



THE GOBANNIAN



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THE GOBANNIAN

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The magazine of the KHS Old Boys Association

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Editorial

Welcome to The Gobannian 2009, which celebrates the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne of England and also his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. He proved to be one of England's most successful kings and most unsuccessful husbands.

I thought it might be fun to open this editorial with a brief resumé of other significant events in 1509. After an exhaustive search through Google, I can now report that absolutely nothing else of interest happened in 1509 in the worlds of art, literature, music or science. Nobody interesting was born or died except for Henry VIII's family, where his father and his granny both popped their clogs in 1509.

So it's pleasing to report that the 500th anniversary is notable for a fascinating array of stories from our band of creative Old Boys. I hope that some history student in 2509 will unearth edition 67 and enjoy the stories contained herein!

It is very nice to welcome back some old friends, and even more pleasing to introduce a few new contributors. I hope you will enjoy the articles and be inspired to follow the likes of newbies Alan Tossell, Peter Games, Reg Morgan and Robert McAdam and send in your stories for 2010.

I would also like to welcome Nick Oaten to his new post as headteacher. He has a class act to follow in the footsteps of Gareth Barker, but has already shown energy and enthusiasm in his new post. My thanks to him for contributing his Head's report at a time when he has plenty of other demands on his time.

So what do we have to offer this time? Robert McAdam, whom many of us contemporaries will remember from lively parties at the old rectory, has sent in an interesting tale of his first engineering project which was to build a new school in the Caribbean. He chose to model it on the new KHS school, and it still stands despite the efforts of a tropical hurricane to knock it down.

Do you remember the terrible fires that swept through the suburbs of Melbourne early this year? Terry Oakley lives there, and paints a graphic and moving picture of the trials that he and his fellow countrymen had to endure.

From the Caribbean to Melbourne to Los Angeles, where Stuart Rowlands follows last year's piece on celebrity photographer Roman Salicki with an equally entertaining interview with 1960s icon Patrick Macnee of "Avengers" fame.

Alan Tossell is another denizen of Down Under, as he has lived in Tasmania for the last quarter of a century. Very early in his engineering career he was invited to fly to a project in Singapore. He describes the journey, a far cry from the speed and luxury of modern jetliners.

Our Webmaster John Porter, son of KHGS institution Len "Percy" Porter, has followed an amazingly varied career which spans teaching to owner of a Scottish B&B. However, his first job was as a VTR engineer at Rediffusion Television, where he spent 10 years operating the new-fangled tape recording machines and hobnobbing with show biz folk! A fascinating behind the scenes look at some of the most interesting years in television history.

One of our most regular contributors is John Barnie who has sent in a delightful essay about his lifelong fascination with bird watching. I should not confess to having favourites, but I have to say I love the way that John writes with a poet's eye. He has a number of books in print – I recommend them all.

The Gobannian would not be complete without a sprinkling of humorous reminiscences about the school. Peter Games remembered an episode involving the girls from Harold Road that hit the national press some 60 years ago. And Reg Morgan sent us two stories concerning a school dance (inevitably featuring "Fanny" Jones) and camping at St Marys Vale with the KHGS Camping Club. Great stuff.

Finally a big thank you to David Eastwood for providing two school photographs from 1962-63. These are always popular and help to bring back many happy memories. If anyone has any more please send them in.

I think you'll agree we have another magazine packed with interest this year. Enjoy.

Carl Davis
Editor



THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

It was a great honour for me to be elected President of our Association earlier this year. It is 84 years since my old headmaster, H Newcombe, became the first President and we continue to go from strength to strength, thanks to the support of a dedicated committee. We now meet regularly at the Angel Hotel, since the closure of the British Legion, and have been made to feel very comfortable, as well as having our own brass plate outside the front door.

I have become aware of the vast changes in education since I started as a fresh-faced 1st former in 1948 at the old grammar school in Pen-y-Pound, and I am tempted to say that today's pupils have never had it so good. My journey to school started with a two mile bike ride, often in a sharp frost, then a five mile bus ride, followed by a brisk walk to the bus station. I was well and truly wide awake when I arrived!! Many of us who lived in the country did not have electricity at home at that time and homework had to be done by candle or oil lamp (if you were lucky) in wintertime. There were only eight teachers at that time with about 180 pupils and we formed friendships that were to last a lifetime. Extra-mural activities were few and far between, with a two day trip to Stratford-upon-Avon by train with Mr Wyn Binding a special memory. It is good to hear of the successes of today's pupils both in education and other activities.

The number of Old Boys remains stable but we could always do with more, particularly school-leavers, and suggestions for new activities are welcome at all times.

The annual dinner continues to be the main event of the year, with the associated raffle being the main provider of funds. The Golf Day continues to thrive thanks to John Bannon's organisational skills and Marlo Hall keeps interest going in the annual Cricket Match with the school, though we would welcome a few more spectators.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that Adrian Bruton has announced his intention of standing down from the post of Honorary Secretary at the next Annual General Meeting. He has performed sterling service over many years and without his dedication the association would be unlikely to be in the position of strength that it is today. Few schools have an on-going association such as ours and it is a matter of pride to be part of it.

We would welcome some new blood on to the committee and we have two vacancies at the present time. Meetings are held on the first Monday of the month and usually last for about an hour, so it isn't a particularly daunting task, but very rewarding.

On behalf of the Association I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr Oaten the new head teacher and feel sure that relations between us and the school will continue to be as fruitful as ever.

*Adrian Francis
President
KHS OBA 2009*



TEN YEARS IN TELEVISION

John Porter was a pupil at KHGS from 1950 to 1958. After leaving school he attended Bristol University, where he read Physics but was severely distracted by Drama and Opera! His subsequent career included 10 years as an engineer in Commercial Television, 15 years as a teacher, 8 years running a Bed & Breakfast on the Isle of Mull, and several years as a trainer in the Computer Industry. He says he is still trying to decide what he wants to be when he grows up! Since retirement he has devoted much of his time to Family History research, both for himself and others. At the moment he is researching and writing a biography of the writer Yoi Maraini (1877–1944).

So how did it all begin? I took my O-levels in 1955 and then started my A-level courses in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. I stayed three years in the sixth form, as my grades weren't that good the first time I took the exams. They weren't much better the second time, but I did get a place at Bristol University to read Physics, with Maths as a subsidiary subject. I spent the next three years at Bristol officially studying Physics, but really getting involved with the Student Operatic and Dramatic Societies – show business was beginning to be important in my life!

On graduating, with only a Pass Degree (no Honours), I had to think about a job, and was offered a Graduate Apprenticeship with the Rediffusion Group of companies. This was a two-year programme in which I was to move around all the electronic development laboratories in the group, spending a few months at each. The first of these placements was with Associated-Rediffusion, the television broadcasting company within the Rediffusion Group. Their headquarters were at Television House, Kingsway, in London.

So it was that on the morning of 18 September 1961 I nervously entered the doors of Television House for the first time. I had a quick tour of the facilities and then I was given a place to sit in the workshop, and a technical manual to study. When I left to go out for lunch, I met a man and a woman coming along the corridor. The woman called to me – “Young man – where's the ladies' loo – my bag's absolutely bursting!” And so it was that I met Fanny Craddock, cookery star, closely followed by husband Johnny.

Later that same month I was given some work to do at the Company's other studios at Wembley. At lunch-time I found myself standing in the canteen queue next to a figure that seemed vaguely familiar. I was struggling to remember who it was when someone said “Mr Crosby, we have a table reserved for you over here” and led him away. Yes, it was Bing Crosby, who was there to record his 1961 Christmas Special, which also featured Bob Hope and Shirley Bassey.

I decided I thoroughly enjoyed being surrounded by show-biz folk, and wasn't all that keen when in January 1962 I had to move on round the rest of the Rediffusion Group to work on flight simulators, background music players, domestic television sets, distress signal transmitters and lots besides. As September 1963 and the end of my Graduate Apprenticeship drew near I was asked, “Which of our development labs would you like to work in?” I was cheeky enough to say “None of them – but I would like to transfer to the operational side of Associated-Rediffusion”. And so it was arranged.

Independent Television in the 1960s was regionally based, with a separate company covering each

geographical area. For example, Wales and the West of England was TWW country (Television Wales and the West). Associated-Rediffusion looked after London from Monday to Friday. The transmitter was at Croydon and covered an area of about 40 miles radius around London itself. In 1963 most television was live, and of course monochrome – colour was several years away. Video recording had been introduced in 1958, only 5 years earlier, but editing the tape was difficult and avoided whenever possible.



Associated-Rediffusion produced many of the really popular programmes at the time, “No Hiding Place”, “Double Your Money”, “Take Your Pick” and so on. Television House, just off the Aldwych in Kingsway, housed the company's offices and the transmission control area, and one or two quite small studios. The main production studios were at Wembley, where Twentieth Century Fox's old film studios had been extensively modified for television use and a brand new studio, Studio 5, built. This was big enough to house a three-ring circus (I've seen it), but could be split in half for less ambitious programmes.

On 23 September 1963 I joined A-R (as it was always called) as a Technical Assistant, the lowest of the operational grades. This was a bit like my earlier position in that I was to be shunted around the various technical departments before settling in one of them. To start with I was put into “Camera Control”, always known as “Racks”. The racks crew sat in a small control room and were responsible for the technical quality of the pictures from the three or four cameras in

a typical studio. Meanwhile the cameramen, on the other end of the cables, looked after the composition of the picture itself.



Muriel Young

I was soon learning how to control the picture quality on really important programmes, such as “Small Time” or “Five o'clock Club”, featuring important stars like Pussy Cat Willum, Ollie Beak and Fred Barker. Muriel Young and Wally Whyton too. But the most popular programme we



Chief Superintendent Tom Lockhart

produced at that time was "No Hiding Place", starring Raymond Francis as Detective Chief Superintendent Tom Lockhart of Scotland Yard. The company made 236 one-hour episodes altogether, and

only a handful didn't make it into the top twenty programmes of the week.

On the evening of 22 November 1963, I was in the Camera Control room of Studio 1 at Wembley. The programme to be recorded was the Irish play "The Playboy of the Western World" – a production for schools television. "Emergency Ward Ten" was on the air at the time – we could see it on the transmission monitor screen. Suddenly the screen faded and an ITN newsflash appeared – "President Kennedy Assassinated". After the newsflash the programme continued, but was very soon abandoned. For the rest of the evening the network broadcast solemn music interspersed with news updates. Meanwhile in Studio 1 the director told all the technical crew to be careful not to mention the news to any of the cast – they were mainly Irish and Catholic and he feared for his production if the news reached them.

It was a fascinating time to be working in ITV. It would take far too long to list all the memorable programmes that were produced at that period. Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" occupied the whole of Studio 5, the biggest studio in Europe. The cast included Anna Massey and Peter Wyngarde as Titania and Oberon, with the comic parts played by Miles Malleon, Alfie Bass and Bernard Bresslaw. Benny Hill was Bottom the weaver. On another day Studio 5a housed the whole of the London Symphony Orchestra, with Sir Adrian Boult conducting. They recorded Elgar's Enigma Variations and Beethoven's 5th Symphony, not for immediate transmission, but to hold for use when Winston Churchill died. As I rushed upstairs after the recording I quite literally bumped into Sir Adrian Boult. "Young man, you are obviously in a much greater hurry than I am," he said, and bowed me past him in a most gentlemanly manner.



John with one of the original VTR machines

Early in 1964 I was promoted to Assistant Engineer, Telecine, Television House. The telecine department showed any programme material that was on film, either 35mm or 16mm. From the company's point of view, the most important output from telecine was the commercials (I spent the whole of one Christmas Day running commercials), but other items ranged from short clips to full-length feature films. And of course, programme title sequences, such as "Ready Steady Go". That programme rapidly caught on with the teenagers – the weekend really did start here. Cathy McGowan and Keith Fordyce introduced it from Studio 9 in the basement of Television House. When a little-known group called the Beatles appeared on the programme for the second time we suddenly found we were under siege – battling our way through hordes of teenagers as we tried to leave the building for our evening meal! "Hey, mister, are you famous?" said one young man, shoving an autograph book under my nose. I said "not yet" and walked on.



Cathy McGowan

Every week Associated-Rediffusion produced an up-to-the minute current affairs programme called "This Week". Sometimes "This Week" was transmitted live from Studio 9 below us; sometimes it was all on film. Typically on these occasions the film was still being edited until just a few minutes before transmission. At about five minutes to transmission time, the editors would rush in with two large reels of 35mm film, one containing the picture, the other the magnetic soundtrack, we'd lace up the machine and we were on the air to the entire ITV network. One night I had just started the transmission when I noticed that film was accumulating rapidly in the lower compartment of the machine – the take up spool wasn't taking up! Obviously we couldn't stop, so for the next 25 minutes my colleagues hand-fed 3,000 feet (that's well over half a mile) of film out of the machine and across the floor into a huge bin, kept for just such an occasion. Amazingly it all worked. And even more amazingly, afterwards we wound the film back on to a spool without getting any tangles!

On 20 April 1964 I was working at Wembley Telecine as holiday relief. That evening there was a massive power failure, which cut the power to huge areas of west London. And this was the night that BBC2 was due to go on air for the first time. The BBC transmitter at Alexandra Palace stayed on the air, but transmitting only an apology caption as their main studios had no power. My supervisor rang the BBC offering to help out with facilities, but the BBC declined the offer! BBC2 finally got going the following day.

In 1964 we got "re-branded", although I don't think it was called that in those days. Overnight, Associated-Rediffusion became Rediffusion Television, with a new logo and call sign. Nothing else changed much, except for the sign on the outside of Television House. Two major items about this time included a General Election and Winston Churchill's funeral, both of which received massive coverage on ITV.

On 8 July 1965, at about a quarter to six, I was sitting at the main desk in Telecine, more or less on my own as most of my colleagues had just left to get a meal.

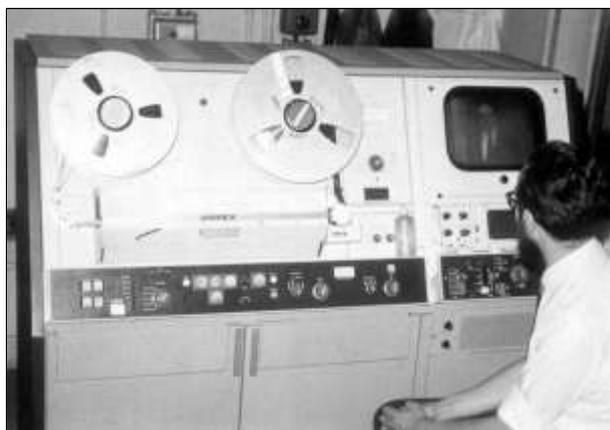
The phone rang – it was Independent Television News, who had studios on the top floor of Television House. “We’ve had a fire in our telecine suite – there’s no power – can we bring the film down to you to transmit the news?” This was less than ten minutes away – I hastily got one of our 16mm machines ready, and asked our central control room to connect it through to ITN. A man in a white coat rushed in with the film, rather out of breath, as he’d just run down six flights of stairs. I laced up the film and ran it down to the first



picture. Help! – I’d completely forgotten that ITN worked with the negative film straight from the camera to cut down on processing time. Somewhere on our machine there was a

positive/negative switch, which we had never used – where was it? Ah – that was better. (I remember that first story was about one of the train robbers escaping from prison.) And so between us, with the ITN man giving me the cues and me working the machine in a mode I had never used before, we got to the end of the news without the viewers being any the wiser. I’ve got a nice souvenir of that occasion – a letter from the General Manager congratulating me!

Not long after this I was asked if I’d like to transfer to the Video Tape Recording department. It sounded more interesting than Telecine, so I agreed. Video Tape Recording, or VTR as it was always called, was still in its infancy. Our two Ampex machines were the first two ever to be used in this country. They’re in a museum now. You couldn’t edit the tape, which was 2 inches wide and came on reels of either 1 or 1½ hour’s duration. The spools were up to 18 inches in diameter, and very heavy. We were responsible for maintaining the machines as well as operating them, so the work was very varied – transmitting “Small Time” for the kiddies one moment, servicing the machine the next! We worked alternate 16-hour days, Monday, Wednesday and Friday one week, Tuesday and Thursday plus a short meal-relief shift the next week.



John with the new colour VTR

31 March 1966 saw another General Election. Studio 9 downstairs was packed with teleprinters and cameras, and we were kept busy through much of the night as the results began to come in and various people were interviewed. The following day, with the results showing that Harold Wilson’s Labour Party were the winners, was it to be the BBC or ITV that got the first interview with the Prime Minister? Well, we won. Using the only portable VTR in the country, (it weighed a ton!) one of our reporters interviewed Harold Wilson on the train as he was travelling back to London from his Liverpool Constituency. The tape was literally thrown from the train at Birmingham, rushed by motorbike to the ATV studios there and the interview played down the line to us at Television House in London, where we re-recorded it and immediately transmitted it. It all worked, and we beat the BBC by over an hour! These days portable videotape is so much part of everyday life it’s quite hard to remember just how comparatively recently it was developed. That was just over 40 years ago.

Later in 1966 we had new VTR machines installed, capable of being converted to colour, and complete with electronic editing facilities. One of the first editing sessions I was involved with was a children’s series called “Orlando”, starring Sam Kydd. Sam had to play two parts, the hero, Orlando, and a villain who was Orlando’s double, which made for some tricky editing when they had to talk to each other! Sam Kydd was so fascinated by this new process for editing videotape that he sat in on our sessions and took a keen interest.



Sam Kydd



David Frost

David Frost’s “The Frost Programme” went out live from Wembley Studios, so generally we were not involved with its production, but were usually asked to record it “off transmission”, as a record of the programme in case of need. So it was that I came to make the recording that has been

shown more times than anything else that I was involved in. The date was the 3 February 1967; we had just had the commercial break and were returning to Studio 1 for the second part of the programme. David Frost began interviewing Emil Savundra, whose insurance company had collapsed leaving many people uninsured and having lost large sums of money. Many of the victims were in the audience. The interview gradually got more and more heated, and I remember standing by my recording machine completely amazed at the way Savundra seemed to have no conscience at all. David Frost seemed equally amazed, and ended the programme rather abruptly by walking out! That interview gave rise to “questions in the house”, but only a few months later Savundra was arrested on fraud charges. He was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment in 1968.



The shameless Savundra

Another pioneering bit of electronic editing was needed in an episode of "Sanctuary", a drama series set in a convent. A teenage girl had to scratch one of the nun's faces. Working to an accuracy of 1/25 second, we were able to construct a very convincing sequence, although it took half the morning to assemble a few seconds worth of action. These days it's all done with computers.

Then disaster! In August 1967 I was on holiday with my wife and children in the Isle of Wight when we heard the devastating news that Rediffusion had lost its contract to broadcast on the ITV network. This meant that for the whole of the next year I didn't know whether I would have a job after July 1968. The new company was to be called Thames Television, but it was under no obligation to take on redundant staff from Rediffusion. That year was a very unsettling time for us all.



At Last The 1948 Show

Ironically, during this year, Rediffusion produced some of its most memorable programmes. I was helping out at Wembley VTR when I first saw the script for a programme with a very silly title, starring a group of people I hadn't heard of. They were John Cleese, Marty Feldman, Graham Chapman and Tim Brooke-Taylor.

Oh, and the lovely Aimi Macdonald. We weren't quite sure what to make of "At Last the 1948 Show" but it proved to be very popular in those ITV regions that bothered to show it.

And fairly soon after that I worked on a programme for children that had their parents rushing home from work to watch it too! "Do Not Adjust Your Set", with another group of unknowns, Michael Palin, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, Denise Coffey and David Jason. The show featured "The Adventures of Captain Fantastic", which built up something of a cult following among adults and children alike.

David Jason, in his first starring role! The combined talents of these two Rediffusion comedy shows of course very soon became known for "Monty Python", but that was for the BBC, so we'll quickly move on!



Another very successful Rediffusion series about this time was "A Man of Our Times", featuring George Cole as a middle-aged businessman troubled by problems both at home and at work. I have a particular reason for remembering one programme in this series. One of my colleagues, Alan, had just finished recording the current episode, down the line from Wembley. My shift leader, whose name was Alf, was checking old tapes for re-use and putting them through the bulk erasure machine to completely wipe them. In a moment of carelessness he picked up the wrong tape and erased the newly recorded episode! This was on a Friday evening – the programme was scheduled for transmission on the following Monday. By now the scenery had been cleared from the studio; the director and cast had left to go home. The company had to contact the entire cast and crew to ask them to come in on Sunday and re-record the whole episode. After the dust had settled, George Cole wrote to Alf offering his sympathy and saying the cast all felt it went better second time round, which we all felt was a very considerate gesture.

Shortly after this both Alf and Alan left to work for the newly formed London Weekend Television and I found myself acting Senior Engineer, two grades above my official position. And so when we needed an editor to assemble highlights of "The Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Concert" I got the assignment. In theory it was simple – a concert at the Royal Albert Hall featuring Yehudi Menuhin and Ravi Shankar. We were to record the whole concert starting at 7.30 pm and then transmit a programme of edited highlights at 10.30. I was a bit nervous, as because of the tight deadline I would have to physically cut and join the tape rather than our usual practice of editing by copying from one machine to another. Things started to go wrong almost at once when the concert was nearly half-an-hour late starting. Then the whole event overran by an hour and a half, so by the time we were due to start transmitting the highlights, we were still recording! At 10.30 one of my colleagues started transmitting the edited tape of Part One. Meanwhile, two more colleagues recorded alternate items and immediately brought the tape to me to be cut and spliced into Part Two.



Ravi Shankar

I was being guided by a very experienced director, who had been briefed by musical experts at India House. Whatever we did, he said, we were not to cut in the middle of a musical item – this was considered to be an offence to the gods. The performance of a very long Dawn Raga had just finished – my colleague was quickly checking the recording – when – disaster! We had the beginning, we had the end, but a build up of the tape coating on the recording heads had spoilt the centre section, and it was due on the air in about three minutes. I had no time to think – I cut out the whole of the damaged section, joined the two ends together, and we were on the air! I watched anxiously as the tape played, but even I didn't see the join, and I was looking for it. Neither did anyone else – the Dawn Raga played to its conclusion and the programme

compere signed off. The following day I got the edited tape out again, and I only found the join by inspecting the tape. The gods must have been with me – the music hardly faltered, even though there were several minutes missing.

On Friday 26 July 1968 Rediffusion transmitted its last programme, and I was officially redundant.



The government had introduced a redundancy scheme in 1965. My payment from this scheme came to £6 12s 4d. Rediffusion paid me, I think, about £200. On Monday 29 July I started my new job

with Thames Television, who had decided they needed us after all. I was doing the same job, in the same room, with the same equipment. But I was one Grade Higher – I was now an Engineer. Just over a month later they promoted me again, to Senior Engineer, the grade I had been “acting” as until the change. So all in all I came out of it fairly well, but it had been a very worrying twelve months, as we didn’t have our employment with Thames confirmed until the very last minute.

Things carried on much as usual until November. Then on Saturday 15 November 1969 our VTR machines were moved a mile up the road to new studios on the Euston Road, and on Monday 17 November 1969 we were on the air again, but this time in colour. And that evening I did my first colour transmission – “The Curse of the Werewolf”. As this was a feature film it would normally have been



Eamonn Andrews

transmitted from a Telecine machine, but only one of the new colour telecine machines was fully operational, and that was needed for the commercials (of course). So during the morning we had copied the film to videotape to be played back into the evening’s programmes.

One of the series produced at the new Euston studios was “This is Your Life”.

Initially this went out live, with only the “pick-up” (the moment when Eamonn Andrews pounced on the evening’s victim) being pre-recorded. Frequently the tape reached us only 15 minutes or so before the transmission, with some editing needed before it went on the air. We had some close shaves, but no real disasters. People whose lives I worked on included actors Glynis Johns, Keith Michell, and Googie Withers, and rugby player Barry John, who was surprised by Eamonn as he came off the pitch at the end of the England-Wales match at Twickenham. We had a complete Welsh male voice choir in the studio for that programme. They insisted they had to watch the match during the afternoon, and I joined them in the viewing room. “Mae hen wlad fy nhadau” before the match has never sounded so good. I supported Wales and sang along!

The “This is Your Life” director usually invited us to the after show party, so I have happy memories of chatting to some of the people involved.

On one occasion, I forget whose life we were doing, Petula Clark was a guest on the show. This time the whole programme was being pre-recorded. It was after the recording was finished that someone realised that Petula Clark should not have appeared as she was under exclusive contract to the BBC! I had to spend an entire day editing the show to remove every shot in which she was visible, and also any mention of her, sometimes cutting in the middle of a sentence. The following day the BBC gave her permission to appear – I’d had a whole day’s work for nothing! Oh well, that’s Show Business!

An unexpectedly enjoyable series we did at Euston was “Cooking Price-Wise” in which Vincent Price prepared some of his favourite recipes from around the world. At the end of the series he invited us all for a drink – a true gentleman, far removed from his screen persona as a master of horror!



Vincent Price

At 4.30 am on Saturday 31 October 1970, terrorists planted a bomb at the top of the Post Office Tower. The damage was all too visible when we came in to work on the Monday, as the tower was just half a mile away. Then, during the evening, the Thames switchboard received a call to say that there was a bomb in the basement of the Euston Studios, timed to go off at 9.15 pm. We were transmitting “Callan” to the entire ITV network at the time. The police advised us that they thought it was a hoax, but it was a very uncomfortable feeling as we waited for the explosion! Luckily it never came.

The next few years continued with much the same programming, “The Benny Hill Show”, “This is Your Life”, “Callan”, and so on. Gradually the hours on air were getting longer, I had two small children who didn’t always understand Daddy’s need for sleep in the mornings after a late night on duty, and so I made the decision to leave television. On 31 August 1973 I did my last transmission, went for a drink with my colleagues, and walked out of the studios for the last time.

Well, that’s the end of programmes for now, so I’ll say “Goodbye” and leave you with the test card. Goodbye.



A SLOW FLIGHT TO SINGAPORE

Alan Tossell was in KHGS during the war years 1939-45. He went on to study Mechanical & Electrical Engineering at the Crumlin Technical College. His education was interrupted by two years National Service in the Royal Navy before he completed another two years engineering study.

His career has taken him to all manner of places, mainly to do with the installation of power station equipment and ship propulsion systems.

Alan and his wife moved to Hobart Tasmania on his retirement twenty five years ago.

This all began rather more than fifty years ago. I was summoned to the London office of the English Electric Company for a possible position overseas where I was interviewed by a gentleman named of K W O-----. His scholarly appearance was enhanced by the thick lenses of his spectacles. The interview began with him placing his elbows on the desk, clasping his hands together in an attitude of prayer and enquiring, "Well, how was it?" I assumed the question related to my trip from the English Midlands that morning and when my reply indicated that it was uneventful, Mr O----- placed his hands over his face and after a longish pause said "Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I thought you were Williams who has just completed his three year stint in Singapore".

My next visit to London was to meet the Export Director; on this occasion my new wife Mary was with me when further interviewing took place to establish our suitability for life in the Colonies.

My third visit involved another meeting with Mr O----- who again covered his face with his hands and uttered "Don't tell me, don't tell me", followed by a pause and then "BA10, 10 December". I wondered if this was some further test to determine my suitability or otherwise for the post of their Diesel Engineer for South East Asia, but had to admit that I was unable to respond. Mr O----- went on, "No, that's the flight you are on to Singapore".

Early on the morning of 10 December 1956, my wife and I left my parents' home in South Wales, caught the steam train to London, checked in at the British Airways city terminal, and took the bus out to London airport. The airport then was the old RAF Northholt aerodrome and seemed to be a collection of low concrete huts. Here we passed through Immigration & Customs and waited.

Winter snowstorms, which had first delayed the London train by some hours, now led to the cancellation of our flight. We were taken by bus some sixty miles into the countryside to the luxurious Selsdon Park Hotel, complete with a Palm Court Orchestra playing to couples dancing in formal dress.

The next morning we returned to the airport to repeat the immigration and customs check. Back in those days departure seemed to have an aura about it, perhaps a touch of finality. The Customs officers were uniformed and indistinguishable from Royal Navy Lieutenants, whilst emigration men were immaculately turned out in greyish suits and wished one a pleasant voyage as they returned your passport with all the reverence of handling you the Holy Grail.

We were bussed out to a DC4, Canadian built and fitted with four of the wartime Rolls Royce Merlin Engines. British Airways referred to the aircraft as one of their Argonaut fleet.

We taxied to the end of the runway where each engine was revved up to maximum speed. Then we moved down the runway, slowly at first then with increasing noise and vibration. Lift-off, and a slow rate of climb over the City of London. Two and a half hours later we had landed in Frankfurt for refuelling, then over the Alps as we headed for Rome. At the warmer altitudes we experienced the "pinging" on the fuselage as chunks of ice fell away from the leading edges of the wings.

From Rome we headed westwards, in bad weather. Mary was suffering from sickness, not caused by the flight but morning sickness. Eventually we landed in Istanbul in a snowstorm at three in the morning where there was a crew change. This was accompanied by the mandatory refuelling and the ground crew mounting the wings to sweep the snow away while snow ploughs cleared the runway.

We took off again in darkness and headed for Basra, the plane flying low in an attempt to avoid the worst of the weather. We were slowed by headwinds to such an extent that we had to put down in Baghdad for fuel. We continued to Basra flying low over the desert. Basra airport then seemed to me nothing more than some date palms and a group of low huts. Next stop Bahrain, more fuel no doubt, bright sunlight but an absence of any colours. Everything seemed to have taken on a dun coloured hue.

In late afternoon we reached Karachi. Since the plane had very limited catering facilities, just very light meals and snacks, we deplaned and were bussed some distance to an old colonial Rest house for dinner. I remember the starched table linen and an abundance of turbaned waiters.

On again on a south easterly course, arriving in Bombay on 9 December at about three am. Here Mary's diary reads "More of those light refreshments, left at four in the morning".

At seven thirty we landed at Colombo on the Island of Ceylon (or Sri Lanka as it now called) and then more Customs & Immigration checks. We were transported some miles to the Mount Lavinia Hotel, a fine colonial structure where we breakfasted on a veranda facing the sea. We strolled on the beach followed by native peddlers, remembered more for their persistence than the quality of their merchandise. I remember that Mary bought a hat and necklace. We had a relaxing day before retiring to sleep under mosquito nets. For the first time we experienced the heat and humidity of the tropics.

We were up at 5 am on the final leg of our journey, this time flying over the sea until sighting the Island of Sumatra and seeing for the first time the intense green of the jungle. As the plane started to lose height we could see the orderly lines of the rubber and palm-oil

plantations of southern Malaya and then the causeway that connected Singapore to Malaya. Finally we heard that friendly squeal of tyres striking the runway of Singapore's Payar Lebar airport. The aircraft door swung open and we were treated to that old Singapore smell that wafted from the nearby vegetable gardens, namely that noxious brew of human waste that was used to fertilize the crops.

Customs and Immigration checks again. Looking at my passport now I can see it is stamped 11 December, some five days since the start of our journey.

The Singapore Office Manager escorted us to our hotel and by the time we had had a shower and a rest he was back to take us out to dinner. We dined at Prince's Hotel Garni, probably the best restaurant in Singapore at that time. I particularly remember the oysters (which were flown in from Sydney each day), the fillet steak and the Bombe Alaska.

We got home at two in the morning, then up again at seven for my first day in the office. I remember thinking that life was going to be pretty good here, provided I could stand the pace.

Postscript

Alan has fond memories of his years at KHGS, and particularly of his English lessons with Mr Len Ralphs. He remembers being enthralled by the story "Youth" by Joseph Conrad, which tells of a disastrous voyage to the Far East. It is an autobiographical novel written in 1898 based on the author's own experiences.

Conrad only ever had command of one ship and that was the "Otago", a handsome vessel of some 147 feet. He took command in 1889 on the death of its captain John Snaddon. The Otago continued in service for many years and was converted from sailing ship to coal lighter in 1905. In 1931 it was finally towed to its current location in Hobart where it was beached and salvaged for scrap. The rotting hull was left to rust away. I went to see the Otago about ten years ago, when I took this photograph.



A painting of the Otago in her heyday. This was used as the cover illustration for Conrad's 'A Mirror of the Sea'



The Otago. In the background is Mount Wellington and the city of Hobart.

REMEMBERING BIRDS

John Barnie (KHGS 1952-60) is a poet, fiction writer and essayist. He lives in Aberystwyth.

"Remembering Birds" is an essay selected from his forthcoming collection "Fire Drill".

His latest book "Tales of the Shopocracy" has just been launched, an affectionate memoir of his father and family, describing the milieu of shopkeeping in Abergavenny - highly recommended.

Publishing details are shown at the end of this article."

When I was very small, perhaps three or four years old, and so toward the end of the Second World War, someone gave me a *Book of Garden Birds*, one of those children's books of the period with thick, almost cardboard, pages. Each page had brightly coloured paintings of blue tits and great tits, chaffinches and bullfinches, robins and blackbirds, with the text in a large font size that weaved itself around the paintings. Or at least I think it did; almost certainly I couldn't read at the time and so the words were a dense mass of meaningless symbols that I took little notice of. The paintings were different. I don't recall being aware of birds before that gift, but I remember sitting by the fire with the book open on my knees – so it might have been a Christmas present – absorbed in the birds' plumage, their forms, their blackberry eyes, the dynamics of them as they perched confidently on a branch or flew across the white space of a page.

I am sure that it was after this that I started to look at birds through the kitchen window as they fought for scraps in the yard and tried to stalk them in summer in the garden hedge. A few years later, when I started to get pocket money, I bought other books about birds, which I still have – *Eggs and Nests of British Birds*, *Nests and Eggs*, *A Pocket Book of British Birds' Eggs and Nests*, the titles indicating that around 1952 or 1953 I had turned my attention to egg collecting. My cousin Alan had given me his small collection that included a magnificent curlew's egg taken from a nest on the Mardy, and I had been stirred by my mother's tales of the collection amassed by her brother, my Uncle Ron, in the Forest of Dean. We rarely went to visit him, so I had to imagine the collection. It had, she said, the eggs of almost every bird in the British Isles, including that rarity of rarities, a hummingbird's egg, which he had extricated with tweezers from its nest, lodged in a tiny hole in a wall. The Forest of Dean, I decided, must be an extraordinary place. Not till a few years later, when I had obtained T A Coward's *The Birds of the British Isles* in three volumes, did I realise that the hummingbird could not be. Later still, hearing more of my Uncle's exploits as filtered through my mother – all of them improbable and told with deep seriousness – I realised that I had been introduced to the tall tale, and that Uncle Ron would have bedded down well in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.

Yet the tale of the hummingbird's egg has stayed with me as if it were something true. I can see a moss-covered wall in the Forest and a crouching figure, and a hand inserting a silver tweezers into the crevice, then delicately, slowly, drawing it back with the prize of an egg. I was at an age when I believed what my mother said (she herself believed the story when she told it me) and I imagined it so intensely that the tale has the quality of remembered experience, as if I had been there at my Uncle's side and shared his thrill at such a find.

I was never a successful egg collector myself. I always felt an element of guilt when I discovered a nest in a hedgerow and felt squeamish at the process of piercing an egg at each end then blowing out what you hoped would be yolk, not the bloodied foetus of a bird. So my collection didn't grow much, and when, as I was peering into a hedge on the Old Hereford Road, a man on a bicycle stopped and said "You're not bird nesting, are you?" to which I answered "No", I gave up. Later of course I came to realise how damaging egg collecting was to bird populations, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s almost every boy did it because that is what you did, just as we all wore a knife with at least a four-inch blade, hanging in a sheath from our belts.



Kingfisher

I never look for nests now, but the sight of a mottled or sky-blue egg shell broken and discarded on the ground from which the bird has hatched, reanimates the excitement I felt when I was twelve or thirteen on parting a hedge to see a clutch of eggs with their perfect oval shapes and rare colour and markings. I always have to stop and pick the shell up and examine it carefully before walking on.

Just as I can remember the exact location in the Forest of Dean where Uncle Ron discovered the hummingbird's egg – in my mind the wall is very old, about five feet tall, situated under a stand of beech trees, dappled light filtering down to brush the lichened stones – so I am able to recall precisely where I *did* see birds of different species for the first time, with an intensity and precision that eclipses almost every other kind of memory.

Perhaps it has something to do with the sudden and unexpected nature of so many of these encounters – the neon-blue flash of a kingfisher breaking cover on the banks of the River Usk; or the undulating flight of a green woodpecker on the wooded slopes of the Deri; a glimpse that can be recalled at will, more real than any photograph or nature film.



Green Woodpecker

Some encounters, though, are bizarre in ways that make them seem like the imagined memory of the hummingbird's egg. One day in summer when I was perhaps eleven or twelve, I was lying on my stomach on the banks of the Usk at a place where the river curved, bringing deep water up close, undercutting the rich red soil of the bank. I don't think I was looking for anything in particular, but suddenly there below me, two or three feet under the swiftly flowing water, was a bird walking on the bottom, its head darting left and right as it made its way upstream. I had no idea what it was, or that a bird could do such a thing, pacing there as if an underwater life was its element. Consulting T A Coward at home, I realised that it was a dipper and that these birds of the fast flowing rivers and streams of Wales do this regularly in search of food. Although I have often watched dippers since, bobbing with their white bibs on stones in the glitter of the Usk's shallows, I have never again seen one hunting underwater, and I sometimes question whether the memory is real.

There is something of the process of writing poetry in these encounters. Often you go out to a promising location and see nothing, or at any rate nothing unusual; then when you have given up and turned for home, the unexpected happens and you are presented with a gift, the perfection of a bird that appears as if just for you. You could not have arranged the moment, and it will never happen in the same way again. Like the time in Saskatchewan when an acquaintance took me birdwatching south of Saskatoon. It was early May, but spring was only beginning. We had been walking beside a river that had cut a deep meandering gully through the soil of the prairie, the banks covered in a thick mat of bushes and low trees not yet in leaf. The afternoon had been disappointing and we had gone back to the car when I gave the bushes one final sweep with the binoculars – and there was a mountain bluebird on the topmost twig of a bush, a male in its plumage of deep royal blues, fluttering to keep its balance in a strong breeze. I will probably never see another of these stunning birds, but the memory has the assuredness of a poem that has written itself, suddenly and inexplicably, and is there before you on the page. It is both yours and nothing to do with you, a gift that you searched for and did not deserve.



Mountain Bluebird

I am not sure why birds especially have attracted me in this way. Out walking in the countryside, I look just as intently at insects and plants, but apart from butterflies, I have only mastered the names of a few species. I admire amateur naturalists who can identify at a glance whatever they see around them, but I have never been like that. Likewise, though I have the nine-volume *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa* and consult it regularly, the scientific study of birds as practised by ornithologists does not appeal to me. What I am drawn to is the aesthetics of birdlife which would be diminished if I became involved in the measuring, counting, behaviourist approach of science. This sounds Keatsian, but I do not mean that I consider ornithology a waste of time or that its findings are unimportant – I wouldn't own the *Handbook* if I thought that. My interest in birds is Keatsian, I suppose, in that birds have a beauty all of their own which has evolved through the diversification of species over millions of years; this beauty has, or can have, great appeal to us, even though we know it is a by-product of the way the human brain has evolved and not a function of the endlessly varied plumage of the birds, as an earlier homocentric observer might have believed.



Goldfinch

The beautiful patterning of the plumage of, say, a goldfinch evolved incrementally over many thousands of generations, yet each goldfinch, as you watch it feeding on a thistlehead, appears exactly right; nothing, you feel, could or should be changed. The analogy with poetry is a remote one in that the processes are very different, yet a poem too, if it is a good one, seems fully formed, alighting on a branch of the mind with a life of its own. It too is a product of "evolution", the evolution of the poet as a practitioner, the long hours when nothing comes, or when what emerges is malformed and has to be discarded. For the poet should be as profligate as nature; only the poem that is perfect in all its parts and which has come in Keats' phrase as "leaves to the tree", survives.

John's latest books are a collection of poems, Trouble in Heaven (Gomer Press, 2007, £7.99. ISBN 978-1-84323-781-5) and a memoir of his father, Ted Barnie, and the world of the Abergavenny shopkeepers, Tales of the Shopocracy (Gomer Press, £8.99. ISBN 978-1-84851-068-5)

BUSHFIRE!

Terry Oakley (KHGS 1954-60) is a life coach and a short story writer. He lives in Melbourne, which in February this year experienced the worst outbreak of bushfire ever experienced in Australia's history. The causes and after-effects are still being picked over today.

This is Terry's personal account of a disaster that came much too close to home.

Terry would welcome any correspondence on the bushfires (or anything else!)

His email address is Ttenett@bigpond.com

Stand two inches from and face a wall of radiant heaters measuring 140 metres high by 260 kms long, all switched to maximum output for more than two months. It's hot. So hot it melts and burns glass and aluminium to nothing; it melts metal car wheels into rivers of silver and re-glazes ceramics with ghostly hazes of flame-shadows that have fanned and flared to create the re-glazing; it contorts massive steel beams to spaghetti. I've just described the intensity of our bushfires and a foretaste of the destruction wreaked from February 6th to the end of March 2009.

We're used to fires in Australia. Numerous recordings lifted from the logbooks of medieval trading ships detail that from the safety of their small ships they watched dense flames on the mainland, encouraged by black bodies. Indeed indigenous people learned very early in their history to use the regenerative power of large scale fire to flush out mature game to be caught, killed and committed to the pot. They also realised the rejuvenating effect this had on the armour-hard seed pods of drought resistant plant species and grasses.

In Eastern Australia in early summer the acacias give way to as many ground orchids as you'll find in the whole of South America. When these appear the air above and below the canopy is filled with a scent reminiscent of mum's kitchen floor after she's cleaned and mopped it. Stand well back and look to the tops of the trees and you'll see a ghostly haze not unlike Jack o'Lanterns wavering ever upwards as the relentless heat of the sun volatilizes the oil in the dense canopies of the eucalypts. Strike a match if you dare and you will be instantly engulfed in blue flame.

Late January 2009 saw the usual annual influx of overseas visitors for the Melbourne International Tennis Open. The continuous scorching summer heat caused rail tracks to buckle, closing many lines. Lines still open saw passenger numbers double, and failing air-conditioning in the overcrowded trains added to the



Typical rail track buckling

discomfort of visitors and locals alike. It's the same every year... you get used to it and yet you never do. You simply learn to plan your lives around the scorching heat. Our summer wind blows hard and unrelenting for two months southwards from the centre of Australia where daytime temperatures are regularly recorded above 50°C. By the time they reach our part of Victoria the winds have lost some of their intensity; we rarely go above 42°C. This year it was different.

Experts warned that rail buckling and the rest of it were just a foretaste of the big event. The Meteorological Department predicted temperatures up to 45°C. It actually reached 47.6°C. To try to give you some idea of this, set your oven thermostat to 50°C. Open the oven door; stick your hands in for ten minutes and experience what a temperature of 47° C is like. Not hot enough to roast a chicken, but it does remarkable and painful things to your bare hands. And it's everywhere and constant!



My home, mercifully not consumed by the flames

The week before, we'd installed air-conditioning. We live in a little stone house with a stable door entrance much like you'd find in some parts of Wales. Our walls are in parts more than two feet thick. The roof is corrugated steel over thick planks of pine, with the cavity between outer roof and inner lining boards filled with more than six inches of fibre glass. This means that in winter the whole house is toasty warm from just the wood burning stove. And in most summers with levels of natural insulation there's been no need for air-conditioning. This year was different.

On 6th February we waited till lunch time as temperatures climbed above 45°C and only then did we switch on the air conditioning. We closed all doors and windows, drew the curtains and sat on the big leather sofa behind the front door. With our mobile phones on and transceivers tuned in to the radio channels we listened in to the State Emergency Services (SES), Police and Country Fire Authority (CFA) chatting on their community channels. We don't have a television as such, but we do have a computer that's attached to an outside aerial. This allows us to project a picture 6 feet by 4 feet via a projector directly onto a wall. It was switched to ABC Channel 2 (a bit like BBC1). We watched in trepidation as the day unfolded.

The morning had been quiet with reports of winds from the north; as usual, winds shifting west to south west were disconcerting. When faced with a wind from one direction you can position your fire fighters with their backs to the wind to knock down spot fires or warn those in its path. When the wind is behind you at one moment and to your side the next you run the risk of your troops being cut off. Worse was coming to greet us. Radio broadcasts told of a fire in Bendigo (200 kms to the north) that had claimed several houses and three lives. When a fire is more than 200 kms away you can reassure yourselves, but following quickly came reports of sporadic fires in Gippsland (80 to 200 kms south east); fires north in Kinglake (25 kms); St Andrews (16 kms); Kilmore (25 kms) Marysville (90 kms) and Christmas Hills (6 kms). God help us. The whole of Victoria is on fire and moving to the suburbs and we're in its path!

The TV broadcasts were arriving in a steady but frightening stream. I called the fireguard coordinator, Mick, who comes from Hull in the UK. Today he's taken over the job from Cath who has sold up and moved to a 'safer' area. She was a long-time local and very used to this sort of stuff. I asked Mick what was the plan? We agree that we'll call the next person on the fire tree. We all know each of our contact phones for all 33 houses in our local area. We also know the numbers of people in each household with their names, ages and the schools of their children. Today is Saturday 6th and that knowledge is no longer theoretical.



Most phones ring out, signalling that their owners have gone to a safer environment; shopping for essentials or outside trying to make their houses safe. Mick says he'll quickly reconnoitre houses up the street from him if I can do the same on my side. We have two elderly couples in the road and we have to visit them to make sure they're OK, especially as one couple is not answering the phone.

When I venture outside the heat hits me like the draught from the oven. It's intensity takes my breath away so that I gasp and cover my mouth and nostrils for relief from wind-blown smoke. As I get outside I notice our new next door neighbours moving into what was Cath's house. Their high removals van backs up the steep drive and takes down the heat-baked sagging phone lines. I use some choice words that don't endear me to them (we fix that one a month later over a good bottle of red), but fortunately the downed line isn't broken. I tell them to get inside and forget about moving in or they will get dehydrated and become another statistic of summer heat. This morning they



A hopeless fight at Bendigo

got off the plane from Rotterdam temperature when they left 6°C... temperature here 46°C. They just dump their stuff in the garage, take my advice and book into a hotel.

By the time I've done my visits I'm exhausted. I don't think all of this is from the heat but from listening to people in varying states of distress. Everyone's watching television and listening in to the radio chat and in almost every house I pick another report on a new fire in a new area and they're getting nearer: Bendigo; Eaglehawk; Dixons Creek; Steeles Creek; Kinglake; Kilmore; Yea; Marysville; Narbethong; Mudgeegonga and Yackandanda; Smith's Gully; Happy Valley; Churchill. Yet another fire in Christmas Hills as the CFA building succumbs with no CFA volunteers to defend it. They're in Yarra Glen, Yarra Valley and Healesville and Chum Creek; the Long Gully winery (80 plus acres) on the old Yarra Glen to Healesville road has been totally consumed - not a building or vine left standing. Christmas Hills is the most disturbing as it's only across the valley, over the hill that rims it.

There's fire fighting traffic. Units of fire fighters from every part of Victoria and New South Wales are converging on fires that seem to be starting everywhere. The TV newsman reports that "in the Yarra Valley it has been recorded by the Met and professional weather watchers that in a cloudless sky with varying densities of fast rising smoke, the intense fires are creating their own tropospheres. Rainless thunder and the ensuing lightning are striking densely forested areas creating new fires". And overhead the helicopters from the Police wing, the CFA and Newsmen drone on and on.



The question is, do we go or do we stay? The bare fact is we can't go now, it's too late! There's only one bridge we can cross to get to the city and that will be closed to stop traffic coming into our 'danger' area with the two lanes prioritized for fire fighters. If we go north we run straight into the fires. We have to stay and see it through. I hastily call Mick. He tells me that the fire in Wandong has crossed the freeway and is marching

unchecked towards Wallan (south) & Kilmore (north & west). We both pick up chat from the two-way that a fire has broken out north of Whittlesea in the Wombat State Forest. A local CFA captain almost weeps into the two-way that there are "people trapped in their cars" and "I can't get up there. The smoke stops us seeing and the fire is too intense!". He's told to take care of his own and err on safety. "But it's my f.... job; they're depending on me!" he sobs.

The next day just off the Strath Creek road up near the King Parrot Creek in Flowerdale a fireman reports that he's found an abandoned vehicle and nearby three people, a mother and her two sons. One was four or so, the other about seven. The mother had laid on top of the seven year old to protect him from heat, while the other is some 20 metres back down the road. "He's lying on his back. His eyes are wide open and are the most beautiful blue. No hint of burns on any of them, and they don't seem to have suffered any pain....."

My friend Garth, from just outside Marysville, later told me that he'd sent his wife inside and into the wine cellar as he finished off drenching the verandah and the porch till "it squelched like a wet sponge". As he finishes putting the hose away he looks up and a mob of some 40 kangaroo, oblivious of him, bounce past. He looks to where they've come from and sees a dense wall of flame licking at their heels, following them. They bounce down the hill till they get to the bottom. And stop. In front of them another wall of searing hell has reared up and is racing to greet them burning everything in its path. They turn as one and bounce back up the way they've come. Stopping outside the front gate of his house..... well, let him take over. "Terry, I could feel a tightness in my chest just like the precursor to an asthma attack and I realise that some force is dragging the air away. As I look at the hapless roo, I just want to open the gate and let them in, when, as if someone has pushed them with one almighty hand, in one movement they all fall over, every single one. And they lie there... not a twitch!" Later after the fires have passed he went out to see if the animals were still there and sure enough they are, but not a single singed shred of hair or fur. They just lie there. No movement. Dead, with eyes wide open. "Not what you'd expect if they had died from smoke inhalation!" he told me. He rationalised that they'd been suffocated. Heat from the approaching two fires needed oxygen to burn in and all the ambient air had been sucked away. The roo had simply died from lack of oxygen.



A kangaroo flees the choking smoke and dust



A resident near Churchill calms his burned horse

We have now entered a period unlike any in Australian history. A figure of 176 dead is the official toll in these the worst fires in our history. But fire captains in Marysville and Yarra Glen say on TV that with the numbers of tourists and especially backpackers camping in the fire areas the true figure will not be known for some time and then it will be likely to turn out much higher. The coroner is busy collecting victim remains from the various collection points. It will take her more than 3 months to be able to state with a degree of certainty who the remains belong to.

In a situation like this you find your quota of heroes and idiots. A Gippsland fire captain is chastised and then dismissed for using foul language on the public channels when he tells his firefighting crew to "get the f.... outta there!" Another is given a public dressing down by his local Fire Operations chief for telling his small town in Gippsland to wait for the siren and take it as the order to evacuate. He'd been invited to attend a public meeting in his town where CFA (and others) from head office came along to prognosticate and pontificate on what people should do in this fire environment. With the meeting running into it's third hour and not one clear direction on what individuals should do he took the mike and said "Enough of this bullshit... as we speak the fire is coming over the hill behind us. My advice is, go home; make your properties safe; listen for the Fire Siren and when you hear it take it as your order to leave now and we'll help you. Stay and you have to look after yourselves. We won't turn back to assist you!". The meeting broke up.

Later he sounded the siren; the majority of houses were evacuated and not a life was lost in an area with more than 60% loss of buildings and property. He's told by the CFA chief that it is not his responsibility to order mass evacuation; it's up to the right authority to make the assumption and give the order. He says "F.... the authority, it doesn't know it's ass from it's elbow most of the time and in a fire is absolutely bloody useless". After the fires The Royal Commission convened and commended him for his initiative and the action he took and absolves him with a rebuke for the 'Chiefs' who took no notice of its fire pattern scientific advisers and predictions on the changing weather patterns; failing in their duties to not only protect firefighters in the danger zones but the population in general. For his stupidity, ignorance and arrogance the CFA chief's contract was extended by the Victorian government for a further 4 years.

Our neighbours have convened our Fire Action Group. We call ourselves the 'Krusers' after our road name, Kruses Road. From these get-togethers we have a

good idea of who will stay and fight the fires and those who will go. We also know that people will change their minds and stay when they should have gone and go when they should have stayed.

People love danger and excitement yet in extreme circumstances the most level-headed will panic. We know this. So we know we have to be particularly emphatic when we say that we will not put our own lives in danger to assist someone who has changed their minds either way. For we know who will go early and who has made preparation to tackle the fires unassisted.

We cannot guarantee when we will be attacked by random embers. It's the wind borne embers which get major fires underway. In open grassy areas animals and property are primarily safe, for wind borne embers will ignite the dry grasses and sweep the fire past at the speed of the passing wind, normally above 60 kms an hour. With little fuel left after the initial blast the fire moves on, leaving a relatively safe area behind it. But as soon as the fire hits forest areas it climbs to the topmost canopy, where it assumes a terrifying character.



The 60 km per hour wind is bolstered by the effect of the up-draught carrying combustible debris which can multiply the speed of the fire approach by up to three times; a normal wind speed of 100 kms an hour triples to 300 kms an hour. Fire running across the tops of the trees (called 'tree toppers') will outpace a Porsche 911 Turbo running flat out; ordinary vehicles have no chance. Tree toppers themselves pose little threat; like grass fires they move on once the fuel is used up. But they create embers which fall on roofs ahead of the main inferno. Fanned by winds the embers often ignite dry summer leaves and other detritus lying in the gutters, and it is a short step before the dry roof timber substructures are ablaze. In this way the fire can leapfrog ahead, and it is this unpredictable progress that poses the greatest threat.

Late evening on 20th February Mick receives a call from CFA that the wind direction has changed and that we are advised that those who have decided to go should evacuate now while the bridge to the south is open. He calls me, "Can you phone and speak to the next one on the fire tree (phone) and tell them". I call the new neighbours. No answer. I go outside and look up to where they live - there are no visible lights. They've gone. So I call Sue and Julian next door to them. No answer. They've gone too. I call Jill & Peter (more Poms) next door to Sue & Julian. Peter answers and tells me to get off the phone as he's trying to pack



Cattle burned by the fires in Yarra Glen trucked along the Melba Highway

the car with essential stuff and his kids are giving him hell. I don't have the heart to tell him to phone his next door neighbour, and I don't think he will anyway. So I call them myself. Sally answers the phone and tells me they're packed up and going, but she'll go round to next door and tell them. She hangs up. As I look out of the kitchen window I see a stream of cars approaching from the north, painting a yellow ribbon of light as they approach through the gloom. They pass the gate and make their way up the hill to the Kangaroo Road and then south over the bridge to a safe place. I hope they get away. I can tell you that the image of the car lights conjure up the tune "Tie A Yellow Ribbon", and I feel so sad that I'm leaving my home. We built this ourselves! Every single stone; every wheelbarrow of mortar; every reclaimed timber were put in place by Hilary, our kids, friends and me.

Next I call Robert Kann, a friend in a safe suburb nearby, and I say I'm coming over. "I'll make up the bed!" he tells me. I pack the car with bedding and my dog; drive down past the dam; let Basil the goat off his tether and drive to Robert's.

Morning came slowly. I couldn't sleep in a strange bed! I shouldn't have been here; I should have been at home defending my home. Hilary said it would be futile, "we're best here" and off she went to sleepbut I should still have been there. I rationalise that many people less fortunate than me had felt this way too: people who'd been through the '62, '83 & '92 fires and survived them. But not this time. They'd stayed to defend their homes but it had been too fierce. And they perished.



A terrified resident flees the fires with her young daughter



There were no survivors at this grim scene

It wasn't until morning's first grey fingers of light etched across the wall of a dim room that I fell into a sort of restless drowse! Probably just after nodding off I was awakened with a cup of tea thrust into my hand and of course I had to get up. Drowsy, sick with worry for my home and Basil the goat, Robert reported that on the ABC world news there'd been no reports of fire flare-ups in the Warrandyte area. So I rang Mick on the mobile. He was drowsy too and told me that he couldn't sleep in the motel either so he and his wife Chris had checked in and then two hours later checked out, drove back to Warrandyte and camped in the car overlooking the state park on the safe side of the river. Here they watched the glow of the fires recede and felt the breeze change direction. They made way up the Kangaroo Ground Road to home. "CFA says it safe to go home if you want. We're on our way! The bridge is open and there's a heap of cars going our way too!"

The wind had changed direction late in the early hours and was now blowing steadily from south west to north east which had enabled bulldozer crews to construct wind breaks, and CFA volunteers were knocking down spot fires. The trouble spots in its path would now be more intense in the Murrundindi and the Dandenongs. I'm choked now with the memories I had. I was pleased we'd been given a reprieve when the wind had changed direction. But imagine the plight of those poor people now in it's path. I felt so helpless.

We got home and found Basil (our goat) looking contented from chewing the succulents we'd planted a while back as he trotted along the bottom track to greet us, his little tail flicking his dung away. There was no mistaking his pleasure at seeing us, but he couldn't be half as pleased as we were to see him.



A bucket to fight an inferno

As I write this it's September. We've met our friends who survived and made new friends, drunk a few ales and a lot of wine and got drunk together. We cried a lot and laughed some. They have recounted their experiences and their terror. They've told of the noise of the fires that sounded like many hundreds of Boeing 747's all taking off at the same time. They will never forget the life-drawing heat; the smoke; the drones and squeals of insects fleeing ahead of the fires and the noises the animals made as their life's juices were sucked from them by the overwhelming heat. They will tell of all the livestock - cattle, horses, sheep, kangaroos, wallabies, koalas - lying bloated and burned beyond recognition by the sides of the roads.

One told us that he'd been allowed to take his wife back to his house in Kinglake West where by the side of the road they saw what they thought was the stump of a tree. They parked the car nearby and my friend went back to investigate. On closer inspection he discovered what appeared to be a gate-post wrapped in a blanket. Just before he gave it a kick he was surprised (to put it mildly) to hear the 'gate-post' speak. Prising the brittle-stiff blanket off, an old man was revealed who told them that he'd left his house in the midst of the inferno wrapped in his drenched woollen blanket, but was soon overcome by the heat and collapsed. When he came to he found that he could move and even stand upright... but he couldn't get the blanket off. So he sat on the nearest thing he bumped (unsighted) into. We laughed at the retelling, and at the same time wondered at the old man's luck in surviving. There would be many such anecdotes as the weeks wore on.



One of the water-carrying helicopters nicknamed "Elvis"

Hilary is more pragmatic than I am. I've never been attached to much ever - that's why in the past it's been so easy to move houses and countries many times and just settle in. But not this time. This is where my roots are. I won't evacuate again.

The Royal Commission, convened in June, is going still. We've heard testimony from government representatives; state emergency services; CFA and MFB (Metropolitan Fire Brigade); state coroner; fire experts; weather experts; ordinary people who survived; the relatives of ordinary people who didn't; those in

leadership roles who failed to lead. And those who weren't in leadership roles yet set good examples and make good decisions. We've seen the chastisers rebuked and those rebuked by the chastisers exonerated and praised for leading in the absolute absence of leadership. Way ahead of the Royal Commission report the people of Victoria know the good guys from the bad.

Government sources have so far failed to produce a coherent set of guidelines to equip the people of Victoria for the next bush fire season (two months away). Yet, now the Victorian public will have the experience and resilience to live through the next disaster, for there will surely be one.

Have we learned any lessons? It is all too easy to feel contempt for local politicians. Our State government of Victoria in it's haste to be re-elected has put its funds into policies that are vote-grabbers at best. It is clear to everyone that all the intense fire areas are adjacent to state parks. The politicians consistently ignore educated opinion and counsel that all the state parks have considerable ground fuel that even in a minor fire season would induce a major catastrophe. They seem to say "It hasn't happened since 1983 (the last major outbreak) so why should it happen now?"

The fact is we've had 26 years of build up, yet seen no action to reduce the highest levels of ground fuels that will produce the worst fire in history! It is this ground fuel and constant and changing wind patterns that will do the damage. We can only pray that the penny will eventually drop, so that money and resources will be urgently deployed to remove this menace.

Final words

Before the fires I had some dear friends whom I will never see again. We didn't live in each other's pockets, nor did we speak every day. We enjoyed a bottle of red or six and got drunk when the mood took us. And I do miss them.

Many people suffered and will continue to suffer as a result of the worst fires in Australian history, but there have been many positive outcomes too.

More than A\$300 million was raised from a public appeal for money to help re-house and nurture those who lost everything . Children in schools all over Australia still run programmes to raise money to build schools and provide services; my local Lions club has given money and facilities to build houses and provide meals; one lady placed an ad for people to donate their best china teapots and tea cups so she may give them to the elderly as a symbol of peace, compassion and understanding; the response has been out of this world.

On a local note our FireGuard coordinator Mick and wife Chris have gone out of their way to get to know everyone in our fireguard catchment area. He says that the groups that socialise and work together will fight a fire better together, so his motto has become "better together". So we now have regular Rakethongs (bring a rake, gloves and help each other clean up their space), especially for the new arrivals and the elderly. We have a French Jive Club every other Friday. We will greet the next fire season with vigour and resolve!



Fires feed on ground fuel in Kinglake National Park. But will our politicians learn the lesson?

PATRICK MACNEE, AVENGER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Stuart Rowlands, a former KHGS pupil from 1953 to 1957, is a publicist living in Los Angeles. He met Patrick Macnee, star of The Avengers, one of the most popular TV shows of the 1960s. His interview took place at Macnee's home in Palm Springs in September 2008.

"I was terribly lucky", says Patrick Macnee, his hell raising days well behind him and now living quietly in California's secret British actors and entertainers retirement enclave, Palm Springs. "The Avengers" television series got the whole man-woman thing right from the get-go. Both were equal, both were strong personalities that played off each other with humour, compassion, strength and friendship, which was so important to the success of the series throughout its life. I have always hated expectations and that was what was so wonderful about "The Avengers", it kept growing and growing. Many people don't remember but in 1961 when the series debuted, my first co-star was a man, a very good actor named Ian Hendry and he went off to star in a film.



Honor Blackman was Cathy Gale

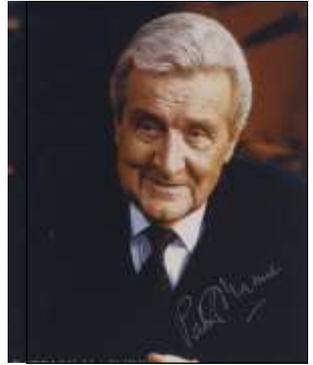
Then came Honor Blackman, who I think was the idea of legendary Canadian Producer Sidney Newman, who created "Dr. Who". Honor also went off to star in films including the role of "Pussy Galore" in "Goldfinger". My next co-star was absolutely delightful, who to this day is a very dear friend, Diana Rigg - in fact we have a Christmas card from her every

year. She lives in France and is now Dame Diana Rigg - a very grand lady."

For the 1968 season Diana Rigg was replaced by Linda Thorson, a young Canadian actor still studying at RADA in London. "Now Linda Thorson was a fine lady, a perfectly normal lady, and I was very fond of her and still am", says Patrick. "But it was difficult for her after her predecessor's success. The show fell to bits. It wasn't Linda's fault at all. Any actor would have found it difficult. In fact, I myself didn't really want to come back. I'm very pleased that Linda has gone on to have such a very successful career on both television and stage."

For an actor Patrick Macnee has unusual forbears - he was born into an aristocratic English family where his father was a racehorse trainer and his mother was the lovely Dorothea Hastings, a niece of the Earl of Huntingdon (descendants of Robin Hood!). At age six, he was bundled off to Summer Fields, a preparatory school near Oxford followed by the epitome of English public schools, Eton, where apart from an active role with the school's dramatic society, he distinguished himself as the leading bookie and pornographer on campus - and was promptly expelled.

Determined to follow on his chosen career path as an actor much against the advice of all his relatives including his father who still held out hopes that he would make a good jockey, Patrick won a scholarship to the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. Packing up his riding boots and a couple of cases of burgundy, Patrick headed for London joining a heady company whose alumni included Stewart Granger, Penelope Keith, Angela Lansbury and Terence Stamp and where he met his first wife Barbara Douglas. He got his start in 1941 with a small role in a successful touring production of "Little Women". He made his debut in films as an extra in "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp".



By 1942 he was finally 'called up' and spent the next three years as Lieutenant Commander in Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB's) chasing German 'E' Boats and heavy cruisers through the English Channel and around the Channel Islands. In 1946 Patrick finally got de-mobbed and returned to the stage and screen determined to be a star. Unable to find work in Britain, he began his quest by heading for Canada. His adventures in New York, Toronto and Hollywood over the next few years are the stuff of legend as his financial straits forced him to try to live between all three cities in attempts to find work.

As his acting career finally got into full swing in Toronto, New York and Los Angeles he featured in over 30 television plays and more than a dozen feature films during the busy post-war years including a stint in Hollywood from 1957-1959 for "Les Girls" and "Mission of Danger" for MGM. His US TV credits also included half a dozen "Playhouse 90's", and "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" - but still he was not a star.

Finally in the winter of 1959/60 and still broke, Patrick bailed out of Toronto, which was languishing under ten feet of snow, and returned to England. In 1960 through a fortuitous meeting with brilliant Canadian producer Leonard White, Macnee landed his signature role in ITV's imaginative new British TV series "The Avengers", playing John Steed, the suave, dashing Englishman with his bowler hat, rolled umbrella and elegant clothes.





Diana Rigg (Emma Peel) was Macnee's most popular partner

Overnight "The Avengers" became an international hit, Macnee's popularity soared and both he and the show enjoyed a cult-like status, finally burying his fears about not becoming a star and solidifying his bank account.

"The Avengers" aired in Great Britain from January 1961 through September 1969, and totalled 161 episodes. "The Avengers" became one of the most popular television series of all time, eventually reaching audiences in 120 countries, a record that still stands today. Many have accused "The Avengers" of copying James Bond but in fact the launch of the series predated the first Bond movie, airing in 1961 the year before "Dr. No" starring Sean Connery was released. "I hated "Dr. No" says Patrick. "It was far too violent and in my opinion treated women horribly. In fact the entire James Bond series treats practically all its women characters badly and I was very glad that "The Avengers" was totally different. Of course that didn't stop me appearing in 1985 in "A View to a Kill."



Joanna Lumley was Purdey in The New Avengers



Along with "The Avengers", Macnee's major film credits include "The Howling", "Young Doctors in Love", and "Sea Wolves" with David Niven, Gregory Peck and Roger Moore, Rob Reiner's "This Is Spinal Tap", and the television series, "The New Avengers". Other television appearances include "Sherlock Holmes" with Christopher Lee, HBO's "Dream On" and 26 episodes of "Thunder in Paradise" with Hulk Hogan. For two years he starred as Andrew Wyke in the Tony Award-winning Broadway production of "Sleuth" then reprised the role in Canada and across the USA.

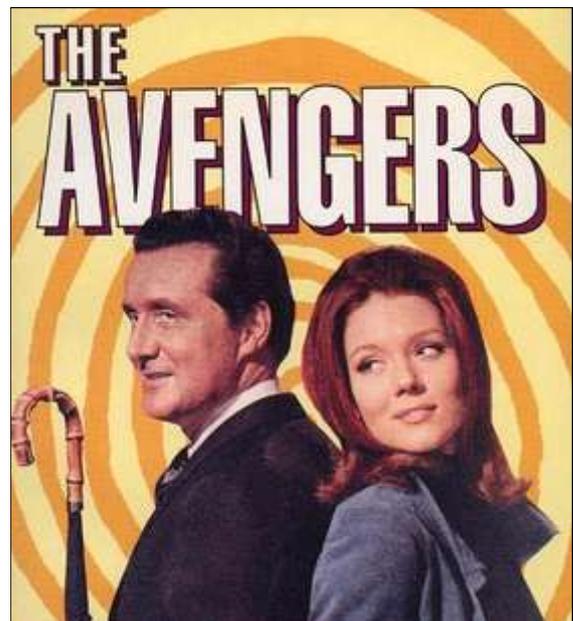
An enthusiastic teller of wild stories, many at his own expense, Patrick's entertaining and slightly scandalous autobiography, "Blind In One Ear," was published in 1992 and "The Avengers and Me," was published by TV Books in June 1998 - soon to be republished with the title "The Avengers: The Inside Story." Every episode of "The Avengers", uncut, digitally remastered and remixed is currently distributed by A&E. It is to Macnee's credit that he refused to give his permission for "The Avengers" series to be released to the home video market until all of the supporting actors were paid a percentage of the profits.

As he eases into retirement John Steed still resonates in Macnee's character. Mourning the recent loss of his third wife Baba, he is still very elegant, superbly dressed with flashing blue eyes and upright stance and well capable of causing the ladies heads to swivel as he saunters through the upscale shops and eateries of El Paseo near his home in Rancho Mirage.



Following Diana Rigg was a tough job for Linda Thorson as Tara King

In a career spanning over 65 years with just a break for World War II, Macnee smiles when asked if he has any major regrets and why he was not honoured by Her Majesty the Queen for his stellar career. "I must admit to have been having a very bad day when the representative from the British Consulate drove down from Los Angeles a couple of years ago and rang my doorbell to ask me if I would accept the recognition. I was terribly rude and promptly showed him the door. Having got rid of him to my satisfaction I returned to my living room only to find my wife absolutely furious. I think she would have loved to have the honorific Lady added to her name and that would have made her very happy - and I think that is my only true regret."



TEMPTATION!

*King Henry VIII Grammar and Harold Road Girls School rocked by a national scandal!
Well, perhaps not. But a story reached the national press back in the winter of 1949 that
would scarcely raise an eyebrow these days. Peter Games remembered the tale, and with
a couple of tattered press cuttings and a bit of research the story can now be retold.
(Thanks to Chris Gething and the High School old girls association for their memories).*

1949. It was a winter's afternoon in the library of the girl's high school. A group of sixth form girls (who comprised among others Betty Jones, Diana Rees, Molly Jenkins, Margaret Hatherall, Joyce Evans and Renee West) were sitting around listlessly, trying to think of something they could do to relieve the tedious end of term feeling. A cunning plan slowly began to take shape.

The girls and boys school were separate at that time, but there was quite a lot of contact between the two at the sixth form level. Many of the A level subjects spanned both schools, with regular trips from Harold Road to Penypound, and vice versa. There were monthly social meetings too, and special events like an annual Christmas dance. (Reg Morgan remembers one of these dances elsewhere in the magazine).

The idea started innocently enough. The girls decided to send in a request to the BBC to play a record for the grammar school boys on the popular Saturday evening Family Favourites programme from 7 –8pm. Then one of the girls suggested a subtle twist to the plot. What if they chose a slightly risqué record and claimed that the request had come from the boys! Everyone thought this was added a little spice to the plan and the letter to the BBC was soon being drafted.

There was a long discussion about which record to choose. This was long before the days of rock and roll, and the music at that time was mainly dance band numbers and smoochy crooner tunes. Renee West was going out with one of the sixth form boys, Joe Davis, and she mentioned that he liked the song Temptation. Many artists had recorded the song, notably Bing Crosby, Andy Williams and perhaps the most popular version was by Perry Como.

But at the time the girls decided not to go for one of these sultry versions, but chose a madcap rendition by Spike Jones and the City Slickers. Spike Jones was something of a musical innovator. He fronted a conventional band, who at the start of their shows played straightforward versions of all the latest tunes. Then after the interval all hell broke loose. The band reappeared dressed in crazy clown outfits and wild

wigs, homemade instruments like a stringed toilet seat, all accompanied by a cacophony of gunshots, honking car horns, sirens, bells and whistles. No-one else at the time was doing anything remotely similar.

The song was duly played on Family Favourites, with a dedication to the High School girls. Not all the girls heard it, however. Being a Saturday night, many of them were already on their way to an evening out.

The boys school headmaster was Harry Newcombe, who at the time was living with his son at the Railway Inn. At 8am on the following Sunday morning he was wakened by a reporter from the Daily Mail, demanding a quote about the radio request story. Apparently Newcombe was furious. Joe Davis remembers the events well. "I don't think he could have cared less about the record request" said Joe, "but he was very annoyed at being dragged from his bed at such an early hour".

The Daily Mail story was run under the title "Temptation for St Winifred's". It was claimed that the radio show had an audience of 10 million. Mr Newcombe was quoted "It is certainly novel, but a little unnecessary. I have always encouraged my boys to be friendly with the girls' school, provided they do it openly". The girls' headmistress, Miss Gethin-Davies, said "I haven't an idea which of my girls the request was made for. I could guess, but that wouldn't be fair".

The story would no doubt have ended there, but a few days later the Mail printed a follow-up story revealing that the record request had come from the girls and not the boys. It wasn't revealed how this Woodward-Bernstein investigation had unearthed the truth.

Miss Gethin-Davies called one of the girls involved into her office "for a chat". It was all conducted very amicably and she shielded the girls from any further press attention. Not surprisingly interest in the story quickly died away.

Looking back it is surprising that there was any interest in the story at all - it must have been a very slow news day. But how entertaining it is to see this snapshot of school life some 60 years ago.



Artwork:
Haydn Gear

"I have always encouraged my boys to be friendly with the girls' school, provided they do it openly."

CLONING KHS IN DOMINICA

Rob McAdam, more often known as Mac, was in the grammar school from 1956 until 1963. He was brought up in the Rectory, Grosmont which his contemporaries may remember for the large New Year Eve parties.

He was persuaded at a school careers evening by Colonel Borlase, the chief engineer of Cwmbran Development Corporation, to try engineering as a career and was hooked. He lives near Beverley, East Yorkshire with his wife, Jean, a community doctor and visits Grosmont frequently. They have two sons who are in the midst of their professional training and unusually follow their parents as a doctor and an engineer.

Throughout my varied career I have found that volunteering for overseas relief work has spiced up my life. Even for short periods it has led to new experiences and a level of satisfaction not often achievable elsewhere. Because of my Voluntary Service Overseas work I knew how to be useful for short periods, every few years, in places as varied as the Lebanon, Darfur, Northern Transvaal and Kandahar. My assignments covered the whole range of engineering organisation. My employer at the time was generous enough to agree to my being seconded and I worked for charities or non-governmental organisations. Sadly the problems were basically caused by war or major political upheavals. It was always the people and particularly the children who suffered.

My story starts in the 1960s. There was a feeling amongst many of my fellow graduates that we were having free education and a generally soft and pleasant life compared with our parents' generation which had suffered and struggled through the difficult years of the second world war. We felt that we owed a debt to society. Talking with my colleagues at college there were several who felt that before they started on their career paths they would like to give something back for a couple of years. They would then feel that they had returned the debt owed by them to society and they would feel morally free to pursue their own future desires and aspirations.

I was educated in the old King Henry VIII School from 1956 to 1963, having been brought up in the village of Grosmont, which had a very supportive community spirit. The town of Abergavenny was more lively and so provided a wider range of experience. The boys school at Penypound was closing in late 1962 so the teachers and sixth formers were moving gradually into the new coeducational comprehensive school which was nearing completion a short distance away. Our A level examinations were imminent. We hoped to avoid some of the disruption and not lose our practical work or our notes and books. It also meant that I had a good opportunity to see the early layout of the details of the building and the materials and techniques used in its construction. I heard the teachers' comments on what they thought were good and bad aspects of the new school. The relevance of this information was to become apparent some years later.

Despite the disruption I was fortunate to obtain the right A levels to gain a place to read civil engineering with a science bias at Manchester University. When I arrived it was a cultural shock in more ways than one. Manchester was a big and thriving industrial city with a well developed artistic and cultural heritage. The University was at that time embedded in the southern part of the city with all its normal activities taking place in and around the students life and their studies. The current separate student campus was yet to develop, for better or for worse. My course had recently been

revamped by the recently arrived and progressive Professor Michael Horne. He had incorporated additional small topics which focused on human welfare as well as the essential academic and mathematical course material. I was fortunate to have Dr Horne as my tutor as well as my professor in my final year and at tutorials he would encourage the students to consider and study a wide range of factors which may be the norm nowadays in universities but which in those days was novel for many students and engineering graduates.

In 1966 I graduated "in absentia" because with Professor Horne's agreement and the loan of my father's Land Rover with a jeep trailer, seven fellow graduates together with my father set off overland for Turkey. This was then beyond the iron curtain countries and engaged in a simmering border war with Greece. On the way we telephoned one of the parents to learn that we had all successfully graduated. After several interesting adventures we arrived in Istanbul and were dazzled by the views and the varied and beautiful buildings. We parked up and crossed the Bosphorus by ferry into Asia. Two of my friends set off together further east to travel right around the Mediterranean. They journeyed back through North Africa, Spain and France. The rest of us sadly had pressing commitments at home. My father had the parishes in Wales and my other companions had new jobs to start. I had been accepted for VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) starting in a few months.

VSO had been set up a few years before and initially arranged for school leavers to work in developing countries with the local people. This arrangement was found to be limited in the benefit being provided to the host country and was changing. The emphasis became for graduates or similarly trained youngsters to start their work experience living and working with people of different cultures. In this way they could use their recently acquired knowledge and skills to assist or train the local people.

On my return from Turkey I attended the various selection and training courses. We learned a huge amount about other societies and countries. We trained to work and organise as individuals and in teams containing local and volunteer workers and professionals. I received lots of practical advice from experienced overseas workers on being flexible, keeping healthy, communicating effectively and being able to assimilate and enjoy the local culture. VSO then assessed the volunteers and assigned them to programmes submitted by the recipient countries. These programmes had already been examined for need, safety and living conditions. Most of the volunteers got Africa, fewer got Asia and about a hundred including myself got the West Indies! I was one of about a dozen who were assigned to one of the most beautiful, friendly and undeveloped islands in the chain known as the Windward and Leeward islands.

It was called Dominica because it was supposedly discovered on a Sunday. I had really landed on my feet.

There was not a lot of time to prepare. The West Indies seemed quite remote in those days. My parents gave me a compact tape recorder and a Kodak camera with lots of slide films. Every few weeks I would tape a verbal letter and take a film of slides. I posted these home and received a tape letter back usually with some extra goodies. They processed my slides and got some idea of what I was doing. Telephone calls were possible but difficult so the post was the main means of communication. I soon found that the Geest banana boats sailed quickly to Barry docks in South Wales weekly and that they would take crates or parcels either way in about five days. This was useful for larger items and for one celebration I had a barrel of beer shipped out.

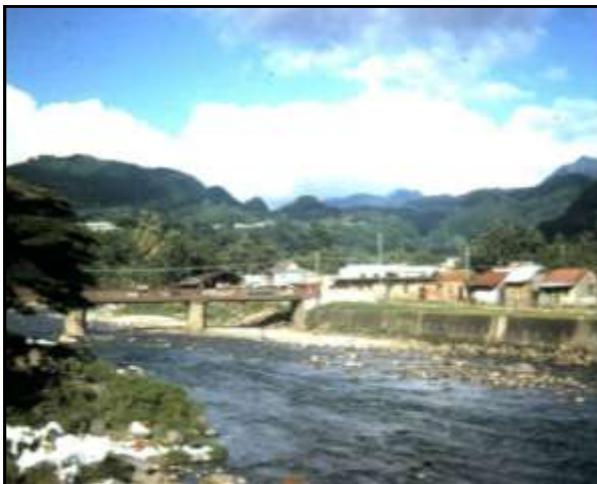
The time came to leave home for at least a year. A number of us bound for Dominica and the nearby islands gathered in London and flew out from Heathrow. The plane did not have the range to fly directly but landed for refuelling on the lacework island of Bermuda. We flew on to the French island of Guadeloupe and landed in the middle of the night. Getting off the plane was like walking into a furnace. I was soaked in sweat in minutes. The long flight had allowed us to get to know each other and those going to the other islands. Later in our assignment this was very helpful because if we wanted a break on another island, we already knew someone there and could usually beg accommodation.

We flew on to Antigua and after a rest changed to a smaller plane for Dominica. As we approached the island it seemed dense green as far as the eye could see. The small airport was across the island from the capital town and we could see the high central mountains disappearing into the clouds. We flew down a green valley with its steep sides above us and landed on the short runway that stretched out to the intensely blue sea. We were greeted at the airport by several officials with Land Rovers. The ride took a couple of hours on the potholed roads. We were driven along the beautiful Atlantic coast and then up a valley through jungle and plantations over the centre of the island to the capital town of Roseau on the Caribbean coast. This was a small colonial town of



Rob viewing the anchorage at Roseau

great charm in a valley with a hill behind which had once been garrisoned and was bisected by a river of the same name. There were a couple of jetties for smaller trading boats on the coast but the bigger ships and the banana boats were loaded by dumb barges or lighters towed out from the shore to the anchorage.



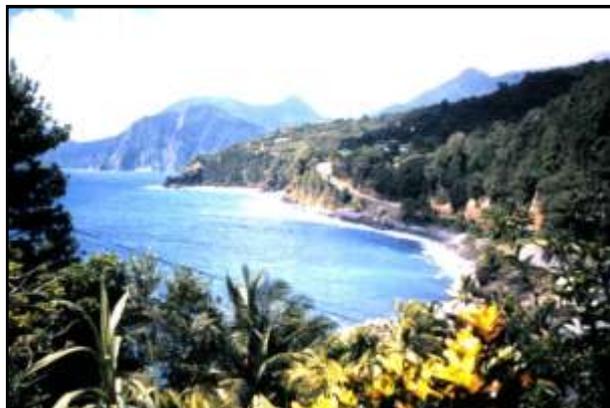
The River Roseau, running down from the mountains through the capital to the sea

When we arrived we had a meal and were introduced to a whirlwind of local people. Everyone was very friendly but I was finding that I was becoming overwhelmed by the number of people and the variety of strange places. We were also very tired. By now the VSOs knew each other fairly well and supported each other. Several were to live in the nearby Princess Margaret hospital, accountant Dave Roberts and I were to share a government house nearby and two teachers were based in the town centre. Dave and I inherited from the previous VSOs a part time maid Ulixia who was shy but very efficient. She shopped, cooked and cleaned for us and did our washing. She had two school aged daughters at home who were always very smart. She provided us with the local gossip which was important in the absence of other communication and enabled us to concentrate on our projects.

Dave was working in the government finance department helping to introduce more modern techniques of financial planning and management. I was assigned to help and support the design and construction of a new road around the island to enable the banana growers to get their crops to Roseau quickly in order to catch the banana boats. The remote steep hillsides and the reputed 365 rivers running into the sea made this a challenge. When the banana stems arrived on the buses which had been converted to trucks for the day they were weighed, checked, wrapped and carried on ladies' heads to the lighters which were towed out into the harbour for loading through a side hatch into the Geest boats.

My boss was Wendell Lawrence, a charming, very helpful and able Dominican who was Director of Public Works. At our first meeting he was welcoming and when I asked him what he wanted me to do he was a little vague and asked me what I wanted to do and that there really was no rush anyway. This was a novel experience for me and an introduction to the Dominican philosophy of life. Things got done anyway

but the stress was much less. In contrast our social life was filled with parties, meals and dances. Some were surprisingly formal but most were delightfully West Indian. We were the new arrivals and much in demand for a while. There were about a hundred expatriates and a couple of thousand Caribs in a reservation amongst the seventy thousand or so Dominicans.



The Dominica coastline with the central mountains behind

I soon realised that the local staff were quite able to survey and build the roads themselves and I learned a lot from them. I was able to help in the design of a few of the large bridges which were built in concrete entirely by hand. The rivers were an education and the rain was something else. I was used to rain in Wales but in Dominica you would see a cloud approaching out to sea but a couple of hours away. When it arrived it was difficult even to drive. Then the rain would stop and blazing sunshine would return while everything steamed. On other days there was steady rain but it rained most days. The island although small was very steep, covered in trees and rocky. The mountains rose to over five thousand feet and were volcanic. Little rain was absorbed and so the rivers could rise rapidly and run fast. The bridges and gutters looked vast in bright sunshine but at times were really needed.

I asked Wendell if there was additional work I could do to feel that I could justify my being there even though I was thoroughly enjoying myself. There were a few small items at first and then as I found my feet other projects became apparent. I helped with water purification schemes for several small isolated villages. I became included in the hurricane precaution plan for the island. Hurricanes were not infrequent and a major storm directly over the island could be an overwhelming disaster. I was assigned some big earth moving machines, lorries, fuel tankers and men. I was given a site where all this equipment would go when we had a hurricane warning and before the roads were cut off. If we mobilised we would recruit the local labour force and use our initiative to help the local people in any way we could. Fortunately I was never put to the test.

In the public works offices I was shown some soil testing equipment which had been donated but not unpacked. It was quite sophisticated but there was nobody who really knew how to set it up. I had only recently completed my degree and had used similar equipment at the university. A suitable room was made available and two technicians, Carlton Hazel and Brindsly Charles, were keen to help and learn how to

use the equipment. With some trial and error we succeeded and they were able to test soil characteristics as well as steel, concrete and tarmac specifications. They became good friends and helped me in all sorts of ways. We even tested the strength, brittleness and density of the local varieties of wood we were using in construction. Some were stronger than anything in the design guides and some would sink in water.

Wendell was approached by the resident tutor on the island to ask if I could assist. The University of the West Indies usually took local students to one of the larger islands for their studies. All the male students went but for some reason the women did their first year in Dominica under the supervision of the resident tutor. She was mainly a classicist and had difficulty with the increasing number of girls wanting to study science and mathematics. I had recently completed a similar degree and so I thought that with the help of their set books I would be able to help. It was a sobering experience. I was assigned six eighteen year olds which was distracting in itself but I soon found that they were potentially much quicker and cleverer than me. At an early class one of the girls said with a disarming smile that she was having problems with one of the sample problems in the text book. I took the question home and it also baffled me. Some of the physics questions were based on the properties of steam in a railway locomotive. They had never seen such a machine except in books. I found that the best way forward was for all of us to work as a team to pool our knowledge in order to be able to solve the difficult questions together. Fortunately all the girls did well and were able to leave the island for their second year



Part of the Convent, now incorporated into the school

at university.

The major girls' school in Roseau was the Convent. The Sister Superior had asked Wendell if I would be able to design and build a large classroom block extension to the school. The school was popular and overflowing from the convent buildings into temporary classrooms erected in the grounds. The convent itself and its church also had to provide living accommodation for the nuns themselves. It was surrounded by a perimeter wall and was located on the edge of the town centre. The imposing entrance had a large door with a big pull bell. Wendell asked me if I thought I could help and suggested that I could get advice and assistance from Barbados if needed. I had had no experience of designing a school and I knew that it was very important that it should be safe and convenient. A further complication was that it would be

used by girls at first but later it might become a mixed school. I had no idea how many toilets and washing facilities girls needed and it was quite a surprise when I found out.

Gaining access to the site was unusual. The school was part of a working convent and walled off from the surrounding town. When I first visited the site I approached the main door and rang for assistance. One of the sisters then accompanied me through the convent buildings to the site. It was immediately obvious why there had been no building there before. Parts of the island were still volcanic and at some time in the recent past there had been a volcanic eruption which had thrown layers of soft pumice rock over the site. This material which they called tarish was very useful for all sorts of construction such as road and floor bases but it could be eroded by water if it was not protected by a covering layer of impervious material. The tarish was easy to move and would provide a suitable support for the school at the bottom of the foundation trenches. Unfortunately the tarish also contained volcanic bombs. When the volcano was erupting the volcanic ash to form the tarish it was also ejecting liquid lava lumps which varied in size from cricket balls to over ten feet in diameter. These had hardened into very hard rock. We could remove the smaller ones but we had nothing which could move or break up the bigger ones. There were more than a dozen of these immediately visible and presumably this was the reason why the site had not been used for earlier buildings. In fact some of them may have been rolled in from the rest of the convent site. There was certainly no room left to roll them away again.

I reported back to Wendell and the Sister Superior. I described the bombs and Wendell said there might be a solution. I also said that I thought I could design and build the school.

As I mentioned earlier when I was in school in Abergavenny I had watched the new King Henry school being built and had been a pupil there for my last term or two. I could remember the design and I had a fair idea of the materials and techniques used. From what I remembered I drafted up plans of an identical school block of three stories tapering to two at one end because of the slope and submitted them to Wendell and the Sister Superior. In case the school took in boys as well as girls the block needed to be able to operate independently of the convent, with its own toilets, changing rooms and offices. They were



One of the large sulphur coated volcanic bombs which had landed in the "Valley of Desolation"

generally in agreement with my proposals and the size was right. The dimensions were the same as the Abergavenny school and the structure was a reinforced concrete frame infilled with concrete blockwork.

Because of the sloping ground it was possible to have more ramps than staircases with extra storage under the ramps. Unusually for Dominican schools the toilets and washrooms were to be built within the building. In the event of a severe hurricane the negative pressures generated could try to lift the roof off and destroy the school, so the school would have a pitched galvanised roof held down with shear bolts which would give way in the event of a severe storm. Because of the tropical heat the school would have an outside verandah running the whole length of each storey instead of an internal corridor. Classrooms crossing the whole width of the school ran off this corridor. Each classroom had louvered windows instead of glass leading into the verandah at the front and through the outside wall at the back. From the outside the block would look very similar to the King Henry VIII school in Abergavenny.

Once the draft plans were modified and agreed I drew up the detailed plans and sent them off to Barbados for verifying. I realised that this might be (and indeed was) the only school I would ever design, so I was determined that it was not going to fall down. When I found that any structural detail was in doubt I made it additionally strong. After a couple of weeks the plans were returned from the engineers in Barbados fully approved except for some minor changes to the steel reinforcement in the landings to the staircases between the storeys. I incorporated these changes into the design and made some modifications which they suggested would ease construction. The Sister Superior was really keen to get the school built as soon as possible because the existing buildings were so overcrowded.

We had to dismantle a short length of the perimeter wall in order to get our equipment in. The sisters helped by collecting and stacking the stone blocks from the wall so that they could be used to rebuild the wall when we had finished. They also made us lots of cold fruit juices to drink because working in the humid climate was quite a challenge. The temperatures were very high and the sun could be intense so it was easy to become dehydrated. We started to dig out the site for the foundations and the drains but soon ran into problems. As we expected the tarish was fairly easy to remove but the volcanic bombs were indestructible. Wendell knew that several of the workforce had previously worked on an extension to the runway at the airport where there had been some problems. The contractors had left a long time ago but they had used dynamite. He thought that some of it might still be stored there. A box of it was found and brought to the school site in Roseau. They also brought some fuses and fuse wire. I knew nothing about explosives except what I had learnt second hand from my parents' friends who had worked in the Welsh pits and quarries. I knew that you should drill all the holes first before you loaded the explosives in case you drilled into a charge which had not gone off. I did not know that the starchy goo we found on the outside of some of the charges was nitroglycerine which became highly volatile when it dried out. We drilled all the holes in the volcanic bombs and loaded one with a single charge and inserted a detonator. We tested the fuse wire to see



Site of school just after the start of construction

how quickly it burnt. Land Rovers in Dominica had a habit of not starting first time so we had a driver waiting on the road outside the gap in the wall with the engine running. For extra protection we had strapped a large piece of thick plywood onto the roof. We lit the fuse and jumped into the Land Rover. The driver did a passable imitation of a Grand Prix start for a hundred yards where we stopped and heard a bang. We returned and found that the charge had gone off but it had not split the boulder. We then tried with two charges and this was successful. I decided that we should load all the remaining plumbs with two charges and that we would set them off one at a time. I also realised that I did not really know what the implications were of what I was doing. We set a single fuse and jumped into the Land Rover and shot up the street where we heard the charge go off. Then we felt a rumble and looked back and saw a volcano of rock and soil rise up from behind the convent wall. We waited until the rocks had stopped dropping onto the plywood on the roof of the Land Rover. We walked back to the site and found that all the volcanic bombs had broken up beautifully. Because of the sweating of the charges once they had dried out in the heat they had gone off spontaneously. A big cheering crowd gathered rapidly and asked me if I could do it again because it was so exciting. I wondered what Wendell would say but he had difficulty in stopping laughing. He said that we should offer to replace any broken windows in the town with no questions asked. A couple of houses had had sizeable rocks come down through the roofs and through the floors and into the hurricane cellars. We replaced and repaired more than a thousand windows and roofs, many of which had clearly been broken for a long time.

We cleaned up the site and started on the foundations. My time in Dominica was sadly drawing to a close, as I needed to continue my professional training and become chartered. I was being replaced by a chartered engineer, Rickie Reade, who with his family soon became good friends. Being chartered himself he was happy to act as my training supervising engineer for the short time we were together and he signed off my work for the whole time I was in Dominica. This enabled me eventually to apply for chartered status a year earlier than I had expected. Rickie continued the work on the school to completion.

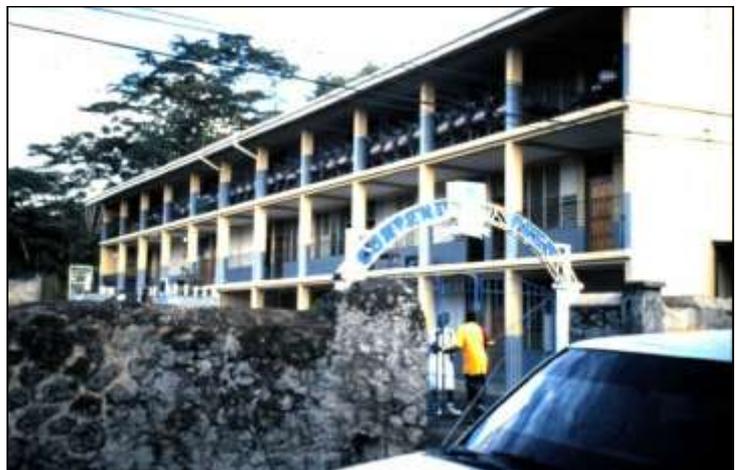
Forty years later my wife Jean and I returned to Dominica and met up with several old friends including Wendell Lawrence. After I had left he had got a more senior job in Barbados, but when he retired he had returned to Dominica. He had been persuaded to accept the voluntary job of supervising engineer for Dominica's churches, over a hundred of them, of different denominations and all well used. He said that he was working just as hard as ever but not being paid. We arranged a visit to the school. The convent had closed but the convent complex was a very busy school. We went to the King Henry block which looked splendid and had recently been repainted. We were welcomed by the principal who gave us tea and showed us around. The teachers now were salaried and the school was mixed. She said that when



The steps and ramp up to the first floor

Hurricane David hit the island some years previously, the King Henry block was one of only five major buildings still habitable. For a while it had housed hundreds of displaced Dominican families.

As we were leaving and crossing the playground we were approached by a group of children. They asked if I was the man who had built their school. I said that I had designed it but that most of the building had taken place after I had left. They looked at each other and then at me. One of them then asked, "Mister, why didn't you give us a cafeteria?" Children are the same, but how times have changed.



The school entrance to the King Henry block

FROM THE ARCHIVES 1962-63

These photographs were presented by David Eastwood, and were among the first to be taken on the steps of the new school shortly after the transfer from the old school at Penypound. David cannot vouch for the accuracy of every name, so if you think there are any errors please contact the editor.



KHS Sixth Form 1962-63

Top row: Stuart Jordan Anthony Adams Clive Swinnerton David Jones David Whittington
Second row: John Burridge Graham Elliot Joe Griffiths Rob McAdam
Third row: Phil "Fred" Kerton Robin Phillips Louis Taylor Mike Barnie Viv Bevan
Front row: Barry Edwards David Eastwood Mike Penny Mrs "Fanny" Jones Alan Walker Roderick Dove



KHS 1st XV 1962-63

Back row: Dr Isaac (Head) Anthony Adams Lewis Jones Clive Swinerton Doug Warren Mike Williams Gwyn Jones (Games Teacher)
 Middle row: Carl Davis Chris Somerton David Eastwood Bob Phillips (capt) Mike Penny Phil Pritchard David Jones
 Bottom row: John Powell Alan Walker Mike Powell Fred Jones

ESCAPADES IN TENTS AND ON THE DANCE FLOOR

In his own words, Reg Morgan "attended King Henry VIII penal institution from 1952-59". After working in Environmental Health in Somerset, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire, he returned to Abergavenny where he looked after the Meat Hygiene Section of Monmouth Borough Council and set up the Poultry Meat Inspection service at the Sun Valley turkey plant. He took early retirement at the age of 53. To relieve the tedium of school life Reg was active on the social front, and in this memoir he recalls his involvement with the KHGS Camping Club and the annual school dance at Harold Road.

Mike Davies and I were the founding members of the KHGS Camping Club whose sole purpose in life was to provide a safe and environmentally friendly campsite for the poor deprived pupils of the upper school, and where their parents had complete confidence in the knowledge that the well being and welfare of the campers was of the utmost importance.

At the end of each school year Mike and I would decamp to St Mary's Vale and pitch some tents several days before the end of term. We had to make sure that the site was safe for the poor lads and to make certain we collected monies and spent it on the essential necessities of life to sustain them when they arrived at the campsite. We therefore had to spend several days at the site to organise this and as a result arrived each morning at assembly looking like pale shadows of our former selves.



The big night arrived and they came to be greeted by bottles of beer, cider, wine, or if they had not contributed they had to bring their own.

The boys were always provided with a welcoming and warming fire which had been collected by cutting down tree branches and scrub wood gleaned from the surrounding area.

These social occasions were conducted in the manner expected of the behaviour of pupils from the school, and we did not let it down, and much merriment and debauchery carried on until the small hours.

Everyone attending was expected to attend assembly in the morning and there were many ashen faces and trembling knees to be seen.

On one occasion Chris Jennings came (he who was later to become my brother in law), and he was chopsy and thought he knew it all. This did not please the gathering so I gave him a bottle of home brewed elderberry syrup. This was a vicious brew which was supposed to be diluted in hot water and drunk in small quantities for the relief of coughs and colds. Chris

downed the lot, and we all retired to bed. Chris had bought an ex-army sleeping bag and this had an external waterproof covering, which once zipped up made him look like an Egyptian mummy. We had not long retired when there were strangled cries from the direction of the mummy asking to be let out as he did not feel well. The boys in the tent, now thoroughly fed up, opened the flap and pushed Chris (still in his sleeping bag) out onto the wet grass, where he was promptly sick and spent the rest of the night there.

There was another memorable time when, after many ales, it was decided to go and visit a young lady who lived at High Beeches, Llwyndu – several of the boys had amorous feelings for her. I am led to believe that her brother was present and offered to show them the way.

The path was very steep and narrow and we carefully picked our way in the darkness. Suddenly Monty Arkell who was near the front leapt off the path into what we thought was a pile of bracken. Monty let out shrieks of pain and thrashed around in the bush. We thought he had injured himself and rushed to help, but it was soon apparent why Monty was making so much noise.

The pile of bracken turned out to be a gorse bush and Monty had gone head first into it. It took a lot of effort to get him out and all amorous thoughts and lust had by now long disappeared. The plan was abandoned and we returned to camp and retired to our tents. In the morning Monty was lying moaning and when his shirt and trousers were removed we found that his back, buttocks and thighs were studded with thick black thorns. Gleefully the sadistic pack descended on him and ripped the thorns from his flesh. Monty preferred to stand for the next few days, and did not take up the kind offers when his fellow class mates gave him their seats.

Not all the boys were residents and some only came for the evening and then returned home. One of these was Jeremy Price who lived at the top end of Chapel Road. Jeremy had turned up with his bike and decided to cycle home in the early hours. Now in those days the track through the vale was rutted and had a stream running alongside it. It was with great interest that the assembled throng gathered on the campsite above the vale and watched as Jeremy cycled off into the darkness. The only way we could follow his progress was by the bobbling headlight on the bike. He was doing quite well until there was an almighty crash and Jeremy and the bike disappeared into the stream. The rest of the journey was then accomplished by Jeremy pushing his mangled bike home.

As we were now coming to the end of our school days we decided to have a special bash, and a barrel of cider was purchased. Mike somehow got hold of an

old shop bike with one of the large metal carriers over the front wheel, and the cider was taken up to the camp site.

We had to return down to town and we came hell for leather down the hill from the vale only to see to our horror an oil tanker delivering to a house and completely blocking our path at the top of Chapel Road. As I had a racing bike I managed to scrape between the vehicle and the hedge but Mike had no chance. He did a heroic impression of a kamikaze pilot and threw himself off his bike in a cloud of dust and gravel before crashing into the gate that led down to Avenue Road. I seem to remember that the parentage of the tanker driver was then questioned. Mike tells me that to this day he still carries the scars on his upper thighs. Not being into that sort of stuff, I am unable to confirm or verify this.

I cannot remember much about this party, and I put it down to senile dementia, as Mike suffers from this as well. It may be that some of the stories told above may have happened on this last camp. All I can recall

is that we had to clear up afterwards, and Mike and I had to return the now empty barrel of cider. We had placed it back in the front of the shop bike, covered it with a sack to preserve the dignity of the school, and were cycling down Chapel Road. Coming up the other way was Mr Harold (Acer) Sharpe, the Deputy Headmaster.

As we approached him a sudden gust of wind blew the sack off the barrel and it was exposed to all and sundry. A wry smile flitted across Acer's face and he said, "Good morning boys, and have a good day", before disappearing into his house. It was as if he expected to meet his pupils every day cycling down the road with barrels of cider being carried on the panniers of shop bikes.

I don't know whether anyone carried on our pioneering spirit after we left, but I can now imagine that if it happened today, swarms of SWAT units would raid the site, after complaints of noise, under-age drinking etc, and that ASBOs would be floating around like confetti at a wedding.

One of the highlights of the social events was the annual dance held between the boys of KHGS and the Girls High School in Harold Road.

As we were now in the sixth form girls had disappeared from skinny swathes and were now cuddly and buxom young women who needed our attention.

We therefore decided that the dance to be held at Harold Road should be a special occasion that year. As we were in the biology lab we approached Mrs (Fanny) Jones and asked if we could conduct experiments on the effects of yeast on sugar solutions. Fanny's eyes lit up; here were her boys showing an interest at last, even proposing an experiment, and all those doubts she had had about our ability were consigned to the dustbin. All her efforts had not been in vain and her decision to go into teaching had been vindicated. She readily agreed, and with a short period of time demijohns were soon bubbling away in our office.

As the months passed we studied in the lab, with the comforting sound of glub-glub assisting us to attack our studies with more vigour.

The evening of the dance came, and we gathered in the lab in our glad rags and looked at our hooch, which had been decanted and filtered.

There was a bottle of pure ethyl alcohol in the lab cupboard, and it was decided to pour half of this into our hooch. The bottle was immediately filled up with water from the tap so that it would appear that no-one had touched it.

We then got stuck in and soon a warm glow both from our stomachs and the steam coming out of our ears filled the room.

The trek to Harold Road started, but we were invited into Pager Jenkins' house in Chapel Road where he produced a bottle of vodka, and we had a swig.

We arrived at the dance, where Fanny and the Head Mistress of the Girls School were sitting as chaperones, and Fanny's eyes lit up as her boys leapt



onto the dance floor grabbing the girls and twirling them around in a lively fashion.

The evening was proceeding in an orderly if somewhat excitable fashion until Pager disappeared outside and came back smoking a cigarette on the dance floor. This was unheard of, and though fags were smoked behind the bike shed and bushes, they were never smoked in front of teachers.

Pager was told to put his cigarette out, and he walked across and stubbed it out on the wall immediately above the Head Mistress's head. The unfortunate woman was engulfed in fag ash and burning remnants of tobacco.

There are moments in your life when you realise that things are going wrong, and this was one of them. We stood transfixed to the floor, and were then asked to leave the premises. All our hopes of fun and pleasure in the bushes were dashed, and we left in complete humiliation.

The next morning Fanny was not pleased and gave us a complete rolocking as we had let both her and the school down. Needless to say there were no more experiments allowed in the lab.

PS. I would never have had the courage to print this if Fanny was still alive. But I did invite her to my wedding, and I can remember her drinking a gin at the reception in the old Lamb and Flag.

ANAGRAMS, SHNANAGRAMS

This page was going to be blank, so on the principle that nature does indeed abhor a vacuum I decided to fill it. Inspired by Marlo Hall who sent me an email containing a few anagrams that I found faintly amusing, I decided to hunt out a few more. I hope you enjoy them. If you don't, please send your complaints to Marlo. Ed

Anagrams are something of a curiosity. I remember one of the first times I came across anagrams, in one of those puzzle corners you find in kids comics. The question was "Can you create an anagram from the word CHESTY?" I must have been very young at the time as I thought the word CHESTY was a bit naughty to include in my comic, and I had no idea what an anagram was. I looked it up in my dictionary, then tried to solve the puzzle. I failed. Looking at the bottom of the page at the upside-down writing I saw the answer was SCYTHE. Not much wiser I went back to my dictionary, but ever since then I've had a lifelong interest in words and word puzzles of all kinds.

Puzzles of the CHESTY=SCYTHE kind leave the dedicated puzzler with a dissatisfied so-what feeling. A really good anagram must have balance, where the solution has a funny or surprising or interesting resonance with the problem word or words. The following pairs show some good, sometimes excellent, examples.

astronomer = moon starrer
the eyes = they see
the Morse code = here come dots
garbage man = bag manager
election results = lies – let's recount
snooze alarms = alas, no more Z's
eleven plus two = twelve plus one
mother-in-law = woman Hitler
bad credit = debit card
comfort is = Microsoft
laxative = exit lava
schoolmaster = the classroom
starting prices = racing tipsters

Compiling anagrams is a serious study. Creating ever more complicated and clever pairings is the work of the *anagrammatist* who refers to the original word or phrase as the *subject*. Some have gone to the extent of taking a whole sonnet or a Shakespeare speech and rearranging the whole thing in anagrammatic form, sometimes echoing or parodying the theme. To these individuals I say - get a life! Anagrams are essentially just a diversion, and in my view should be more or less instantly recognisable as containing the same letters as the subject. Who could be bothered to check through every letter of On a Grecian Urn to make sure that the parody is complete? Not me.

Anagrams in English have a relatively short history, as the vagaries in spelling (often within the same document) made mixing up the letters of words for amusement slightly pointless. But for a more stable language like Latin the practice was highly venerated, as in

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum
(Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you) =
Virgo serena, pia, munda et immaculata
(Serene virgin, pious, clean and spotless)

(I realise I need not have translated the Latin for our Old Boys, but the Gobannian is read by a few non grammar school boys!)

On to some slightly more complicated examples:-
a domesticated animal = docile, as a man tamed it
a shoplifter = has to pilfer
television programming = permeating living rooms
the countryside = no city dust here
Statue of Liberty = built to stay free

Famous personalities are a rich source for the anagrammatist. From the long dead

William Shakespeare = I am a weakish speller
Florence Nightingale = Nigel, fetch an iron leg
to the not quite so long dead
Alec Guinness = genuine class
to the (in some cases) possibly brain dead
Jennifer Aniston = fine in torn jeans
Madonna Louise Ciccone = occasional nude income
Clint Eastwood = Old West action
Justin Timberlake = I'm a jerk, but listen
to probably dead but perhaps still working in a chip
shop near you, Elvis = lives!

Here I have to reveal my all-time favourite celebrity anagram. Not the wildly inaccurate

Margaret Thatcher = that great charmer
but that other female Conservative cabinet minister,
charmless in the extreme, so cleverly described as
Virginia Bottomley = I'm an evil Tory bigot.

And here's a cruel comment on the former prime minister as his popularity figures plummeted
Tony Blair MP = I'm Tory Plan B

In 1975 Sir Peter Scott coined the name *Nessiteras Rhombopteryx* for the Loch Ness monster, presumably with tongue firmly in cheek. The Greek translation is *the monster of Ness with the diamond shaped fin*. The newspapers were quick to point out the anagrammatic translation

Monster hoax by Sir Peter S
This was countered by Peter Rines, who claimed to have taken two underwater pictures of Nessie, by the announcement

Yes, both pix are monsters, R.
An elegant and erudite use of the genre.

In spite of what I said earlier about the excessive lengths some anagrammatists have gone to, it is worth finally recording a couple of the clever medium length anagrams out there.

The end of the world is nigh =
Down this hole, frightened!

Twenty thousand leagues under the sea =
Huge water tale stuns. End had you tense.

That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind =
A thin man ran; makes a large stride; left planet, pins flag on the Moon! On to Mars!

The best things in life are free =
Nail-biting refreshes the feet!

On that note I will leave it, having given you more anagrams than you would ever wish to see. However, I hope you agree it was better than leaving a blank page!