

David Coppard's memories of the Southern Grammar between 1956-61

In 1956 I joined part way through the first year (having moved back from Devon) and remember going in the front entrance with my mum. We saw a chap wandering along the corridor and thought he was the caretaker so asked him for directions to the Headmaster's office. After shouting at us to "get off the school crest" (set in the floor) he told us to follow him - and we were surprised when he sat at the Headmaster's desk!

At my joining interview with Mr Mills, my mum asked if I would be doing Latin (in the one term at Exmouth Grammar I did well!) but he said quite abruptly that it was a dead language and only those in the 6th form studying languages could do it. When she asked if the school taught swimming he roared back that the school was an academic institute and if we wanted to swim "go to the beach"! So I was quite surprised when I learned the school had got a swimming pool a few years later. [Ed: interesting, since I recall taking Latin {Mr Gosling – and, on occasion, the Headmaster in the late 1950s moneo, mones, monet etc!}. Also, an interesting response re the swimming since HJM himself used to swim in the sea every day or the year and was also the key person responsible for getting the swimming pool financed and constructed].

We all called the art master, Mr Jeffries, 'Buller', (mainly because of his World War 2 stories) and as far as I remember he knocked a 'large' lad across the room when he 'lost it' once.

Unfortunately, the lad had only just walked in and had nothing to do with the playing-up situation; the whole class got blamed and after that we were not allowed to do art again! [Ed: I seem to recall that it was one of Buller's peculiarities that he would take vengeance on the next boy he saw rather than necessarily the perpetrator of the "crime". I could fill half a website with stories about him!].

In the 4th Form we were also banned from doing French again (Mr Blake) – including not being allowed to take French GCE (not that I was any good at it anyway!).

Although we did General Science, we never got past the 'law of moments' in physics, because we kept having replacement teachers - although Mr Chatterton did take us a few times I think.

[Ed: Seems to me that this class was working its way through the school timetable!!].

Despite the error of our ways,, I seem to remember that although we were 5R, we got more GCE passes than any other!! I achieved 5 out of 7 - failing maths and metalwork (I'm left handed!).

I remember taking great delight in refusing to join the Combined Cadet Force because, being from a Royal Marine family, I was already in the Royal Marine Cadet Band at Eastney barracks and the CCF didn't have a RM section (there should have been some as part of the Navy).

When I went to Mr Mills office to leave (mid term end of 1961) he accepted our 'shilling' to join the Old Secundrians - but we never heard another word from anybody (Ed: until recently, of course, when I'm delighted to say that David found the website and is now a member of the Association again).

David Coppard February 2010