been in the toilet, sir", but that did not work – not for TWO whole hours! Eventually, he wormed the truth out of me, told me he would have to think about what action to take, and sent me off to bed.

The answer came soon enough as we were getting up the following morning. "Tombo" appeared in the dormitory and announced that I was about to receive my just desserts, and anybody else who was out carol singing with me, would they also step forward. Anthony and Godfrey both owned up and we were all led into the bathroom to have our bottoms dusted with a few whacks each of the hairbrush. Peter Bellion was in another dormitory and thus escaped both detection and retribution.

Later in the day, during a Latin lesson, "Tombo" called us out one by one to deposit our ill-gotten gains on his desk, checking that each amount tallied (we were all very honest), and that was that. We were never informed to which benevolent society the money went!

This salutary lesson was, however, quickly forgotten by the following Christmas when it seems that boys went calmly walking out of the school gates in droves to go.....yes, carol singing! This happened on the last day of term ("payday"), and I only learned of it the following term when the *real* payday for the culprits took place. The Head defined it most scathingly at the first Assembly, as "an impertinence akin to begging!" Oh, dear!

The reason I missed this was because I had started my Christmas holidays about three days early. My dear Mother was an absolute “whiz” at wringing concessions out of Mr. Madden. This time she had spun him a yarn about having to go away on business, so could I come home a bit earlier. And it WORKED!

Another milder escapade was when I had just moved up to the Senior School (Form IV) and Michael Pearson and I, plus one or two others, thought it would fun to climb a tall tree behind the Assembly Hall. It was Sunday morning after chapel and we were romping around in the branches, not making much attempt to be discreet, when who should come strolling along the path below with his baby daughter in a pushchair, but the Assistant Headmaster, Mr. H. Crispin Smith. “Crippie’s” pet expression when he strongly disapproved of something was “I take a (very) dim view...”. Oddly enough, I do not recall him using it on this occasion. He recognised Michael, who had just been made Head Boy, and said “Is that the Head of the School I can see up there? NOT a very good example, is it?” We descended rather ruefully to “terra firma”, and nothing more was said.

Easily my craziest and most dangerous adventure was when, in the Third Form, I accepted a challenge to a duel with air pistols from the “Gangster”. “Gangster” was one form above me, big for his age, and we had always enjoyed a fairly amicable relationship on the whole, to the point where he was sometimes quite protective towards me. For a time we had even sat side by side on the same table at meal times. There would, however, be the occasional contretemps when I would manage to annoy him. This resulted on one occasion, when I had got up to go and fetch something, in “Gangster” sprinkling so much salt on my plate of macaroni cheese that it was totally uneatable!

I cannot now remember the circumstances which lead to the challenge, except that “Gangster”, now in the Forth Form, had become the proud possessor of one Webley Senior and two Webley Junior air pistols which he had, in total defiance of the rules, brought to school. Anyone who thinks I am weaving fiction into my story is welcome to consult some of my contemporaries who may also recall being potted at.

I accepted the challenge as an act of bravado because I did not want it to be thought that I was “fashed” (scared, windy in the Shant’s slang of the time). I did so, furthermore, knowing that another boy in “Gangster’s” form, Roy Harland, in accepting a similar challenge, had ended up with a pellet embedded in one of his knuckles. This had been removed (secretly, of course) by judicious use of a penknife, and without any resulting infection which would have involved recourse to Nurse and a barrage of awkward questions. I saw the hole it left, too! Whew! How we kept the angels busy can be seen as you read on!

We duly met at an appointed time and place in the Triangle, the part of the woods (now totally cleared) through which we used to pass from the quadrangle to reach the outdoor swimming pool. I was alone, but “Gangster” turned up with three “heavies” from the Fifth Form. He certainly did *not* need the moral support that I did! I was given a Webley Junior and a number of pellets and sent off to hide so that the hunt could begin. I, of course, did not have “Gangster’s” expertise so the result of the duel proper was a forgone conclusion. I ended up with a few blue welts on my body, while “Gangster” had just one on his back where I had caught him with a lucky shot while he was diving for cover into the bracken.

When we had fired off our supply of pellets we called a halt, and I handed back my air pistol, acknowledging “Gangster” as the winner. I regret to report that I then became the victim of some extremely unsporting behaviour. One of the Fifth Formers did not participate, but with three pistols the other three opened up on me as I was making my way back to the school. One pellet passed close to my head and took a twig off a tree! One or two others hit me, but it was only later I

shuddered to think of the enormity of either one of us losing an eye. It could have so easily happened. Yet, in spite of it all, we still remained on speaking terms.

Moving on in more detail to members of the teaching staff, the backbone of the School, one of the great comic moments in Ballard's history came one morning after breakfast in the summer of 1947 when Sidney Payne got up to announce the arrival of the King, George VI and Queen Elizabeth' in South Africa on their State visit.

Even as far back as 1947 Sidney, or "Gaffer", was a figure out of a bygone era. He was then around seventy-six (76!) years old with a mane of thinning iron-grey hair, a large hooked nose, and a very deeply tanned complexion from many years spent in South Africa as a young man. He still wore high, winged, starched collars, black ribbon ties which were tied in a large bow, pince-nez spectacles and leather lace-up boots in which he used to shuffle along with an ever present bundle of papers under his arm. He was not only the First Form master and took them for most subjects, but also the School Music and Singing Teacher, and both organised and conducted the School Orchestra. A very versatile old gentleman, indeed.

On the occasion in question, he gave even greater proof of his versatility when, having made his announcement, he launched into an impromptu rendering of a Zulu salute of welcome! For several minutes he wiggled and wobbled and wailed up on the stage in the Dining Hall while the whole School and Staff who were present remained convulsed with laughter. I doubt if anything like it has ever been seen, either before or since. It was a priceless gem of a performance!

Sidney also must have married late in life, since he had an extraordinarily young son, Kenneth, who taught Maths and Physics to the Fifth & Sixth Forms. His initials K.A.P. gave him the soubriquet of "Kappa", which also suited his mathematical talent. For those who were interested, "Kappa" taught some rudimentary steps in ballroom dancing, and also organised badminton tournaments. He did not always win these himself, but players like me were on to a hiding to nothing when we took him on!

"Kappa" was also a very keen Classical Music fan, mainly of the Russian School and some of the more modern and contemporary composers. He had a wonderful collection of gramophone records, and very kindly encouraged me to come and knock on his study door whenever he was playing anything I fancied listening to.

We once went up to a concert at the Royal Albert Hall together when I was in my final year. More of my Mother's "string-pulling" here. She knew someone who knew someone who worked at the RAH, and could occasionally obtain free tickets. A little intercession with Mr. Madden and I was allowed out for the evening, and to invite a friend along. I had availed myself of this possibility on a couple of occasions with Clive Whittenbury and William "Beano" Boston. This time I wanted to repay "Kappa" for his kindness. The only problem was that, when he accepted, I was so overawed at the idea of going out for a whole evening *alone with a master*, that I could hardly utter a word and I remained pretty tongue-tied until we got back inside the school grounds. Apart from the music, it must have been one of the most boring evenings he ever had in his whole life. If he is still alive to read this, I hope he will understand and forgive me. Those who, in later life, christened me "Chatty Patty", would simply NEVER believe it!

"Tombo" was probably still only in his late forties when I came to the School, but appeared older to us because his hair was completely white. He was a big, portly man, but he also taught Swimming, and in the water he could move like a torpedo. Most of the time he moved and spoke almost lazily, with a languid smile and a rather sardonic sense of humour, but if we ever saw him walking quickly

and chewing on the little finger of his right hand, THAT was a warning sign. He was either mad about something or with someone. His verbal abuse in class consisted of calling us either “clods” or “twerps”. If, at the same time, he was feeling slightly humorous, he would latinise the latter word into “*twerpus*”!

As I wrote to Andrew Foot on the occasion of the memorial service to be held for “Tombo” back in the late eighties, I could never count myself one of his favourite pupils, and our relationship was frequently an uneasy one. I can now ascribe much of this to my own laziness, which was to affect my relationships with other masters as well. I did, however, come to realise how much I owed him for instilling into me a love for the English Language which, in turn, led to my love of foreign languages, and English Literature, as well as his thinking highly enough of me to give me leading roles in two of his stage productions – Mr. Hardcastle in Goldsmith's “*She Stoops to Conquer*”, and the Banished Duke in Shakespeare's “*As You Like It*”. Both of these subjects were two of only three which I dared to risk taking for my GCE ‘O’ Levels.

One little satisfaction I had was some years later when we found ourselves sitting side by side at an O.R. Dinner. I discovered he had, out of personal interest, taught himself Spanish, a subject in which I had recently graduated. We were consequently, as equals, able to conduct a very amicable conversation in that language. He may not entirely have approved of some of the turns of phrase I have used in this memoir, but one must keep up with the changing language and times.

During my first summer I made some progress in swimming and diving but, to this day, I have never learned to swim putting my face under water as “Tombo” wished. I just could not get the rhythm of breathing right. The result was that I was never able to pile up many points for the house Swimming Shield because he always hauled me out of the water when I was not doing it properly.

If “Tombo” had a quirk it was that he frequently wanted us to swim and do P.E. in the nude. For swimming he considered it healthier “not to have a wet costume clinging round our private parts”. Fair enough. There were no quick-dry nylon costumes in those days. The naked physical jerks were mostly something the Cambridge Upper dormitory had to perform on alternate mornings, and his rationale for this, as well as the nude swimming, struck us as rather odd. He explained once that this was to smother our budding sexuality and divert any unhealthy interest from each other's bodies! As he put it, “Have a good look and you'll soon realise there is nothing there worth looking at.” What could one add to that?

There was, on the other hand, some sporadic contact with girls we encountered outside the School grounds, usually on our Sunday walks on Shirley Hills. They too were considered to be hazardous for our health, and Mr. Madden made this very clear in one assembly when it seemed that some unnamed individuals had been caught sneaking out to meet them. He warned us of the dire consequences of “getting girls into trouble”. To my knowledge, apart from some shouted conversations over the Paddock fence, and some mild flirtation in face to face encounters on the outside, nothing remotely scandalous ever took place.

There was one occasion, however, when David Tindall Green and I, together with one or two others, met a couple of lively, but not very pretty, thirteen year olds. I was not particularly interested, but David and the others arranged to meet them the following Sunday in the dip (now covered in with the tramline running through it) in the woods just across the road from the East Gate (now the Main Gate). Unfortunately, they made the mistake of giving the girls their names, with the result that during the following week a couple of adoring letters arrived at the School. It must have been the local postmark which aroused someone's suspicions, because the letters and the boys to whom they were addressed all ended up in Mr. Crispin Smith's study! David & Co. were

“gated” for that day, and it fell to me to go and inform two very disappointed damsels that their beaux would be unable to join them. Aren’t today’s pupils lucky not to have to cope with such petty restrictions?!

One of the most eccentric characters was undoubtedly Mr.G.Hamer, the Science Master. I cannot be certain what the G. stood for and, unusually, he did not have a regular nickname, although some of us called him “Five Second Fit” on account of his temper which could flare up, making him appear almost homicidal for a few seconds, before it subsided just as quickly. He could also, on occasions, be quite gentle and show genuine concern if someone seemed to have a problem. He was short and stocky, in his late thirties, with a mass of wavy, fuzzy brown hair, and penetrating brown eyes which seemed to bore into one from behind horn-rimmed glasses. His voice sounded as if he were speaking between his teeth and, whenever his jaw muscles tightened and twitched and his teeth seemed even more tightly clamped, one knew that a “five second fit” was about to begin! Then he would start screaming!

His favourite instrument of punishment was a length of rubber tubing taken off the Bunsen burner. In spite of annoying him fairly frequently (it was he in fact who started using the “Dog” Bruno epithet!), the only punishment I ever recall him giving me was when he was demonstrating once how some water (distilled, perhaps?) could be turned cloudy by blowing carbon-dioxide into it. Maybe I was yawning, or showing some similar lack of interest, when he called me out to the front, sat me on a stool by his desk and, to everybody’s great amusement, made me sit there blowing through a glass tube into a container of water for about twenty minutes while he carried on with the lesson. Michael Pearson, who was three years ahead of me, told me years later that *his* punishment for talking in class had been rather more excessive – having his head held over a bowl of ammonia!

It is, I imagine, pretty unusual for a master to give pupils nicknames when the tendency is vice versa but, having christened me “Dog”, I remember he used to call John Newman “Battledress” because, in the first term, he wore a grey battledress jacket until he received the proper grey flannel School uniform. He called Leslie Hollingsworth “Lend Me Your Ears” because he had rather large protruding ears, and he called Godfrey Longmire “Dopey” because that was what everybody else called him. What used to amuse us all no end though, even when he was cross, was his penchant for calling us by the long, scientific names of insects and various fauna, usually applied to anthropoid apes and early hominids. Once in the Dining Hall, when he was M.O.D. some of us, after the meal, were sitting round with our backs to the table and our legs out in the gangway. I, not unusually, was a bit slow in obeying his order to sit round properly. From up on the stage he fixed me with his penetrating glare – “Bruno”, he bawled, “you *PITHECANTHROPUS AFRICANUS* !” Roars of laughter and yet *another* embarrassing moment for “yours truly”.

It was Mr.Hamer who gave us our first lessons in Human Reproduction. Here at last was the real, genuine “low-down” on how babies were made! For one lesson he had, with meticulous precision, drawn a diagram on the blackboard of the female reproductive organs, including the bladder, which appeared to be uncomfortably close to the main orifice. Colin Fairweather, whose voice had not yet broken, put up his hand and squeakily enquired whether there was any risk of “false penetration”. I use this term for the benefit of any prudish readers because Colin actually expressed the question in simpler and more basic terms. Mr. H. gave Colin one of his gimlet stares, replied with a decisive “No”, a slight pause, then, “NONE whatever!” He was, at that time, already the proud father of *five* children! I heard a few years ago from his son, Edward, that the G. Stood for Gwylym (presumably the Welsh version of “William”), and that he was, in fact, a fluent Welsh speaker. Sadly, he died in 1957 at a relatively young age, due to a failed operation for a duodenal ulcer.

Some fifteen years or so later when a mutual acquaintance told me that Colin Fairweather had got

married the previous week, my mind immediately went back to his gloriously naïve question. I grinned inwardly and thought “Well, now he *must* know for sure!”

Mr. Hamer left about the end of my third year, and was replaced by a charming little Scotsman, George Flett. He was probably around Mr.H.’s age, perhaps slightly older, slim build, rather sharp features and black hair going a little grey. What I particularly remember about him is that he was one of the most even-tempered of all the masters who passed through the School in my time although, later on, I do not recall either Derek Mayo or Andrew Foot ever showing signs of irascibility. I do not remember him ever raising his voice or punishing anybody physically and, under his tuition, although Chemistry always remained rather beyond my ken, I think I made some fair progress in Biology and Physiology. He was popular with all of us and never, as far as I know, even given a nickname.

In complete contrast, and certainly the most irascible, was Henry “Joe” Claisse. Henry came to Ballards during my second year and hated it from the first day. It was something of a mystery to us why he stayed but, since he was well into his fifties when he arrived, he was probably just working out his time until retirement. He was short and portly with a mop of silver-grey hair and a habit, when talking, of frequently throwing his arms into the air as if trying to shrug himself more comfortably into his jacket and gown. These gesticulations tended to grow more frequent, the angrier he got. He called everybody “boy”, and sometimes “sir”, which we thought very old-fashioned even then!

Apart from being naturally prickly, Henry had one major defect which is fatal for any teacher. He tended to mumble and slur his speech. Since one of his main subjects was **French** (the others escape me), it was not too surprising that we made little progress. I remember this particularly keenly because, having started French in Form I with Mr.H. Carrick Smith and, I confess, been very lax in my attitude to begin with, I was, by the time I finished in Form II, fairly good at it and really enjoying it. Then, inexplicably, in the Third Form, we were handed over to Henry. That year, I am afraid, was a complete black hole for me, and by the time we got back with Carrick again in the Fourth Form, I was lost. I learned to speak and write French eventually, but mainly under my own steam, and did not take it at ‘O’ Level until eight years after I left!

Much of Henry’s irascibility might be attributed to the fact that we did not follow much of what he was talking about, so he thought we were all stupid and found his job frustrating. Although it was rare to see him in something approaching a good mood, he did sometimes show flashes of humour – enough to make us laugh. I think he was truly in his element when he was playing cricket. For his age and build he proved to be a surprisingly able batsman and bowler, and once he got dug in at the crease it could be very hard to get him out. I suspect he was enjoying little moments of revenge as he belted the ball around the pitch.

One of the pillars of the establishment was A.A.“Gyffe” Pizey who taught Maths and Physics from the Second through to the Fourth Forms and who retired at the same time I left. The most striking thing about him, apart from his aforementioned ability to appear silently out of nowhere, and which we all delighted in imitating, was his deep, rasping voice. It was said that this was a result of his having been gassed in the First World War, and has more recently been authentically confirmed.

I am afraid that his subjects were two of those which left me completely cold, and he was quick to detect my lack of enthusiasm. To the extent that once, in total exasperation, he once called me “a lazy little swine” which, in those days, was strong language indeed. There seemed to be a period when all he ever said to me was “go and get the offence book”, and I would consequently be “gated” for the week. One week I was in it *three* times! In the end, I was galvanised into trying a

little harder and doing a little better although, prior to that, I had, to my shame, once sneaked a look in Barry Robinson's exercise book in order to produce some better answers for the prep. we had been set. Barry was the class "whiz" (we called them "nibs" then) in Maths, and later I confessed to him what I had done.

"Gyffe" was one of the old school, strict but always fair. We parted amicably on the morning of the day we left Ballards, and I heard he lived on in happy retirement for another twenty-two years.

Another stalwart figure was the Arts & Crafts master, Mr. William "Lanky" Wright, who also ran the Tuck Shop. This seemed to open very sporadically and one day, when it's opening had been announced, I remembered to my horror that my account was at zero. One of my classmates, Tom Mackney, very kindly told me to borrow from his account. Unfortunately, when I presented myself at the Tuck Shop I had not thought of asking Tom to accompany me to confirm his offer. "Lanky", who always looked rather severe, gave me one of his rare, but somewhat sceptical, grins and said it sounded "like an old soldier's story". So, no tuck that day.

"Lanky", as his name suggests, was well over six feet tall with a booming voice which went well with his frequent threat to "come down like a ton of bricks" on those who were either inattentive, or generally misbehaving. Art was another subject for which I showed a singular lack of talent, and I got the "ton of bricks" treatment on more than one occasion. "Lanky's" preferred technique was, while he was reprimanding someone, to stand over him and emphasise each word by beating a steady tattoo on the boy's scalp with his knuckles. Ouch!

He had an odd habit, when he was studying a painting, of standing with his head cocked on one side and squinting hard, while with one hand in the back pocket of his trousers he would gently scratch himself. He was, in fact, blind in one eye, but one would never have thought so. He certainly didn't miss much of what was going on in his classes! There were stories about his legendary absent-mindedness, some of which may have been apocryphal. One was that he once drove into Croydon on some errands, but came home on the bus and was indoors before he remembered that the car was still parked in town. Another was that he was once explaining something to a class, picked up the duster to clean the blackboard, changed his mind and carried on talking. He then took out his handkerchief to blow his nose, changed his mind and carried on talking. When he had finished what he was saying, he then wiped the blackboard with his handkerchief and **blew his nose on the duster!** That does take some believing, doesn't it?

"Lanky" was in his forties and a widower when, much to our surprise, and obviously showing a charm which was not always apparent to us, he met, wooed and wed the pretty, blond and considerably younger Dale. It was not long before they were raising a nice little family, and we were all very happy for him. Something of what he drummed into me (with and **without** his knuckles!) about Art must have taken root because, although we had some amiable encounters after I left (he even offered me a cigarette once), he would be pleasantly astonished, were he still alive today, to learn how much of my working life was spent selling Fine Arts books covering the whole spectrum of painters and schools of art from the Renaissance to the present day.

At least when I met Mr.H. Carrick Smith after leaving, I was able to claim some improvement in my linguistic knowledge. My initial apathy towards French, plus a year with Henry Claisse, had done their worst towards giving me the confidence to take it at 'O' Level. In the Senior School Carrick also took us for Divinity (Religious Instruction), but I was obliged to miss most of his classes for reasons I will explain anon.

He was often referred to as "Carrick Keen" because of his brisk, bouncing walk, and an air and tone

best described as, to use the French term, “enthousiaste”. Another of his duties was to organise the annual (thank goodness!) cross country run which was yet another “bête noir” for me, although I do not think now that it was much more than five miles all together. Out of 140/150 pupils, I once came in a creditable 63rd, but perhaps half the school was having an off day. One year I managed to wriggle out of it, otherwise I always came in at 100+.

I cannot definitely remember now whether it was Carrick or “Tombo” who, during the long summer evenings, used to supervise us on the Top Field while we strove to improve our performance in various field events for the Glanfield Shield in Athletics. Here I shone a little better because, in spite of my slothful disposition, I *was* capable of putting on considerable bursts of speed for both High and Long Jump, and the short distance running. The only time I ever won any prizes, in fact, was one Sports Day when I romped home first in the under-14 100 yards and 220 yards, and second in the 440 yards. In the latter, I was just pipped at the post because all the races were handicaps, and young Roger Keene, because of his age, was given a *twenty-four yard* start.

Sport generally was another field in which I left much to be desired. I quite liked cricket, but could not play a straight bat to save my life. My one glowing memory is of one day in a match down on the Bottom Field while I was bowling. It was common knowledge at the time that I, still not yet fourteen, had a massive crush on Anthony Wilkinson’s eldest sister, Anne, who was about eighteen, and who had left Russell Hill a couple of years early. I had stayed once or twice at Anthony’s home during the holidays and thought Anne was absolutely fabulous. That day she was at the School visiting Anthony. As I was preparing to bowl, a grinning Bruce Cuthbert, warned me that she was approaching and I saw she was standing facing me over a hundred yards away up on the road, together with Anthony. I gave no sign of having seen them. I just took a deep breath, made my run up, and bowled the best ball of my life. It flew down the pitch, bounced, shot between the batsman (I think it was Derek “Deaky” Taylor) and his bat, and splayed the stumps.

Not even Anthony’s needling comment that evening at teatime (“We watched you bowling and she said she could bowl better than that”) could spoil that moment. I knew he was just trying to bait me, and that Anne could never have said such a thing, even though I never won her favours.

So much for cricket. In hockey I managed to play fairly well in goal (no running up and down!), but never well enough to even get into the Second Eleven. As for football....well! All that tearing back and forth to get my shins hacked! As it was, I once managed to get my face in the way when Hayden Batten Jones was taking a shot at the goalmouth. I “saved” the goal, but saw stars for the rest of the match. To this day I still cannot get worked up about it. Back then, while George Smith (a veritable *mine* of sporting information and trivia) and all around me were discussing the latest deeds of the soccer heroes of the day, Tommy Lawton, Ronnie Rook, Frank Swift and Jackie Milburn, one could safely say, in Samuel Goldwyn’s famous phrase, “include me *out* !”

I digressed from Carrick into sport because it now brings me to the next character on the teaching staff – Mr. R.S. “Squibbles” Squires. Gymnastics was every Friday, and our teacher during my first couple of terms was a ferocious Army sergeant with a bristling black moustache who used to come roaring up on a powerful motorcycle. I do not remember much about his lessons, except that he could hand out quite a mean clip round the ear if one was a little slow in jumping to his commands (guess who!).

When “Squibbles” turned up for the first time he looked like anything but a P.E. instructor. He was well over fifty, short (about five feet tall) and squat, bald, and with rather goblin-like features accentuated by pointed ears. It turned out in fact that he had once been a *circus clown*, and was still extremely strong, fit and agile. This aspect of his career was to serve us in good stead when, on a

couple of occasions, he entertained us with jokes, stories and conjuring tricks at the end of term concert. He could also be rather tetchy though, and the incorrigible Bruce Cuthbert, who had been smacked for some small misdemeanour, once told him to “keep his wool on!” He then tried to **run away** when “Squibbles” came after him! He did not get very far and, inevitably, got smacked some more when he was caught.

I actually **liked and enjoyed** P.E., and performed fairly creditably most of the time. “Squibbles” only ever lost patience with me once when I was having difficulty with a complicated series of moves on the Swedish horse. He took a swipe at me as he was sending me back for about the third or fourth try, but it did not really connect properly.

He once organised a gymnastics display on the lawn between St.Andrew’s and the main block. One of the features was a comedy turn - a blindfold boxing match between myself and Peter “Beaky” Taylor, and refereed by a little lad in a lower form called Matten. The latter was billed as the “famous Russian referee – Mattenski”, dressed up in an overcoat and black bowler hat, and with a painted face. We blundered around the ring for several minutes, occasionally “popping” “Mattenski” and the four seniors who were holding the ropes at four corners. At the end “Mattenski” declared himself the winner. This event was actually filmed, and I wonder if the film still exists in the School Archives.

It was “Squibbles” who introduced Boxing into the P.E. curriculum every two weeks. Our coach was an old friend of his, Mr. Johnson, a former Merchant Navy Heavyweight Champion, who still wore his blue Merchant Navy sweater. The only problem was that Mr. Johnson must have been champion around the same time that Nurse Harris had been doing her training – he was over seventy, a tall, stooping figure, and still adopted the old nineteenth century fighting stance of the bare knuckle prize fighters! I think if we had had to compete with other schools we would have been murdered. As it was we only had to knock the stuffing out of each other. A task which we undertook with gusto and which seemed to keep him happy with our “progress”. He was a nice old boy.

Each year there was also the inter house Boxing Competition in which I had the honour of competing one year when I was in the Fifth Form. The score: lost on points to John Newman (St.Andrew’s); beat Peter Small (Oxford) – referee stopped the fight in the third round. However, after the house matches had been fought, there were usually half a dozen exhibition bouts. In one of these, a couple of years earlier, I had been matched with David “Ox” Liley and managed, by a lucky series of straight lefts to the solar plexus, to actually **knock him out** in the first round – a sheer fluke! David was the youngest boy in our form, but he was not called “Ox” for nothing. He was about the second or third tallest (“Beaky” Taylor was always tallest), but very broad and beefy with it. I was glad I never had to fight him a second time. I doubt that I would have got away with it twice!

Apart from that setback, David was one of those boys who seemed to have everything going for him. He was a good all round sportsman (he later became a P.E. instructor), in the Junior School he had a lovely treble singing voice, was nearly always top of the class, and was never, as far as I can remember, in any kind of trouble. I was saddened when he died eleven years ago, aged only fifty-seven.

Returning to the subject of Elocution, we had an annual inter house Elocution Competition, but it was not taught as a subject until after Miss Kathleen Baird came one year to judge the competition. She was middle-aged, red haired, and had large, protruding teeth, which, luckily, proved to be no impediment to her profession. She had coached professional actors and actresses, and knew her

stuff. Perhaps she hinted to Mr. Madden that our enunciation could be improved because, the next thing we knew, she was coming once a week to put the Junior School through their paces.

I was, by this time, in the Senior School and had developed some thespian aspirations. My Mother, bless her, always quick to encourage my ambitions which, up until then, had remained pretty latent, was equally quick to wring another one of those concessions out of Mr. Madden. Could Miss Baird give me a private lesson when she came? Amazingly, Mr. Madden granted the request, and that was why I had to miss most of Carrick's Divinity class.

At the time Miss Baird took me under her wing I had already made my stage debut as one of the assessors in "Tombo's" production of George Bernard Shaw's "St. Joan" (no speaking involved, except as part of the group), followed the same term by my first speaking role as a Cockney crook in Lord Dunsany's "A Night at the Inn". This one act play had been produced by Crispin for the end of term concert. Then, the following Easter term, had come my big role as Mr. Hardcastle in Oliver Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer". Miss Baird had come to see this performance and had enjoyed it, but said my diction needed working on.

On Speech Day the presentations and awards were always followed by a little concert. A series of brief turns, or a scene from a play, performed by the boys. Miss Baird thought it would be nice if I could be "groomed" to recite a poem! It was her choice of poem which led to a lacklustre effort on my part and, consequently, the one and only time I received a real tongue-lashing from Mr. Madden for my apparent apathy and lack of appreciation of the privileged treatment I was receiving.

She had chosen a poem, title and author of which escape me, about a dandy highwayman called "Handsome Jemmy" who had been caught, tried and condemned, and was on his way to be hanged at Tyburn. "Jemmy" was getting the eighteenth century equivalent of the "groupie" treatment to be reserved for pop idols two hundred years later. When it got to the lines "white breasts flutter and white hands fling (at this point I as supposed to practically yodel the word "fling") ribbon'd posies as sweet as Spring", my heart sank to my boots and stayed there. The thought of standing up for several minutes in front of the whole School, Governors, Staff and parents, to recite such twaddle filled me with dread. As it was, I was already getting plenty of ribbing from my dear classmates!

I tried to hint to Miss Baird as gently as possible that I would prefer to recite something more "macho", more "gutsy" (a pity those words did not then exist in English), something I could really get my teeth into, like Horatius defending the bridge against the Etruscan hordes of Lars Porsena in Macauley's "Lays of Ancient Rome".

"Stout Lartius hurled down Aunus into the stream beneath:
Herminius struck at Seius and clove him to the teeth,
At Picus brave Horatius darted one fiery thrust,
And the proud Umbrian's gilded arms clashed in the bloody dust".

Now THAT was what I called a poem! "Tombo" had read it to us a couple of times in class, and I had loved it. Miss Baird, alas, did not take the hint but, to my great relief, abandoned the idea of my giving a Speech Day performance. Once that danger was passed my diction improved in leaps and bounds. Some months later, however, Miss Baird was to have a revenge of sorts.

It was during the Easter holidays of my final year that my Mother, bless her, decided to invite Miss Baird round for tea as a "thank you" for what she had done for me. During the previous term I had participated for Cambridge House in the House Elocution Competition. This consisted of three boys, one from each house, from each form reciting either a poem, or a speech from Shakespeare.

Our Fifth Form piece was Shylock's speech from "The Merchant of Venice" when, having been approached for a loan by Antonio, he proceeds to reproach him for all the previous insults and humiliations suffered because he is a Jew. Happily, I got the highest mark for the Fifth, and Cambridge, on aggregate, won the cup for that year (Miss Baird was NOT judging it). For me it ended there.

But not for Miss Baird! When she came for tea, she sweetly suggested at one point that I repeat my sterling performance for the benefit of my parents and Grandmother. Usually, it was the other way round – my Mother nagging me to perform for visitors. Something I simply *hated*! I always gave in in the end, and so it was on this occasion, after a considerable amount of cajoling and persuasion, but on condition I could *stand with my back to them*! So there I was, obliged to stand in cringing embarrassment in the middle of the living room playing Shylock to a small but, at least, appreciative audience!

I think it was around this time though that I began to realise, subconsciously at least, that I was not cut out to be a professional actor. If one is not brave enough to stand up in front of 300/400 people to recite a rubbishy ("dikey" in Shant's terminology) poem, then there has to be something missing. Furthermore, another thing I could never bring myself to do in public was stand up and sing solo. My name remained conspicuously absent from the cast of any Gilbert & Sullivan operas of that period, even though Sidney Payne had told me, once my voice had broken, that with training, I had the makings of a fine "basso profundo". Praise indeed, but I still could not feel sufficiently stimulated. Yet, I could fight a duel with air pistols! Adolescent boys are truly a strange species.

The peak of my amateur dramatic career, which continued for some years after leaving Ballards, was reached one night in May 1952 when I returned with the Harroddian Dramatic Society (I had gone to work at Harrods barely eight months earlier) as the male juvenile lead in a farce entitled "The Happiest Days of Your Life". As the title suggests, it was about a boys' boarding school and a girls' boarding school which, just after the war, following a mix-up at the Ministry of Education, ended up sharing the same premises, and the efforts of the staff to stop some visiting parents from finding out. A theme like that would hardly raise a smile these days but, back then, it was an absolute riot. The gales of laughter and the applause from my former schoolmates were almost tangible. It was a truly memorable evening.

Moving on to other members of staff, the Assistant Headmaster of my day, Mr. Crispin Smith, only recently passed away in March 2007 at the ripe old age of 93. He, along with "Lanky" Wright, ran the School Cadet Corps, and it was he who taught me how to handle and shoot a .22 rifle. From the the Second Form onwards he taught another of my favourite subjects, History. Although I was not quite up to the standard of classmates like John Blake, Mick Ayles and Roger Ballaster, who seemed to be better able to marshal their facts, I managed to keep up.

Academically speaking, I think I only let him down twice. Once when he sprung an essay on us about the Enclosures Act, a subject on which I had done absolutely no work (I was not so keen on Social and Economic History anyway), and again when he learned that I would only be taking THREE subjects at 'O'Level – just those I liked and knew I could pass! It was the first year the General Certificate of Education was introduced, replacing the old School Certificate, and I was quick to take advantage of being able to choose. He was disappointed, and right in thinking that, had I put my mind to it, I would have been up to taking two or three others. Since our occasional meetings at O.R.Dinners, he may have forgotten that many years later I made up for it by taking four languages at 'O'Level, three at 'A'Level (including Latin), and obtaining an B.A.Honours in Spanish at King's College, London.

His occasional outbursts of anger towards me usually regarded my, at times, over-exuberant behaviour in class, but these never resulted in corporal punishment. I came close to it only once when I K.O.'d an invasive wasp with a deft backhand swipe of a ruler. It may have been a sense of protectiveness towards wasps, but he simply did *not* like people lashing out at them.

It is also worth mentioning that Crispin had a distinguished war record, serving in the Royal West Kent Regiment with the rank of Major, and participating in both the Battle of El Alamein in North Africa, and later in the Battle of Kohima in Burma against overwhelming Japanese forces, being wounded in both of them. This latter engagement thwarted a planned Japanese invasion of India and a very graphic account of it may be read in "The Siege" by A.C. Campbell, in which Crispin has a couple of brief mentions as Harry Smith.

Finally, there was the Headmaster himself, Mr. Madden who, looking back and considering my manifold faults, was, I think, pretty indulgent towards me. Apart from the aforementioned "rocket", when I appeared to be making so little progress with Miss Baird, the worst I ever had from him was some sarcasm and a few dirty looks. One of these was perhaps the first of all my embarrassing experiences in front of the school. It was during the Head's Monday morning Assembly and, for some reason, there were not enough benches for us all to sit on, so several First Formers, myself included, had to stand along the wall. I was leaning there, listening to the Head droning on, while my feet slipped ever so slowly just slightly farther away from the wall. Suddenly, the combination of leather-soled shoes on parquet flooring came into effect and the Head's monologue was broken by my going down on my backside with a resounding thump! One hundred and fifty-odd pairs of eyes swivelled towards me and drilled into me as I hastily scrambled to my feet. There was a deafening silence, not a word was uttered and, astonishingly, not even a titter came from the assembled boys. After what seemed an eternity, Mr. Madden returned to his discourse. I wished I could have disappeared through the floor and into the Science Laboratory below!

The Head, an Oxford Classics scholar, was a large, imposing figure with a loud, booming voice which could be heard most days resounding along the corridor as he tried to inculcate the complexities of Latin Grammar and Caesar's Gallic Wars into us. I had laboured, with some credit, through "Tombo's" Second and Third Form classes, and managed to edge into the Head's Forth Form Latin group. That was as far as I got - I was out by the end of that year!

We had been set some class work to do on our own when, for some reason, the Head was unable to take the class himself. I laboured through the hour and managed to fill about six or seven lines of my exercise book. It was a day or two later, when he returned with the corrected work, that I felt the weight of his sarcasm. As he came to my exercise book "Ah, Bruno", he looked in my direction, "Some people are very slow and very sure, Bruno, you" - and the exercise book came whizzing through the air towards me - "are merely very *slow*". It was clear that I was destined to spend my final year in the blessedly Latin-less Form VB, yet amazing that, for university entrance purposes, I managed to scrape an 'A' Level pass ten years later.

I only had to report to his study once. It was the day after a half-term holiday, and I had got back to the School in time for tea, but had missed the evening role call. This was because I had chosen to go home for the day to Enfield, Middlesex, which was strictly against the rules. I was not supposed to go farther afield than Croydon which was permitted for half term, but was out of bounds on normal exeat days without the Head's permission. I had to explain where I had been and why I had been late back. Luckily, my honesty paid off. I was admonished, but no further action was taken.

Having always generously acceded to my Mother's requests, it was exceedingly unfortunate that, during my very last term at Ballards, Mr. Madden succeeded in mortally offending her. It was a

visiting day and my Mother had requested a meeting to discuss my future. He must have been having a very “off” day because, to hear my Mother’s version afterwards, he had more or less told her that I did not have a future! It seemed that he said things like “Of course, every mother wants her son to be Prime Minister”, and “The world is full of mediocrities”. Naturally, Mother found this attitude extremely negative and discouraging and came away from the meeting very upset.

It was again, to the Head’s enormous credit, that he realised he had come down excessively hard and rather overstepped the mark. He took me aside a day or so later to tell me this, and that he had written her a letter of apology. As he explained, he had only wished to be frank in telling her “I was indolent by nature”. At a certain age, one is rarely aware of one’s faults when they are at their worst, but I can freely admit now that Sloth is one of the Seven Deadly Sins I have had to fight against all my life.

However, mothers also do not wish to hear of their sons’ defects from others, and she never quite forgave him. My later academic achievements were always followed up by her quiet, vehement “*That’ll* show him!”

There were a few other members of staff with whom contact was much more limited, either because their stay at Ballards was so short or, because they came to the School when I had “much less time left to serve”, to use a Forces expression. One of the first was a Mr. Brian Brown, a tall, bespectacled, unsmiling type, who came and went in a matter of two or three weeks due to a recurring health problem. I have no recollection of which subjects he taught, only that he came into our Second Form class one hot day and, when somebody asked “May we take our jackets off, please sir?”, his curt reply was “No you *mayn’t*!” No-one had ever heard that abbreviation before, and it is unlikely that it has ever been heard since. I wonder what “Tombo’s” reaction would have been, but nobody thought to ask him at the time.

A year or so later I recall a short, dark, also bespectacled, gentleman whose nickname only I remember as “Prossy”. Likewise, I cannot remember which subjects he taught, only that he once tore up my newly arrived edition of “The Adventure” comic when he caught me reading it in class! *Why* I took such risks was quite unfathomable. Two years earlier I had also been caught with my head in a book during Carrick’s French lesson. It was the only time he ever beat me.

Very briefly, I think on a supply basis, we had one more exotic-looking (to us) character who was immediately christened “The Brown Bomber” since he might have been Indonesian, or from somewhere thereabouts. If one thinks of the character Oddjob in Ian Fleming’s “Goldfinger”, then one can visualise him fairly accurately. I only remember one Geometry lesson where he informed us, to our great awe and wonderment, that (best Oriental accent here) “shortest line between two points is straight line.”

In my last year Derek Mayo arrived to teach Geography, followed later, at the beginning of 1951, by Andrew Foot to teach English. Of Mr. Mayo, curiously enough, I have no special memories, only of a personable and quietly-spoken young man. I think, but one would have to delve into School records to be sure, I did rather better in Geography with him than I had with his predecessor.

Andrew, as I told him recently, was lucky in that he never had to suffer my presence in any of his classes. The only exchange between us which I clearly remember took place one evening when he was shooing everybody out of the Cambridge dayroom to go to tea. He enquired, as I came strolling along at my usual casual pace, “Bruno, do you ever move any faster than at a slow amble?” “Only on Sports Day, sir”, I retorted. He must have heard dozens of similar ripostes during his subsequent thirty four years at Ballards, so he does not recall this particular one. But we have corresponded

quite regularly since the late '80s, and I had the pleasure of meeting him for a long pub lunch in Lostwithiel in November 2002. There was a lot to chew over!

More or less contemporary with Mr. Mayo and Andrew in that year were Mr. Campbell and Mr. Gotch. The former, I seem to remember, took "Kappa's" place teaching Maths & Physics to the Seniors. He had a rather odd nasal voice which we were fond of imitating, but he was pleasant enough and, at times, quite amusing. Like "Kappa", he also turned out to be a Classical Music enthusiast, although not keen on the modern and contemporary composers. His comment on the Hungarian composer, Bela Bartok, was "you can't tell when they've stopped tuning, and when they've started to play the piece." On Sunday mornings he organised little concerts with his record collection. Since his room was next to the Lower Oxford dormitory, he used to set up his gramophone near the doorway, and arrange seating along the gangway between the beds. He would then explain each piece before he played it. It was a congenial interlude, and a nice touch to the day after morning chapel service.

Mr. Gotch was a *very* different type altogether. A stocky, sandy-haired ex-Army major in his late twenties, with a plummy voice and some very picturesque turns of phrase. He had no qualms about calling other masters by their nicknames in our presence, e.g. "Lanky", "Tombo." I think he was there temporarily teaching English to some classes. We were told he seemed to pay a lot of undue attention to the spicier passages in Shakespeare.

As far as his own language was concerned, he was once heard to make quite a vulgar remark with reference to the Headmaster, which I shall refrain from repeating. As a junior prefect, I was supervising the First Form during prep, and made some comment which raised a loud laugh. Mr. Gotch, who was M.O.D. that evening came in to see what the commotion was about. He then hissed at me sotto voce "You're just like all the rest of the prefects in this school. As much use as a fart in a thunderstorm!" I also heard that he had once quite casually offered to accompany Jeanette (my latest "pash" in the kitchen) to the bus-stop, and this had given "Cluny" Brown a touch of the vapours. Although Mr. Gotch had been an officer, she definitely did not think he was a gentleman. He was a character though.

The question of corporal punishment in schools has been a subject of heated debate in recent years and has now, I believe, been banned completely. I think I can say that on the whole, as far as the teaching staff of Ballards were concerned, it was administered fairly judiciously, but with one or two unhappy exceptions.

At the beginning I mentioned Stanley Rendell, the St. Andrew's housemaster, known by everyone as Stan. He was tall and austere looking, and may only have been in his middle or late forties, but looked older because he was completely bald. Apart from teaching Divinity, he took evening prayers in the dayroom, the occasional chapel service, and nearly always prefaced his lessons with one of his "penny lectures", as they came to be called. He was able to give an initial impression of being a very pious, sensitive, caring person.

I was to learn on only my second night at Ballards that he was anything but that. Being only fair-sized rooms in an old house, the dormitories in St. Andrew's were small, with six to eight boys each. I was in a room with Michael Strange, Adrian Lindlaw, Godfrey Longmire, and Peter and Anthony Bellion. Perhaps I was trying to impress, but shortly after we had settled down for the night, I managed to "fall" out of bed with a thump. This caused a flurry of whispered comments which soon brought Stan into the room to see what was going on. One might have thought that for a first offence, as it was in my case, and a moment of juvenile twittering after lights out, a sharp warning would have been sufficient. But sparing the rod was not for Stanley James (his middle name).

Apart from “Titch” Bellion and Adrian Lindlaw, who denied that they had been talking, he set about the rest of us with his leather-soled slipper.

My previous establishment had been run by a Victorian martinet who also believed in liberal use of the cane, so I was able to take my medicine without flinching. What I found more disturbing though was his treatment of Godfrey Longmire, whose buttocks were clearly not as seasoned as mine, for Stan's technique, even if the stipulated dose was to be three stokes, was to give his victim an extra wallop every time he leapt up oooooing and aaaaing and holding his backside! This meant that Godfrey's beating went on longer than ours. I was not acquainted with the word “sadism” at the time, but that is what it was.

It was this “technique” which lead the following term to a vicious beating for Frank Griffiths, presumably for also talking after lights out. He had a large black and blue weal in the shape of a slipper on his buttocks for days afterwards.

My next clash with Stan occurred perhaps only a week or two later, and also showed the extent of his duplicity. Because I had arrived during the term, I still had just my own brown shoes and not the standard issue black ones. There was only black shoe polish available in the communal shoe box, so I had asked him if he might lend me some brown polish. No problem, just come to his study any morning before breakfast, he had said.

A day or so later I went and knocked on the door. A voice said “Come in”, so I entered to find Malcom Heyne sorting the post (this was later handed over to the M.O.D. in the Dining Hall, and then passed to the Head Boy for distribution during the last ten minutes of breakfast). Malcom said Stan had slipped out for a minute, would be back shortly, and I could wait if I wished. We stood there talking while he carried on sorting out the letters. At one point he came across a letter for me and handed it to me. I took it and slipped into my pocket without opening it.

After a few minutes Stan came back into the room. He looked rather taken aback to see me, but I smilingly and innocently explained the reason, reminding him of his offer to let me have some brown shoe polish. He started to stammer a reply, but then suddenly flew into a rage saying I had no business to be there, it didn't matter if someone had said “come in” and invited me to wait, and he accused me of coming in specifically to sneak a look at the letters. This last was totally untrue, because I had not known that Malcom was there sorting them. An older and more mature person, would perhaps have opted to wait outside, or to come back a little later, but an eleven year old is less well-versed in the finer points of etiquette. Despite my protestations of innocence, I was dragged to one side and soundly slippered and, furthermore, adding insult to injury, I was sent away *without* my brown shoe polish!

That really destroyed my confidence in him, and it was not helped when, on another occasion, he had enquired with his “caring” voice about a bullying incident, and then been totally dismissive and unsupportive once he had been told the details. For end of term exams, he would invite us to ask if there was anything we were not sure about when he distributed the exam papers, then reply testily when we did ask, “It *tells* you what to do. You're telling me I don't know how to set an exam paper when you have to ask.”

It was not just we juniors who were victims of his two-faced behaviour. Someone amongst the St.Andrew's seniors once stole a pot of his jam, more as a joke than anything else. Stan had his suspicions but promised that, if the jam were returned, nothing more would be said about it. John Dennis (the junior prefect of my first Cadet Corps exercise) owned up and returned the jam. What

happened then was that Stan went back on his word, reported it to the Head, and Dennis was demoted.

Young boys are not beyond feeling contempt for someone who constantly preaches Christian behaviour and values, but does little to practice or live up to them. Stan thus managed to make himself the most unpopular and despised member of staff and was, the whole time I was at Ballards, the only one who, on at least two occasions, invited violent physical retaliation.

We juniors were not party to the reasons and causes, but one day during the Easter term 1947 a meeting in his study with Henry Frazer, a Oxford House junior prefect, resulted in a violent scuffle during which Stan received a hard punch on the mouth! Henry also happened to be the School's Cross Country Running Champion at the time and was extremely fit, as well as having a quick temper. Following a reading of my first version of this epistle, Stuart Adams (1946-50) who made a career for himself with the Nat West (National Westminster Bank) reported receiving a visit one morning in the early seventies from the Regional Financial Controller. When he opened the door he was astonished to find none other than Henry Frazer standing before him. They had several pub lunches together during the following two years before Henry moved on to higher things – overall Financial Controller and General Manager.

Whether he had been due to leave at the end of that term in any case, or whether at the end of the Summer term, is uncertain. The fact was that Henry quietly departed at the end of term, probably having been asked to do so by the Head as a gesture of schoolmasterly solidarity. However, it was with no little feeling of vengeful satisfaction that those of us who had smarted from Stan's administrations were able to observe him walking around for the next few days with a noticeable bruise on his upper lip.

The next incident occurred in the Summer term which was, happily, to be Stan's last, and was later described in graphic detail and with great relish by the "Gangster" who was in the same class. Stan was conducting a lesson with Form Two. A week or so earlier, one of the boys, Bernell "Bernie" Balsom, had fallen and hit his head on a radiator cutting it badly enough to require having it bandaged for a few days. That day Bernie received a cuff round the head from Stan for talking in class. The bandages had been removed by then and a scab had formed, but the blow was hard enough to knock the scab off and reopen the wound.

Bernie reacted by calling Stan a clumsy fool, or some similar epithet, and Stan sent him out of the class to stand in the corridor. What happened next almost defied belief. Bernie who also had a quick temper, instead of standing outside the classroom, went down to the ink-room at the end of the passage, found a broken chair in there and, armed with a leg of it, charged back into the classroom and began belabouring Stan with it on his bald pate!

Astonishingly, as far as I can recall, no disciplinary action was taken against Bernie for this violent display of juvenile anger, and there was again a similar feeling of vengeful satisfaction amongst us in seeing Stan going around with a one inch-long cut in the middle of his forehead. With his relations with the Head at rock bottom, and his credibility and self-respect in shreds, he left that summer.

In a different way, his story is as pathetic as that of Matron Jenkins but, I heard years later from Mick (Neb) Ayles who, oddly enough, remained in touch with him, it did have a more upbeat epilogue to it. After Ballards he taught at both Steyning, Sussex, and Newark, Nottinghamshire, grammar schools. It was at Newark that he met his wife, Nellie, a widow of about forty with two teenage children, married at the age of fifty-seven and became a father at the age of fifty-nine!

This could have been the stimulus and sense of fulfilment that he needed in his life which clearly, while he was with us, neither the Bible, nor the teaching of Religion on their own were providing. As Mick reported, Nellie was an amiable and able Yorkshire lady who certainly softened him up, and it is true that, unfortunately, some people with the strong Christian moral sense that Stan had too often tend to see things in terms of black and white. Sometime after his marriage he actually became a clergyman, but was only in active ministry for less than ten years, since he had to retire at seventy. So it seems that he mellowed and expiated some of his sins by becoming more humane, a good husband and “pater familias”. He died in February 1995 aged 95, even beating Crispin's record of longevity.

The next case of staff heavy-handedness will come as something of an anticlimax, but I include it because I have not yet mentioned Maxwell at all, except as Derek Mayo's predecessor. Mr. Maxwell joined the staff in the Autumn of 1947 as successor to S.J. to teach Geography. He was ex-Army, big, blond and thirty-something, and capable much of the time of being far more affable than Stan ever was.

I managed to get off on the wrong foot with him through being a bit too voluble in class, and this eventually led to a beating with a heavy rubber shoe. I think I was the first in the class to find out that he would not dish out three “of the best” (the normal dose), when six would do. We never had a good relationship and, even when I did once revise hard for an end of term Geography exam, and was able to comfortably answer eight out of the nine questions, he still contrived to mark me only 29/100. When I queried it he simply shouted me down.

He was not, I am glad to say, as quick to mete out physical punishment as Stan was but, apart from his penchant for more than the usual number of whacks with the shoe, he was rather too free with an open-handed wallop which, delivered to the back of the head, really made it ring for several minutes afterwards.

This was demonstrated in a distasteful episode one morning after breakfast in the Dining Hall. It was the duty of one boy on each table to swab the table down with a dishcloth after the dirty dishes had been collected. On the Oxford Senior table the job had fallen to Roy Jones who, inadvertently, had not done a thorough job. Maxwell was M.O.D. and, passing along the tables, he noticed the soiled spot, enquired who was responsible for wiping the table, and told Roy to immediately go and get the dishcloth and clean it properly. Now Roy was not the most robust individual in the School since he was asthmatic and excused all form of sport. As he was getting up to go for the dishcloth again, Maxwell, who was standing behind him, swung his arm in an arc and gave him an almighty clout. Poor Roy did not even see it coming. I was sitting practically opposite on the Cambridge Senior table and saw it clearly. It was brutal, gratuitous and totally unnecessary, as well as being humiliating for Roy. It was sufficient to cause a loud murmur of resentment to run round the Dining Hall, and it was Norman MacDougall, Oxford House Captain and later to become Head Boy, who volunteered to go and see Maxwell afterwards when the latter wanted to know who was talking.

The resulting conversation is not on record, but Norman was big enough and old enough to have stated a few home truths and, it may have been coincidence, but it was during that year that Maxwell left, to be succeeded by the far gentler Derek Mayo. Gentle enough, in fact, to be nicknamed “Pansy”, although this was an affectionate term which had NO hidden connotations.

I realise rather late that in earlier versions of this memoir I never mentioned two shadowy personalities who were not on the teaching staff, but very much part of school life. More specifically, the chapel. One was Mr. Frederick Gower, the School Organist for 30 years. He was indeed the most shadowy of all, since one only ever saw his back as he sat playing up in the organ

loft, and always seemed to be wearing the same blue suit. Now, just inside the chapel door is a plaque dedicated to his memory. On the other hand, the Reverend Canon Greenaway was much more prominent. He was actually the vicar of the local parish of Addington and was not infrequently seen walking around the School where he would come to take a chapel service from time to time and to preach the sermon. In spite of being short and portly, he was quite flamboyant in the pulpit, and his resonant, plummy voice rang around the rafters, and in one passionate sermon in the parish church (we sometimes walked down there for Sunday morning service), he actually made the pulpit shake (rather dangerously, I thought!).

Another of his little tasks at the School was taking a weekly class to prepare those of us who were due for Confirmation and our first Holy Communion. Apart from this, he remained strangely aloof from us boys. I never once recall him stopping to pass the time of day with any of us, nor do I ever recall seeing him smile. He just sailed round the premises as if we were not there. A seemingly reserved and austere character altogether. However, one interesting piece of information about him did emerge during one of his sermons, and with an extremely touching aspect to it. He was a First World War veteran and had served in the Salonika campaign against the Turks. Here he had contracted black-water fever, a complication of malaria which destroys blood cells and causes urine to turn dark, hence the black water. Not many sufferers were known to recover from it. This was the news his Mother received in a telegramme when she returned home from Sunday Evensong. The telegramme also informed her that her other son, the Canon's brother, had been badly wounded.

This was the climax of two earlier tragedies. Her daughter had died three months earlier, and her husband only three weeks before, having caught a terrible chill at his daughter's graveside. The news concerning her two sons was too much and the poor lady collapsed and died on her doorstep. In her hand she was clutching her prayer book. The Canon's sermon that evening was on the subject of Reverence. Could we possibly imagine, he asked, the reverence with which he and his brother still kept and regarded that little prayer book? For them it's sentimental value was clearly inestimable. Canon Greenaway, always looking serious, appears seated with the teaching staff in all the school photographs of that era.

I have covered in detail (perhaps too much so) characters and events comic, tragicomic and sad, but cannot close without saying something about the darker side of life at Ballards where "The Lord of the Flies" syndrome was much in evidence long before William Golding wrote his famous novel. One of the things of which I came away convinced is that there is practically no such thing as a thoroughly *nice* little boy. This is especially so when they are all cooped up together for weeks on end, with only each other on which to vent their adolescent frustrations and animosities. Perhaps Nurse Harris's generic description of us was not so wide of the mark after all.

One of the factors which kept Juniors in constant fear of giving offence was that corporal punishment was also administered by prefects and junior prefects, often for pretty trivial reasons. As well as an assortment of hairbrushes, shoes and slippers, my own bottom also came into contact with hockey sticks, and even once a *linesman's flag*! There was also punishment by "popping" – one or more hard smacks across the face.

As a Junior one was forced to accept the harsh fact that the younger and newer one was, and the lower the form one was in, meant being always at the back of the queue, having to clean a prefect's shoes, and fetch and carry for any Senior who ordered it, AND be pretty, damn quick about it! The term "cheek" could cover a multitude of sins, of which the cardinal one was answering, or even hitting back.

A little harmless (I thought) repartee when I was still in the First Form once earned me a severe beating from a Fourth Former who was a head and shoulders taller and used his fists on me which, even in the prevailing atmosphere, was definitely NOT cricket. I was only saved from further punishment by the arrival on the scene of Peter Harrison, a Cambridge prefect, who strongly rebuked the youth for his heavy overreaction. However, much later on, as with S.J., I was able to enjoy a sort of proxy revenge when I witnessed my tormentor getting the worst of it in two fights with boys who were nearer his own age and size.

A “charming” pastime of the Seniors, when we had to come across from St. Andrew’s to join the queue for tea outside the Dining Hall, was making us run the gauntlet between them while we made our way to the back of the queue which stretched along the cloisters. I soon got fed up and learned to avoid it by simply walking around the lawn, entering the cloisters at the classroom end and reaching the back of the queue that way. I was not quite, as my Grandmother used to say, “as green as I was cabbage-looking!”

It was odd how there never seemed to be anyone in authority around when we were suffering these painful indignities, but generally I think we bore it all pretty stoically. There was also the strict tradition of not “sneaking”, or telling tales, although this was breached once. An anonymous note complaining of one boy’s behaviour was slipped under Crispin’s study door. The offences demanded immediate expulsion but, as it was near the end of term, and the boy involved was leaving anyway, he was discreetly sent home on holiday a few days early. There were suspicions about who had written the note, but nothing was ever proved.

There were, however, some gentle characters. I remember particularly Dennis Millmore and Michael Ribbands. Dennis was Cambridge House Captain during my first four terms, and was a superb actor – the only times he ever had to raise his voice. His performances as Hamlet and as the Lord Chancellor in Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Iolanthe” in School productions received rave reviews in the local press. Michael was in the form above me, always pleasant, good humoured and humorous. Tragically, I heard, both died while still only in their thirties.

The episode of my duel with air pistols shows that, in spite of the strict discipline and supervision at Ballards, our behaviour at times managed to fall little short of delinquent. Once the Head gated the whole School. The reason, if I remember correctly, was that there had been a fire in the woods which had necessitated the intervention of the local fire brigade. Amongst the boys who had gone to watch them fight the blaze, two or three were spotted actually trying to *puncture* the hose! The fire chief had been unable to get their names, but had reported the fact to the Head, who demanded that the boys own up. They never did, and we were kept in for over a week.

There was also the time that two boys went on a shoplifting spree in Croydon. When caught, it was left to the Head to deal with them and, although they were severely punished, they did not, to the amazement of all of us, suffer expulsion. Generally, it seemed, the Head was very loath to take this step, but he did add to the punishment by making them come and stand out in front of the school at the next Assembly, while he shamed them in front of all of us.

There was a case right before the end of term when the cashbox disappeared from Matron’s office. Nobody was ever caught or even accused of this petty larceny, but I heard that a boy in long black tights had been seen loitering near the scene. It so happened that was the term that “Tombo” was putting on a production of George Bernard Shaw’s “St. Joan”. The “Gangster” had a minor role in it as the Executioner (!!!), and part of his garb was....long black tights! Hmmm!!! He was leaving as well!

The final drama of this nature while I was there (and this time the Head really came down hard) was the expulsion of six boys, five of whom were Forth Formers like myself. I missed the events leading up to it through being on one of my periodical sojourns up in the “san”. When I came down the whole school was abuzz with excitement.

What happened was that one day, for a silly prank, they had gone into “Tombo’s” study and stolen his cashbox! I do not think it contained very much, but they took it and buried it somewhere. I do not recall the exact details of why and how they were suspected and ultimately detected, but “Tombo” threatened to call in the police unless they showed him where they had hidden their loot, such as it was. The Head, not without some regret, did the rest.

It was a sad episode which was perpetrated mostly out of bravado and “just for a laugh”, but went badly wrong. One cannot steal from others and then claim it was just innocent fun, although three of the culprits had some of our sympathy because it was clear that they had just been easily led. I can, however, happily assure readers that Bruce Cuthbert was not one of the six involved.

I had the pleasure of meeting one of the latter at an O.R.Dinner some twenty-odd years later, to find him fit and well and guess what? A sergeant in the *Metropolitan Police!* I trust the others also made good eventually.

At this point, having expounded on the not very exemplary behaviour of others, I must confess that I myself was not always a model of restraint and decorum. I left after one year in the Fifth Form and was, during that year, also a junior prefect, but more than once I was accused of being too easy-going and not showing enough sense of responsibility. I was considered, in modern parlance, to be too “laid back”. This was indeed true, but it did not prevent me from showing periodical outbursts of temper and castigating some luckless junior for some minor offence. Therefore, if anyone reading this can recall suffering either physically or verbally at my hands, I now, after a fifty-odd year delay, offer him my most humble apologies.

Personally speaking, whatever my own sufferings and humiliations at the time, I can look back now and be quite sanguine and philosophical about it all. I bear no malice. Do we not, in reciting the Lord’s Prayer, ask that our trespasses be forgiven “as we forgive them that trespass against us”? This process had in fact already begun by my final year when Sixth Formers like Clive Whittenbury, “Beano” Boston, Norman MacDougall and Francis MacMahon, all became quite good pals, which had not been the case while I was in the junior school. With Francis I have had sporadic contact over the years, but especially during the last eight, since we found ourselves staying in the same hotel in Madrid! He even used to phoned me up from the UK sometimes until, sadly, he was taken by cancer in June, 2010, aged 77.

Ballards days were not the *happiest* days of my life, but they were certainly formative. They prepared me, as nothing else could have done, for life in the Army, to fend for myself, and to face up to many of the problems and situations which life holds in store for us. They could not, at that time, have prepared me for how to deal with the opposite sex but, in that respect, does one *ever* learn? They gave me a good, sound basic education which I was later able to expand and develop, and which led me to achieve some success in my chosen field of publishing, even if, in Mr.Madden’s words, I did not “become Prime Minister.”

PATRICK BYGATE (né BRUNO) 1946-1951

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Some explanatory notes:

The title “Ballards Days” comes from the name of the large wooded estate just outside East Croydon, in Surrey, which comprises the school grounds – the Ballards Plantation. The existing buildings which have, since my time, been extended, were inaugurated in ca.1924/25 as the school for senior boys from the age of ten & a half upwards. The school though actually celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2003, and was originally housed a few miles away at Russell Hill, Purley. Russell Hill continued to be the girls’ and very junior boys’ school until it was sold off and transferred to Ballards in ca.1960.

Then the schools were often referred to as the Purley Schools or, since they were originally founded for the benefit of those children whose parents worked, or had worked, in the drapery and retail trades, the Warehousemen, Clerks & Drapers’ Schools. Our school at Ballards was Russell School, as distinct from Russell Hill, but we inmates irreverently referred to it simply as “Shant”. We were divided into three houses – Oxford, Cambridge & St. Andrews, and then subdivided, according to age and academic ability, not into classes or grades, but into forms, starting with Form I through on up to Form VI. Forms IV & V were divided into A and B, the former being for those who still, with the blessing of the Headmaster, took Latin as part of the curriculum. The school year was divided into three terms, not semesters.

Since one of the school’s patrons is the Queen, the school was eventually granted the title of ROYAL Russell School. This gave it a rise in status to PUBLIC school which, in the perversity of the English language, means that it has become a somewhat more elite, private, fee-paying school, such as those of Eton and Harrow. Private schools are also private, fee-paying schools, but of a more junior status.

Ballards has now changed beyond all recognition, as well as having become co-educational, much of the woodland around has been cleared to make way for new wings and extensions, and the school role of around 145/150 boarders in my day has jumped to between 800 and 900, many of whom are day pupils. It has also become multicultural and multiracial to an extent we could never have dreamed of. At one attendance at an Old Russellians’ Dinner in 2002 (and my first for several years) I was astonished to be introduced a Head Boy who was African, and to a Head Girl who was Chinese! In some ways a splendidly progressive step forward, but I heard it had also had the adverse effect of one headmaster banning Speech Day and Sports Day because the Nigerians were constantly walking off with all the sports and athletics prizes, and the Chinese likewise with all the academic prizes. Someone must have been developing an inferiority complex.

A SHORT GLOSSARY OF “SHANT” SLANG

BEURRE	- butter
BOLSHY	- disobedient, bad tempered, uncooperative
TO BLUB	- to cry
CAVE	- (pronounced as KV) watch out (if someone is coming)
CHIBBY*	- chestnut of the edible variety
CHIBBYITIS	- the stomach upset caused by eating too many of the above
CRAP	- a smack round the back of the head

DIKES - toilets
 FEMININE URINE - (both words pronounced to rhyme with “nine”) hot lemon drink
 FASHED - scared, windy
 FASHITE - coward, to be “fashed”
 FRERE - brother
 GORM - idiot, twerp
 LIGGER - ignoramus, dunce, not academically gifted
 NIB - a swot, academically gifted
 PASH - a favourite,
 TO HAVE A PASH ON S.O. – to show favouritism towards somebody
 TO PIFF - to pretend, to fake
 POP - a smack in the face, also “to pop s.o.”
 POPPLE - a popularity act
 SAN - the sick bay, sanatorium
 ‘SCITS - biscuits, cookies
 SPESS - an odd type, specimen
 TO BE IN A WHEEZE – angry, in a bad mood
 TO DO A POPPLE – to do something to attract attention, to make oneself popular
 TO TAN - to beat
 T’OTHER SHANT – the Girls’ & Junior Boys’ School in Purley
 TOASTY - to be red in the face, blushing

*CHIBBY - also a game of catch played in the woods during the summer months by two teams of any number, usually less than ten a side. After deciding which team was to be the “hunted” and which the “hunters”, the latter would disperse into the woods to be followed, after few minutes, and hunted down by the other team. This merely consisted of touching the adversary who would be obliged to return to base and wait to be released by a team mate, who would try to approach the base unseen to touch & thus release his companion.

Base, at that time, was the stump of an old oak tree on the edge of the quadrangle. An area now covered by the new Science block.