

In 1944 I had to take my 11+ exam. There were three papers - Maths, English and IQ. Boys of my age living in the southern portion of Portsmouth had to proceed to Francis Avenue School on two consecutive days to take the papers that would decide whether or not we would go to the Southern Secondary School and happily I was one of those who managed this. 1944 saw the Butler Education Act become law and as a result the Secondary School was renamed Portsmouth Southern Grammar School. Unfortunately the original school buildings had been destroyed in the air-raids on Portsmouth and the whole school had been evacuated to Brockenhurst in the New Forest, so in the September of '44 I became an evacuee and boarded the train that would take me away from my family for the first time. I remember bursting into tears on Brockenhurst Station when I discovered I was the only child from Penhale Road School to be billeted, away from the rest, in a cliff top hotel in Milford-on-Sea - the Mirimar. After a few days my unhappiness was noted and I was given the option to transfer to a cottage in Sea Road, Milford where six or seven boys were billeted with an ageing lady and her daughter. Sadly, I can no longer remember the ladies' names. This seemed to work the trick and although we had to travel from Milford to Brockenhurst and back every school day, changing buses at Lymington en route. We were all quite happy with the arrangement. At weekends, as the sea front was at the end of our road, we spent many happy hours playing on the sands and climbing the cliffs, and all this despite the anti-tank obstacles set up along the beach.

But what of the teaching staff? As one might expect they were a mixed bunch and over the years one only experienced a few of them. Some, like "Shack" or Mr. Shackleton, our chemistry teacher and a bluff northerner, was much loved by the pupils especially those of us who remember the Brockenhurst days. He would zoom up the rutted road to the collection of wooden huts that made up our school accommodation, waving cheerily to those of us walking up the road and responding warmly to our greetings. His opposite number "Chats" Chatterton was a rather colder and somewhat more cynical man. In our 4th year he expressed the view that none of us would obtain a decent mark in our School certificate chemistry exam. In the event many of us, including myself, managed distinctions, so he must have succeeded in imparting skills and knowledge to us despite his cynicism [Ed: a clever piece of psychology perhaps by "Chats"?]. So, thanks "Chats". As for "Shack" I vividly remember on one occasion him coming into our room at Brockenhurst to begin a lesson and informing us of an amazing thing he had read in one of his professional magazines. "Boys", he said, "I want to give you a new word. It's "plastic" and it's a substance rather like bakelite. In a few years you'll find all sorts of things made from it - boxes, cups and saucers, pens and even chairs and tables." How right he was and where we would be today without plastic?

Our two French teachers were "Tish" Tilney and "Scratch" Hitchins. Scratch was quite formal but a brilliant teacher who stressed the importance of speaking the language as the French would do. A talented musician he formed and conducted the school orchestra. Tish was a bit of a showman but he too required the correct pronunciation at all times. "What is this letter?" he would ask, holding up an "e". If anyone pronounced it "ee" he would shout "No, it's "e" as in egg. This an "ee", this is an ee", as he lifted his leg and loudly slapped his knee. Doc Lobb was a kind and warm English teacher who went on to become head of Southampton University's Education Faculty where I was later in life privileged to meet him again while attending a day's music course led by Avril Dankworth, Johnny's sister. He was responsible for producing several of Shakespeare's plays and cast me as Flute, the bellow's mender in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as Macduff in *Hamlet* and as Sebastian in *The Tempest*.

He was scathing in his opinion of our school hymn book "Songs of Praise." "Nothing but a collection of pleasant ditties! And what does this mean? "Oh what a sound and too divine for hearing. If you can't hear it it's not a sound is it!" After he left we were taught at sixth form level by Saxon Walker, less extrovert and much younger but he enthused us all the same. Two of the maths teachers were brothers - Stan and Reg Davies. Reg was my first year form master and he obviously knew the type of fiction that appealed to boys. While at Brockenhurst he would come in to our room for half an hour or so at the end of Friday afternoons and read to us from Captain Marryat's "Children of the New Forest", very apt when one considers our location and predicament at the time. Harry Steed, known to us as "Cabhoss" performed a variety of teaching rolls but it was he who introduced me to the delights of recorder playing.

Most feared was Sid Parnell. He taught Latin and no-one dared mess with him. He would set us all kinds of Latin verbs and cases to learn by heart and woe betide the boy who had not succeeded in this by the start of the next lesson. The punishment for failure was always to write out the correct response a specified number of times and it was the form captain's task to keep a record of this. The hope was that Sid would not pick on you for a recitation. Those of us who were to go on to study Latin at sixth form level wondered what was in store for us. What a change! His greeting at our first lesson was "Good morning, gentlemen, I would like to tell you what we intend to study this year - Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* Book 1 and Virgil's *Aeneid* Book 6." He expressed his expectation that we would settle down to this task and from then on he became our friend, not enemy, and a brilliant teacher as well. There were many more teachers of course, some good, some bad but those I have mentioned cannot fail to stay in one's memory.

When I arrived at the school our head was G B H Jones, a rather fiery little Welshman who seemed very remote from us, but within two years he became seriously ill and sadly passed away. His replacement, Harry Mills, was a far different character with dark jowl and impressive forehead but he soon commanded our respect with his general demeanour and his sense of fairness. His wife Aileen played a character in a BBC West of England weekly serial, broadcast on the Home Service, about West Country village life "At the Luscombes" which became a very popular programme. She played Dot Luscombe a well-meaning but tiresome grown up daughter of the

family. In real life she was a lovely, unassuming person who would come in to one or two of our rehearsals leading up to the school play each year offering advice which was gratefully accepted by us all. She would also act as one of the judges for the "Headmaster's Speech Prize" which on one occasion I won with my recitation of T S Eliot's "Journey of the Magi".

The next hurdle was GCSE "A" Level exams covering my chosen subjects of English Literature, French, Latin and History. In those days a sixth-former had to opt for either arts or science and I chose the former as the prospect of going on with chemistry, maths and physics appalled me. My aim was to seek university entrance by means of a Portsmouth Major Scholarship. Although my A level results qualified me for this I had to wait a further year for acceptance at London, so I extended my studies for another year and was chosen by Mr. Mills to be a member of his history scholarship group. He would meet with us for an hour twice a week in his room where would listen to him quietly and take notes.

Outside his door was a small panel consisting of three coloured lights. If green was illuminated it meant knock and enter, if amber knock but wait to be asked in, if red do not attempt to interrupt the headmaster. While our scholarship group was in session it would be set at red of course, so it came as a great surprise late on the morning of 13th February 1952, when there came a loud knock at the door. With one of his deep frowns Mr. Mills called "Come in!" There at the door stood the school caretaker. "I do apologise for interrupting, headmaster", he said, "but I think you should know that it was announced on the radio a few minutes ago that His Majesty King George passed away early this morning." "Good Lord", said Mrs. Mills. "Will you please ask Mr. Hoare (the Deputy Head) to assemble the school in fifteen minutes." To us he said, "Sorry boys we will have to end there for today." Having assembled in the hall the school was informed of the King's death and, also, much to our delight, that school would end for the day at noon.

Regards

Brian (6 Dove Court, Hatfield AL10 8QW

Email address (if supplied): brian.dummer@ntlworld.com