

Len Russell (joined 1934) memories:

Before I joined the school my sister, who was four and a half years older than me attended the Girls' Southern Secondary School. She left in the July of that year (1934) to take up employment. She did not have to pay any fees presumably because my parents had two children to support and their income was below a certain level. However, when I started at the school I used to have to pay 14 shillings a term, my fees being assessed at two guineas a year. We used to hand over the money to our form teacher and the amount was recorded. I remember my friend (who, in 1946 was our best Man) paid £5 a term. I don't recall any embarrassment or scornful remarks from fellow pupils (Ed: See School Fees Section for more information on this practice).

When I started at the school I was in form 1C (we were allocated to forms in alphabetical order) and found myself in a form room under the supervision of our Form Master, Harold Steed, through whose influence I became a Francophile, interested in music and bookbinding (he bound his scores and libretti for the G & S operas). He was nicknamed "Caboss" because of his surname. Across the blackboard in his room was the legend "Si vous n'avez rien à faire, ne le faites pas ici". In 1946 he was the organist at my wedding.

J.H "Piggy" Ogden taught us general science. On one occasion he referred to us as "idle beggars" but he was obviously misheard because an angry parent arrived at the school complaining that he had used a not dissimilar but objectionable word. It was in his lessons that I first saw the marvellous machine the epidiascope.

John Gardener was, I believe, the only no graduate on the staff. He was a gentle-mannered person who never threatened or bullied anyone but somehow succeeded in maintaining absolute discipline. He was nicknamed "Gussy" as he had a habit of running his hand in a smoothing gesture over his wavy hair. After the war we became friends as fellow members of the Southsea Shakespeare Actors.

The art master, George Downing, "Flip", was a character who didn't hide his dislike of anyone who couldn't draw. We spent a large part of our first year in lettering and layout which developed our accuracy of line-drawing. He was author of a book on perspective. When we completed our week's work he marked it out of fifty and presented those who achieved top marks with a drawing pencil, presumably out of school stock!! We all had to buy a watercolour box with specific pigments and brushes from a shop in Kingston Road (at the rate of 120 outfits a year that shop must have done fairly well over the years).

By 1935 I was in 2B. At the end of the first year the top halves of 1A and 1B became 2A and the top halves of 1C and 1D became 2B. The bottom halves became 2C and 2D respectively.

Our gym master was Leslie Keating ("Bugs" as a reference to the then effective insecticide whose adverts ran "Keating kills bugs, fleas, moths...") [Ed note: absolute manna from heaven for a schoolboy methinks!!]. He was obviously influenced by the Swedish athletics and gymnastics movements and in the passageway leading to the gym he had inscribed in Swedish the injunction to keep to the left!! This countermanded the usual rule on staircases and corridors often emphasised by Mr Shackleton's voice "keep to the right, keep moving boys!" Even today after seventy years I can hear in my mind his actual accented voice!

We had Team Leaders' classes after school and when Leslie Keating married Dorothy Whittle, an accomplished local athlete, we team leaders appropriately clad in ecclesiastical garb formed a choir at St Mark's Church.

Games afternoon was held at the sports ground opposite the airport. We had to make our own way there and I remember borrowing my father's bike to get there from Southsea. The annual cross country run took place on the northern slopes of Portsdown Hill – it was usually a muddy affair and one year we washed ourselves in the brook at Purbrook Heath. A local youth informed us that "cows piss in that". (Ed: I wonder if anyone retorted along the lines of "That's OK – so have we!!").

There was a very encouraging system whereby every time you participated in some sporting or athletics activity you were awarded a House Point. At the end of the year medals were awarded to those gaining a certain number of points. I only managed to receive a bronze and then a silver medal which nestle along with a bronze medallion of the Road Life Saving Association which we were all encouraged to earn. (Ed: see examples in the "Miscellaneous" section). I don't recall being trained in athletics but we did practise running at Bransbury Park.

Mrs D. Patterson worked in one of the science labs. We only encountered her when, staying in school for a dinner-time rehearsal for the school opera, we handed her a slice of bread and jam and a small tin of baked beans at morning break time and were presented with beans on toast to sustain us at midday.

T.E. May was reputed to have been a Boxing Blue at Oxford. He always wielded a walking stick which crashed on to one of the front desks to emphasise a point or to wake up" a somnolent class. When we had history tests he used to give us a pile of paper (a quarter of an exercise book page size for one word answers to the questions) to a boy in the front row who was given the instruction to give "One piece of paper to each boy, neither more nor less". On the occasion of his very last lesson before retirement he removed his gown and told a boy to "put it in the dustbin as it is no longer required". When the boy had left the room someone in the class objected and said it was too precious to be thrown away, so it was retrieved from the bin and torn into little pieces for us to have "one piece each, neither more nor less". (Ed: What a nice touch).

In September 1936 I entered Form 3A. Our classrooms had long blackboards embedded in the front wall and amongst other memories of a very noteworthy teacher, long before he became Rev Dr Ivor Machin is that of his blackboard technique. He would stand centrally before the board and begin writing with his left hand, the writing sloping backwards, and continue with his right hand, the writing having a forward slope. I'm not sure whether this was to achieve economy of movement or merely a "party piece" but it certainly created an interesting pattern! He was working on his doctorate with a dissertation on "religious Writing in Northern Ireland" or something very like that.

On a purely personal note he presented me with a book "Manual de la Paix" which I still have somewhere, for submitting the best essay on the school outing to Paris. My parents couldn't even afford to buy me a school uniform so I hadn't been on the trip but I had talked to friends who had!!(one of those friends was Jack Blitz – of whom more later). One year Dr Machin and his wife, who later became Mayor of Andover, entertained those of us who had principal parts in the *The Gondoliers* (Ed: see Drama Section) to a very pleasant party. He was a great scholar and an excellent and enthusiastic teacher.

By September 1937 I was in Form 4A. A.G "Tishy" Tilney was a man of very strong religious convictions and though he never preached at us evidence was never far beneath the surface He was an excellent French teacher and, as I recall it, we gained very good results in the School Certificate Examination – certainly in the year that I took it (I remember my oral examination – the lady examiner was a stunning red-head!!). Mr Tilney was an energetic and enthusiastic teacher who managed to impart his enthusiasm to his pupils and I am certainly very grateful to him for that. I met him many years later at a function at the Southern Grammar School (as it was by then) where my son was a pupil and he thrust a leaflet into my hand the title of which was "The True Nature of God".

Arthur Stocks, a Yorkshireman, was our geography teacher. I enjoyed his lessons and developed a life-long love of maps and their interpretation. During one term we listened to a BBC Radio programme on regional geography. I still have the exercise book in which I "wrote up" each programme as a homework exercise. Another enthusiast, he was an excellent teacher. He had a mannerism that engaged our attention – in the absence of bi-focal spectacles he used to remove them and then replace his glasses as appropriate to his need for reading or looking at us as he addressed us. We used to count the number of times that he did it. In those days we were not sophisticated enough to bet on it and the practice didn't really affect our main concentration.

In the following year he successfully proposed, for a Fellowship of the Royal Geographic Society, a fifth former who had written a paper on "Line Squalls in the South of England". I have a hazy recollection that

the boy's name was Middleton but I may be wrong. He has apparently observed the phenomenon from his bedroom window. I have no idea what became of him after he left school.

F.A "Foxy" Rayner taught Latin. He had some very fixed ideas which he freely imparted to us. One of them was that Freemasonry was (or was not – I forget which!) a good thing. The other was that every true-born Englishman should wear a moustache.

In September 1938 I entered 6M1 on the "Arts" side. I was sorry to have had to drop physics which, with David T. "Dizzy" Winter, I had enjoyed and found in later years that many of the principles I had learned stood me in good stead in every day mechanical problems. E.B. Cooper never managed to get me to understand calculus.

In January 1939 I took the Civil Service Clerical Classes Examination. I was successful and was appointed in July 1939 to a Clerical officer's post in the Admiralty at Portsmouth Dockyard. One of the girls in the office was the daughter of Mr Bishop, our school caretaker, and I understand that when the school was bombed in 1941, she and her father rescued books from the library.

Jack Blitz won a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, where I had the pleasure of having lunch with him when, in 1941, I enlisted in the Royal Air Force volunteer Reserve in Oxford. Jack later gained a scholarship to London University and went on to become Head of Rowntree's Australian business. He died a couple of years ago (Ed: that would be about 2004).

Although of course I knew him, I was never taught by Mr W. Shackleton. We all knew that he lived in St Ronan's road and that he often had Siamese students as guests. In 1945 I met one of them in Bangkok when we were "liberating" the country; he was Secretary to the Prime Minister. He asked me where I came from in England and when I told him Portsmouth he said he had spent his "vacations" during his Oxford undergraduate days in Southsea. I said that he must have stayed with the Shackletons and he was interested to learn that I knew Mr Shackleton and also Ivor Machin who had taught him some English history.

On looking at the signatures on the fly-leaf of my King George V Silver Jubilee Souvenir Book (all Portsmouth pupils were given a copy) I am reminded of a large number of teachers who were generally well liked by nearly all the boys and who certainly made my schooldays happy and enjoyable ones.

Incidentally, I have somewhere in the house, a photograph of the entire school population (about a metre long!!) in 1935 and another similar one when my son was at the Southern Grammar in 1964.

Whilst at the school, school outings were arranged – though how they were financed I cannot say. I know my parents could not have afforded very much (though they did, somehow, manage to find enough for me to see Pompey win the Cup in 1939!). We visited Winchester (my abiding memory is of a three-hole lavatory which jutted out over the river) Eastleigh Railway Works, London – to see the King's silver Jubilee decorations – and Portsmouth Gas Company's Works at Hilsea. The latter was a truly "educational visit" and was followed in our next chemistry lesson by an experiment in which we placed a few peanuts in a hard glass test tube, placed a cork pierced with a short piece of glass tubing in the open end and then heated the test tube over the Bunsen burner. The gas given off was ignited at the pin jet! We used to sit on the benches to listen to instructions and I remember one boy whose shirt caught fire as he sat too near the pin jet!! The repercussions of such an incident today would be enormous by in those days hazards were more acceptable it seems (Ed: and more sensible too!).

Punishment was generally in the nature of "impots" – lines to be written up and handed in the next day. More severe and to be dreaded were "detentions". The offender's name was written in a book suspended on a nail outside the Headmaster's office, so ignominy as well as loss of free time was the penalty. During my time at the school I never saw a boy receive corporal punishment and, in fact, only knew about one time that it was administered, presumably by the Headmaster – what the offence was I don't know. (Ed: rather different in the 50s and 60s! sometimes I wondered if **capital** punishment was looming around the corner for persistent miscreants!). I don't think I'm viewing life through rose-tinted spectacles and I know we

weren't angels but somehow or other firm discipline was maintained (Ed: oh, how we wish that were the case today) without recourse to physical means.

I was lucky in that I only missed one day's schooling during my time there and that was because I was witness in a road traffic accident.

I don't know what happened to the Honours Boards (**Ed: neither do we – despite extensive efforts to find them. If anyone can locate then please do let me know [Peter Higgins]**) except that my son, John, featured on the one at the Southern Grammar School as achieving an Exhibition at King's College Cambridge in 1965. He attributed a large element of his success to having been taught by David Palmer (English) and Steve Newton (History).

All of this was a long time ago but many of the characters and incidents are very familiar to my mind and though, as Shakespeare wrote "When the age is in, the wit is out" the memories are very happy ones.

I hope you haven't been too bored with this "waffle" – useless though it may have been I've enjoyed the reminiscences and the labour of committing them to paper.

Leonard Russell
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