

Reflections of the Old School and after

75 years ago I was at the old school for only part of a year before war was declared. I recall feeling proud at being accepted for entry at 11 years old having been stressed out with the 11+ in 1938. To be honest I thought I had failed. Previously I had attended Bramble Road Primary School off Fawcett Road and became a choir boy at St. Mathews Church opposite (both destroyed during the War) for a short while after my parents moved from Andover to Percy Road. I did some drawing at that school and the teacher rewarded me, for some reason, with a tiny tee-square which in retrospect was perhaps an influence for the future.

Kitted out (which I do not think my parents could afford) with satchel & pencil case, blazer with badge & long sleeves, school tie & long short grey trousers, I walked a stone's throw into a new way of life, past Timothy White's store on the corner and just along Fawcett Road to cross over to the school in Fratton Road with a whole load of others. I seem to recall that we were formed into four groups on the tarmac of the playground in front of the brick Victorian looking school and given class or form letters, Housemasters and colours, before entering the school building.

The school to me was very large and overwhelming with a dado seemingly above my head in corridors painted in colours of medium brown (or was it dark green?) gloss paint on brick, topped with a paler colour with high window cills. I think the floor was of wood block. For some reason, I cannot remember classes but I do remember PT classes because I liked the gym with its climbing bars, tall ceilings and polished wood floor and I liked playing football for my 'green house' team at Bransbury Park. I also liked the art room where I first met art teacher Mr. Downing who I thought was a great artist. He was always playfully rude about boys' homework so I was surprised to receive a compliment from him about one of my homework attempts at drawing still life. That must have influenced me to develop skills (after the old school was destroyed by bombing), during eventual evacuation from the war risks in Portsmouth, to the New Forest. That led me towards Gloria at the new school who I loved at 14, art distinction at school & the start of my career as an architect and, as reported in my speech to the re-union dinner of 2007, to be the Queen's architect at Sandringham for 35 years with an MVO medal to-boot!

So, also as reported, I married Gloria in 1948 and if you ever go to Sandringham and the Visitor Centre there, you will see the result of that one piece of encouragement to draw and paint from Flip Downing in 1938 at the old school in Portsmouth before the war. That pleases me!

I mentioned Andover above and must also mention the Headmaster at the primary school I was attending there. When I left to go to Portsmouth he told me "must do better". I recall he had a pronounced limp, seemed stern to me and I left him in the past. However, as a Portsmouth boy evacuee, waiting for the school bus at Brockenhurst to go to Lyndhurst, a chap in the street with a similar limp and appearance walking by, caught my eye on several days. I finally decided I would speak with him and lo and behold to my surprise he was he! Of course I told him I was "doing better" etc. and he invited me and a friend to tea on another day with his family in his retirement house near The Cloud Hotel. Perhaps he was as curious as I was! But I enjoyed the encounter although these days I guess that would be considered a risk.

Finally, if the Lyndhurst Parkhill gang: Gerry Bugo, Jimmy Scott, Alan Routley, Geoff Richards Stan Buckett and Gloria's other friends (year below): Colin Campbell, Laurie Brown, Peter Corben, Mike Salmon, Alan Bastard, Stan Bettsworth or George Allen are out there and see this, we would be glad to hear from them desmond@kwaite.co.uk .

Dicky Waite year of entry 1938 (document produced June 2012)