

The Old Royals' Association



ORA NEWSLETTER

YOUR LINK
TO THE PAST
PRESENT AND FUTURE



Part 1 of Frank Nelson's
The Life of an Orphan

June 2017

No 98

FROM THE PRESIDENT



This year we celebrate 167 years since John Lees founded the school and I know there have been countless changes along the way.

The school today seems to have reverted back to the original idea of John Lees. He wanted a school to support children in his local community and now that the school is a free school I can see many similarities with his vision. I am also conscious of some present pupils who are being supported by the school through its charitable status, pupils who aren't lucky enough to have parents close at hand to care for them day-to-day.

I feel immensely lucky to have been a pupil here for 14 years and I feel that the school taught me much more than just educationally. Also, it is the school where I first met my husband and for that I will always be grateful.

As President of the Old Royals Association I am honoured to be given the opportunity to continue learning about past and present pupils' achievement. On Remembrance Sunday my family and I sat with some pupils for lunch and heard about their future goals. These pupils show a driven passion for the school and its ethos, the same ethos that I was spurred on by when I was a pupil here many years ago.

As a member of the Old Royals' Management Committee I am confident that we can forge greater links with past pupils and current pupils who are leaving the school this year. We strive to find the right ways of communication in an ever-changing technological world and the Committee along with the school work hard to maintain those links with many past pupils to enable us to progress as an Association.

Founders Day 2017 was a great success with a lovely meal laid on by the school for Old Royals and a wonderful win by our football team. I was so pleased to hand the trophy to the Old Royals once again.

I would like to ask anyone from 1970 to the present day to forward experiences and comical moments to our Newsletter editor for future publications. It will be lovely to read some stories and achievements from more recent pupils in our next newsletter.

Sarah Woods

Editorial

This is the second edition since The Royal became a Free School. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that all is going well. It presents many new challenges and opportunities, not least the one of dealing with the increase in numbers and planning and bringing to fruition the structural changes. More details of the many changes will follow in future Newsletters. You can of course come and see some of the changes for yourself, look for the date of next years Founders Day in our next Newsletter, where we will also publish details of Remembrance Sunday, and the ORA lunch. Talking of lunch, we had a very nice post Founder's Day Service lunch in The Victoria Hall. This edition has the first part of Frank Nelson's memoirs, which I am sure you will enjoy, and find fascinating!

Once again, an appeal for your News, and indeed reminiscences of your time at Ophney, photographs would also be valued; an especial plea if you think this edition on the short side!

With the change to the Free School, your Association is going to have to look to its future too, so if you have ideas please let me have them and I will pass them on to the Management Committee who are meeting on the 5th of July to talk about this matter.

Below is the letter I received in 2016 from June Harris following the death of her Husband in February 2016. (His death was reported in the June 2016 Newsletter)

Dear Mrs Hodgson,

My husband John David Harris joined the Royal School in May 1940. He has always said his time there was happy. He always said he didn't feel homesick as he had previously been evacuated so had already had time away from home. He palled up with Jim Simmonds and someone called Leslie and they remained friends until their leaving. They called themselves "the firm" as they used to smoke at times. Their sport favourites were boxing and football and he was best boxing in school finals in 1944. There was no Rocket Cup during the war. He also took up amateur dramatics and played the Common Man in 1066 and All That which took place at The Wulfrun Hall.

My husband died on February 3rd 2016.

Yours sincerely

June E Harris.

Andrew Gardiner is organising a dinner in London near Green Park for the 7th or 8th, Thursday or Friday, of December this year. Any Old Royal, but especially those from the 60s or 70s, and groups of ORs who are interested should contact Andrew on 07879 422105, fairly soon so he can finalise his plans.

One has to go back to the year 1937 to when this life started. My father died in the first quarter of the year, and as a consequence it was decided by my forebears that I would be sent to a school that would give me a good upbringing and the opportunity to be educated. This was arranged through sponsorship by two members of the Freemasonry, which was accepted by the Board of Governors of the School. with fairly strict conditions laid down, for this to come about

Junior School

My introduction to the school came later that year, when my mother accompanied me to the Wolverhampton grounds. I clearly remember being left in the hall way of the junior school after she had departed. There was a lapse, of what I can recall to be five minutes, where I was left alone. I then decided to leave the and proceed to walk back up the driveway toward Penn Road. As I was half way up the drive, a lady dashed close behind; She escorted me back to the school. Being only five years old, I began to cry.

After a little while, I was given my school clothing which at the time was a grey shirt, underwear (calico I think), moleskin trousers (black in colour), grey socks, and a pair of black lace up shoes. All the children would sleep in upstairs dormitories. girls in one and boys in another, Of the three school numbers I had, the last one, I can recall, was 52.

The teaching staff seemed to be very caring but I have to say, that cannot be said for the head teacher, who seemed to be somewhat of a tyrant, Perhaps that was normal for those times! As for meal times. one incident, regarding a stew dinner, remains with me until this day. One afternoon, upon receiving my meal, I became aware of a foul burnt flavour, and quickly decided not to consume what was on my plate. My disobedience did not go unpunished, as I was made to stay behind with my unfinished meal for the larger part of the afternoon. An exercise that I will gladly report. came to no affect. After remaining in the dining room by myself for some time, I left the foul tasting meal untouched. I am unsure as to the origin of the punishment. but I can almost be certain that this style of punishment came on direct order from the head teacher. An imposition of penalty that was reserved for those who disobeyed or objected to her rulings whilst she was in charge of the junior cohort at The Royal Orphanage School, Wolverhampton,

In 1939, the second world war began. I can clearly recall one night during an air raid where we startled by a large bang. We later discovered that a bomb had exploded some hundred yards away from where we were residing. Fortunately we had taken cover in the air raid shelter during the commotion of the night and despite a few sleepy eyes, we were unharmed. A few pieces of shrapnel were later found by the children following the opening of the bomb site, a discovery that during years of World War II, became a regular part of play.

In the later stages of residing at the junior school, with the war still in progress, we would pass the time singing war-themed songs and rhymes. Titles including "Run rabbit, run, run, run", "Siegfried Line", and "There'll always be an England" were used to encourage our patriotism and boost our morale during the times of unrest. A practice that in some ways helped a little more each day.

During the wartime, we were moved from our usual sleeping quarters to a part of the school known as the 'Underground'. Once used as the school gym, our new sleeping arrangements allowed for a quick commute to the air raid shelter upon the sounding of the sirens.

Reflecting back on my years spent at the junior school, I cannot say it was an enjoyable time.

Senior School

Moving up to the senior school was a harrowing experience. We were now in the bottom class, youngest in the ranks, and dwarfed by our seniors. The school housed 140 permanent male boarders ranging from as young as eleven, and as old as eighteen. By this time in our school, we were entirely segregated from the female school population. One of my first recollections at that time was being selected as a 'fag'. Very different from the derogatory uses of today, the term was given to the boys who would be like page boys, or slaves, to the older students. Selected by one of the six formers, my "service" lasted a year and included cleaning his shoes in readiness for the 9 O'clock assembly, and later, his football boots (if the season called for it).

In the earlier years of my time in the senior school, I observed my share of schoolyard bullying. I certainly remember one incident when one of my school friends was unjustly set upon by a senior prefect. It was no question that his bashing was unwarranted, but in those days, complaining about it would be worse.

Within two years, things definitely improved, and the only punishment on offer came straight from the head master. It I recall, it was known as receiving "four of the best". How do I know you ask? I found out first hand after a friend and I decided to skip the school one Saturday afternoon. We escaped over the back fence and headed toward town with the hope of catching the Wolves football game at Molineux Stadium. Knowing they opened the gates 15 minutes before the end, we slipped and caught the final 15 minutes of play. We then headed back to the school grounds before our absence was discovered. Unfortunately we were sighted and of course, reported, and come Monday, we received "four of the best" for our adventures.

Where the teachers lacked in compassion, they made up in their vast knowledge and experience. Maybe this was due to the large quantity of students, some coming and some going each year. I guess it's impossible to develop caring student-teacher relationships when there are more boys than you could poke a cane at. As for myself, I was regarded as a quiet student; I wasn't bothered by anyone.

As well as the usual contenders for school time learning, many of our activities were spent out in the school field. This included team sports like cricket, and football, and more individual pursuits like cross country running, athletics and swimming. Also on offer, was participation in the Army Cadets, made popular through the promise of summer camps that took places at the beginning of the holidays.

At these camps, we had the opportunity to mingle with other students from both neighbouring and far away public schools. Delegated by Regular Army personnel, we would set up under canvas throughout the English and Welsh countryside in places like Bordon (Hants), Ruabon, and Carnarvon. For sleeping, we were given a couple of blankets and a palliasse (a thin mattress filled with straw or sawdust). Reveille sounded at 7am and Retreat in the early evening, both were announced by the playing of a bugle. The meals were cooked on site, and if I recall correctly, were considered 5-stars next to those we endured back at school. However, there is no such thing as a free meal, as potato peeling became a nightly activity enjoyed by all who wished to eat.

To be continued in the next Newsletter.

I am sure many of you will have memories of the Cadet Force, or the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) post 1948. I joined in 1964 into the Army section (that being the only one available then). In those days it was commanded by Major Hinde, who like so many of the staff had seen service in the Second World War.

In those days we wore battle dress, a garb that many will remember, more recent ORs can seek out a picture of Dad's Army where like Captain Mainwaring we wore shirts and ties. We put on a denim battle dress for anything that required potentially dirty activity. It was much more comfortable though in retrospect not suitable for a real battlefield. In addition we had hobnail boots (to be spit and polished), belts and gaiters (to be blancoed), and brass fittings (to be polished).

We did a lot of drill, far more than today's cadets, and I think I could still carry out a fair about turn on the march! As for weapons, we had the long tried and trusted Lee Enfield 303, which in several marks saw service with the British Army from 1895 to 1957. However we did SLR drill with the 303. I could, if pressed, still do a present arms. On the range with ball (live) ammunition it delivered a fair kick. When issued with blanks you still had to be careful as at close range it could deliver a nasty injury. A blank round discharges a flash and various bits of burnt powder and packing as well as a satisfactorily loud bang.

We paraded on Monday afternoons. The whole contingent drawn up and marching onto parade followed by a couple of periods of training. We had a field day in the summer, where confusion reigned to teach us about the fog of war. In the Summer there was a week's camp, Pirbright, Brecon and Culybraggan, on offer in my time.

The other Staff who helped included Messrs Halliday, Miller, Rogers and of course Pope (DM not EF). Stan Henley assisted one year by building an assault course in the Wilderness, and a 'gun' to be carried over it.

I had a good time in the CCF, so much so that I became an officer whilst Teaching. It was on one camp that I was to run across David Miller again, now a Captain and just moving to Solihull School where he would command the CCF.

I will probably include more of my time in the CCF in future editions.

Nigel Green (1969)



Not the current CCF, nor that of my time! Clearly some form of cadets started early in the School's history.

Note the absence of 'The Long Dorm'



Founder's day Service
Andrew Bagnall gives The Address



Founder's Day Football Teams
ORA won 3-2



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