PLAYING THE GAME

A memoir of the Duke of York's
Royal Military School 1968-75

by Colin Wiles

"Man is a creature that can get used to anything, and I think that is the best definition of him"

Fyodor Dostoevsky: The House of the Dead

FOR PENNY

Preface

On the 9th September 1968, when I was eleven years' old, I was sent away to a military boarding school in Dover, twenty miles along the coast from my home town of Ramsgate.

The school had been founded in 1801 as The Royal Military Asylum by Frederick, Duke of York (the "Grand Old Duke" of the nursery rhyme). It offered a home to the orphaned sons and daughters of soldiers who had been killed during the Napoleonic wars. It was established on the King's Road in Chelsea, in a building that is now the Saatchi Gallery. By 1814 there were 1,400 pupils but the school stopped admitting girls some time in the mid-1800's, (but they returned in 1994).

The school re-located to the cliffs above Dover in 1909, having outgrown its Chelsea premises. It was re-named The Duke of York's Royal Military School.
My brother had been a pupil at the school ten years before me, from 1958 to 1965.

The main purpose of the school was to provide a stable education for boys whose fathers were moving constantly between the outposts of the receding Empire. I spent seven years at the school and left aged eighteen in July 1975. This memoir seeks to give a flavour of the school and an account of the regime that was in place during those years.

Note on the text: I started writing this memoir in 2001. Since then I have updated it with new information and impressions. I re-issued it in 2018 to co-incide with the 50-year reunion of our intake year. I have also added some new information as a result of obtaining a copy of my school file in 2018. By 2023 I decided it was time to publish it as a physical booklet.

Scattered throughout the text are some quotes from the Lewis Rudd book listed in the bibliography, and quotes from other figures, such General Archibald Nye, another old boy. These aim to give some historical context about the school.

ONE

"I'm going to the house up on the hill"

9th September 1968. A cloudless day on the Isle of Thanet in the late heat of summer.

It started badly because the bus was late. For forty minutes I had to stand with my parents, with the cheap army suitcase on the pavement beside me. I was eleven. We were outside the gents' hairdressers, a short walk up the hill from our house on Grange Road.. The suitcase was made of laminated cardboard and was cream on one side and chocolate brown on the other, with the letters XX embossed in gold in one corner – XX for the the twentieth battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, my father's regiment.

A dozen miners were standing on the corner opposite, waiting for the bus to take them to the colliery. The parents of several of my schoolmates were standing across the road, chatting. They were glancing at us. The local schools had all gone back a few days before and I knew that they would tell my old school friends about me. I felt the shame and embarrassment of being different from my old chums, of standing out. I felt like an outsider. I hoped that the bus would come quickly.

In the brown and cream suitcase were the items bought from the list that had been sent to my parents several weeks earlier by Major John Dominy, the housemaster of Roberts' House. It is an extraordinary letter (See Appendix 1). Apart from the atrocious grammar and punctuation (and the general incomprehensibility of the instructions it contains) the general tone seems to be, "We will own your son from now on, we know what is best for him, so keep your distance otherwise it will be bad for him.".

We had spent many anxious days buying all the items and checking them off. A wash bag with flannel, soap dish, toothbrush, nail clippers, comb, dressing gown, slippers, a briefcase.

The year before, I had sat the Eleven Plus and passed, although I had no inkling of its importance at the time. I had also been called into the headmaster's study at St Laurence Junior School to sit another exam. I had obviously passed this as well because, late in 1967 or perhaps in the early months of 1968 I had been called to the Duke of York's for a further selection exam and interview, with my father. It was the first time I had ever spent much time with him. He was a remote and aloof figure, who rarely spoke in our home. He'd spent much of the war in Burma and India and had witnessed God-knows what horrors.

It was the first time I had been to the school, even though my brother had spent seven years there. The boy applicants were all put in a dormitory together, and the fathers slept elsewhere. We sat a written exam and had an interview, of which I remember nothing, and we slept in iron-framed beds with crisp white sheets, covered by canary-yellow counterpanes in a high ceilinged dormitory. A blue nightlight shone in the ceiling, casting an eerie glow around the room. I lay awake with the unfamiliar sound of other boys breathing around me, the wind whistling in the pine trees. Then around midnight the fathers all came back from the Dover pubs, talking loudly.

An embarrassing incident occurred the next day, in the Dining Hall. A group of boys stopped talking as I approached and one of them said to me "You're flying without a licence." His name was Steve Lee. I was puzzled until it was explained to me that this meant that my flies were undone. Apart from this, I remember very little of that earlier visit. I cannot recall any of the tests or interviews that took place, only a sense of the oddness of the place, the vast grounds and the low brick buildings, the huge dining hall, the smell of floor polish and the strange, greasy food, the high ceilinged rooms and wooden-floored halls, the tall pine trees and the clocktower, with its priapic leaded roof.

Afterwards my father said that it had been his performance that had secured me entrance to the school. He had impressed the panel with his war record, he said. He implied that it was nothing to do with me.

When I had told my schoolmates that I would be going away to a boarding school they looked at me with a mixture of puzzlement and pity. I was not old enough, or

brave enough to query or challenge what was being done to me. It was just how things were. A part of me was excited at this new adventure. I was different, and would be setting out on a separate course to my Ramsgate schoolmates.
The bus passed through the East Kent countryside. Combine harvesters trailed

> *"A more careful selection of entrants should be made so that, while due importance should be given to the services of the father, boys should only ordinarily be admitted who had something to offer the School from the point of view of intelligence, athletic ability, character etc., so that the backward boy would be eliminated and not become a drag on the progress of the remainder".*
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> **General Sir Archibald Nye (a school commissioner and old boy) 1954**

clouds of dust as the harvest was gathered in. Finally, we were delivered to the back gate of the school, the Guston Gate, flanked by two red-roofed Garden-City style lodges. The bus had, for some reason, taken a different route into Dover, so we had to walk along past the master's houses and the language block and the assault course, until we found the third house along, Roberts' House. This was one of eight brick-gabled, single storey houses arranged along the curved spine road. Inside we found groups of bewildered new boys, eleven-year-olds like me. Anxious, proud parents chatted to each other or to the masters, or stood in awkward silence. I was shown to my bed in the high-ceilinged dormitory, someone checked my name off a list. There were too many people, too many voices, too much to take in. After a while I noticed that my parents had disappeared. They thought it would be less traumatic for me not to say goodbye. I recall a feeling of fear and excitement and aloneness. I unpacked my suitcase and began my new life.

"The first impression one receives on viewing the buildings is that of a model village…The numerous buildings are on the bungalow system, built on the cliffs, over four hundred feet above sea level….In the large oak-panelled Dining Hall the names of the Victor Ludorum, and the cricket, football and hockey teams of each succeeding year are to be found….Each of the dormitories consists of two long bungalows, connected with one another in the form of the letter H, being divided into three dormitories with 25 beds in each, with a recreation room…. The spacious swimming bath runs parallel with the gymnasium, is 84 feet by 45 feet, and the depth of water is 3 feet to 6 feet 6 inches with a gallery. It is one of the finest in the South of England…."

Lewis Rudd 1935

One of the first things you noticed was the smell. It is a smell I find hard to describe, over half a century later, but it has hit me once or twice over the years, and brings me to my senses like smelling salts. Suddenly I am back there; a confused eleven year old, puzzled with the shape and meaning of this new world. How to describe it? A mix of floor polish and soap, damp buttoned cloth, grease, disinfectant, putrefaction, chloroform, shoe polish, bubbling stew and tea. Institutionalised humanity, and fresh laundry. It was a sweet yet rancid smell. I am struggling to explain it, but any of my fellow pupils would, I am sure, recognise the importance of this smell. It defined our time at the school.

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We found that we had a day of grace before the other years arrived, time in which to acclimatise ourselves before the onslaught of the bigger boys. A handful of second and third formers were there to induct us. We soon discovered that we were the lowest of the low – "newchies". If we attempted to talk to a second or third former they would ignore you, or abuse you for being insolent, depending on their mood. They had been through it themselves in previous years, so it was your turn to suffer now. There was a strict pecking order.

There was a boy called Moody they kept talking about. The second year boys were obsessed with him. He was obviously the butt of all their bullying and spite, but a figure of some fascination too.

The dormitory had nine or ten grey iron- framed beds on each side and a narrow varnished plywood locker next to each one, about 6 feet tall, where all of our clothes and possessions were stored. The dormitory was high ceilinged, with visible mansard trusses emerging from the walls, like flying buttresses. There was a tiny blue night light in the centre of the ceiling. The beds were designed to stack one upon the other and presumably had once been used as bunk beds. There were large wooden framed windows down each side and a large window with a never-opened door and a semi-circular fanlight at the end looking out onto the road and the assault course beyond. All of the floors were made of polished wooden blocks.

Within two days of arriving at the school we were issued with our clothing and other equipment – trousers, shirts, blazers, ties and shoes for everyday use. Rugby shirts and shorts, pyjamas, underwear. We were also issued with our blues, the stiff blue-black ceremonial uniform for Sunday church parades. This happened at the Quartermaster's stores, which was next to the Tuck Shop. The stores were staffed by a lugubrious Quartermaster and his less than helpful assistants. They seemed reluctant to give you anything and eyed you up and down before traipsing off to find the required item. Behind the long counter there were shelves that seemed to reach high up into the rafters and on the wall there was a sign that said, "Miracles we do at once…The impossible may take a little longer." The place had an evocative mixed-up smell of polish, Blanco and Duraglit. It was a very calm place. Once we had been issued with our kit, our civilian clothes were packed away for the duration. Our individual identity was submerged into the school.

Each house was built in the shape of an 'H', with a dormitory in three of the wings and the housemaster's residence in the fourth. Adjacent to each dormitory there was a washroom, with a night toilet (strictly out of bounds during the day), several showers, a single bath and a row of wash hand-basins. The washroom contained a couple of huge wicker baskets used for storing laundry and was floored and walled to waist height with a strange knobbly ceramic material. There

was a large high-ceilinged dayroom in the middle of the house, also floored with parquet blocks. There were no carpets anywhere. Between two of the dormitories, extending from the dayroom towards the main spine road, there was a TV room, another common room, used by older boys and then, at a lower level, a toilet area and a boot room that always smelt of dried mud, lined with baking hot water pipes, where rugby kit was left to dry. Next to the bootroom was a locked door that led into the system of tunnels that joined the school buildings.

Between the other two wings of the house there was a modern flat- roofed study block, with six studies, three each side of a passageway. I think these were being built in our first year. They were cheap and out of character with the other buildings.

The eight houses were named after famous army commanders and each had its own colour, used for rugby shirts, the counterpanes on beds, the stripes that house prefects wore on their ties and so on. The doors of each house were also painted in these colours. From the front entrance on the Deal-Dover road, as you walked along the curved spine road, the houses were on your left: Marlborough (dark blue), Wolfe (yellow), Clive (green), Wellington (light blue), Wolseley (dark green), Roberts (black), Kitchener (red) and Haig (light blue).

Chris Merry has pointed out to me that the houses were arranged in chronological order – Marlborough being the oldest and Haig the "youngest" of the army commanders. Haig and Wolseley changed places at the end of my first year, so that Wolseley ended up next to the staff common room and the Dining Hall.

Almost all the school buildings were single storey, The only time we encountered stairs was in the new science block, the gallery in the chapel and the spectator galleries of the gym and the swimming pool.

The school had extensive grounds. Behind the chapel acres of playing fields stretch out, used for rugby, cricket and hockey and flanked by copses of tall Scotch pines. Behind the pavilion there were grass tennis courts. In front of Wolfe House there was a cinder athletics track. Opposite the Tuck Shop and the Quartermaster stores is a swimming pool and a gymnasium, and a huge asphalted parade ground where

we marched up and down to practice our drill and where the Sunday parades took place. Below Kitchener house there are more playing fields, some ploughed fields (I do not recall any crops ever growing there), a shooting range and an assault course. In my lower sixth I went on an Outward Bound course to the Lake District and spent weeks training on this course, with bricks in ammunition pouches to weigh me down. The ploughed field beyond the shooting range may have been replaced by a golf course. Behind the pool and gym there are numerous administrative buildings and the boiler house. The whole school is surrounded by a steel fence in battleship grey, perhaps two metres high with outward pinting spikes.

The dormitories in our house were named after Roberts' victories - Kandahar, Lucknow, Paardeburg. The names meant nothing to me then. (Yet when I wrote those lines, in October 2001, the airport at Kandahar was being bombed by American B52's, as we pursued the liberation of Afghanistan from the dictatorship of the Taliban.

TWO

"There's someone in my head but it's not me"

We immediately encountered our housemaster, Major Dominy, the man who dominated my first two years in the school. Dominy, well over six foot tall, with his handlebar moustache and booming voice, looked and sounded like a guardsman from the Napoleonic wars. He had a vicious streak, and could reduce little boys to tears. The time spent under his "care" was fearful and anxious; fear of being caught, fear of being found out, fear of being picked upon. Dominy's nickname was Tash and his much smaller wife Edwina, a mousy-haired, dumpy, pretty yet fierce woman, was known as Tish. They were quite unmatched physically. She too could be vicious in her own way, and would bully any potential rebel until she broke him down. I can remember her persecution of Steve Simmons for some unknown crime. It lasted a whole weekend.

Dominy coached the first fifteen rugby team. The squad came to our house once for tea with Dominy and we were introduced to them. They seemed like giants.

One Saturday evening Dominy caught me and Simon Daniels bouncing on our beds. For the next two hours he made us change from one outfit to another and back again, from our school uniform to our rugby kit to our dress uniform to our pyjamas, again and again. At each change we would have to stand by our beds and wait for him to return for an inspection. We were eleven. On another occasion someone left out two milk bottles on a shelf and the milk turned sour. He made the whole house stand by their beds, again on a Saturday evening, until the culprit confessed. Once, Dominy suspected that tobacco was hidden somewhere on the premises and again, on a precious Saturday evening, the whole house had to stand by their beds while he carried out a search. For at least two hours we stood waiting in whispered silence, until, finally, he was vindicated. Two cigars and a cigarette were found in Gary Coward's blue transistor radio. Coward was duly caned, I believe. (Twenty five years later, I saw Colonel Coward being interviewed on BBC television, as the United Nations' spokesman in Bosnia. General Sir Gary Coward later became a governor of the school, so perhaps Dominy's methods had some effect).

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Next we were taught to drill. To march in formation, stand at attention; turn to the left and right, salute, quick march, slow march, eyes left, eyes front – all the essential things that boy soldiers need to do. Regimental Sergeant Major Douglas Haig and his sidekick Colour Sergeant Major Jack Forrest were our teachers. We spent hour after tedious hour on the parade ground or in the drill hall, with them shouting, cajoling and adjusting us until we could do a reasonable impression of a boy soldier. Even then there were boys who simply could not master the basics, who would march with their feet and hands swinging together instead of against each other, whose beret rims were always stuck high on their foreheads instead of an inch above their eye, in the prescribed fashion. Cajoling, shouting and threats of violence seemed not to work.

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In October of my first term, aged eleven, about six weeks after I started, I wrote to my eldest sister. She was married to Robert Lovelady and had just had a baby, Claire, born in August 1968. The original letter (published in the alumni magazine) is at Appendix 2, but this is the transcript of the letter (spelling and punctuation as in the original):

20.10.68
Roberts House
D.Y.R.M.S
Dover

Dear Lesley and Robert.
I hope you are allright. I am I hope Clair is allright as well. Today we had a parade we are now wearing our blues. Our housemaster is major Dominy. Our matron is horrible she is ever so old. The lessons we have are quite easy especially maths. Also we do French and Latin. The history master always does ancient tortures on you if you are naughty, the best one is the guillotine where he puts your head through the window and closes the window on your neck then everyone comes past and hits them. Yesterday the under 13 team played Sir Roger Manwood at Sandwich and beat them 67-0 which is quite good. Last night we had a film it was called the Bo-Bo really it was an A but it was quite good. My worst subject is English we have Capt Burnie for it he is allright but I do not like him much. The other day I got two sides off him they are sides of paper and you have to write about the subject the person who gives you them tells you to do I had to write about attention.

A boy in our house got 4 strokes the other night off Major Dominy. They were about half and inch thick and if you touched them they started to bleed.

Over the page I have put a map of the school.

We have watched some of the Olympic games and I know that Britain have won 2 Gold Medals.

Love
Colin

What strikes me about this letter is the lack of self-pity. It is pure reportage – *"this is how things are, and this is my life now"*. Perhaps a bolder or more self-aware or courageous child would have written, *"Get me out of this hell-hole"*!

Dominy often took us on weekly runs on Sunday mornings after parade and chapel – as if we hadn't done enough during the rest of the week. We ran out onto the clifftops, past the three huge radio pylons – RAF Swingate - that dominate the school. This was our training for the annual school marathon, which took place in March (I think) every year. It was an inter-house race of two and a half miles around the school perimeter. He took the marathon very seriously. He wanted his house to win. Everyone in the house had to take part. At lunch on the day of the race Dominy would stalk the dining hall and stop you from eating too much. He said it would stop you running fast if you had too much inside you; this is despite the fact that we felt half starved most of the time. The race began with a mass start by the Chapel, set off by a starting pistol, the real runners poised expectantly at the front. Within minutes the field was spread out over half a mile, the stragglers jogging and walking and coughing at the rear, spurred on by Dominy and his stooges. The course went through ploughed fields and up every available hill. Dominy saw it as a virtue if you crossed the line and puked up on the grass. If he saw a boy spewing at the finish line he would slap him on the back and congratulate him, "Well done boy, that's the spirit!". Every runner's time and position was carefully logged and the results of the House and individual races were duly posted for all to see.

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In our first summer, when we had the house photo taken, George Gelder, in the year above me, made a face, pushing his lower lip up over his upper lip, like a bulldog, and it was captured in the published print. Dominy called the whole house together in the Day Room and gave a speech about honour, the honour of the house, the need for discipline, for order. None of us knew what had happened but we knew something bad was coming. We waited for the axe to fall.

Years later I saw film of the famous session of the Ba'ath party, where hundreds of Saddam Hussein's party colleagues had been gathered together in a hall. In an echo of Stalin's show trials, a disgraced party official who had been tortured,

read from a prepared script and denounced, one by one, dozens of his colleagues. A cigar-smoking Saddam looked on as the conspirators were led away from the hall to be shot by their former colleagues. It rang a bell. They always say that those who have been to an English boarding school cope well with imprisonment. On the same basis, I feel that we also have an instinctive understanding of how dictatorships work.

Perhaps the analogy goes too far because Gelder wasn't shot, he was only caned, but the atmosphere felt familiar.

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Am I being unfair to Dominy and his wife? Did they actually have hearts of gold? In the first two years I had to go to a specialist dentist in Dover where I had a cemented-in brace fitted and Mrs Dominy would take me on these trips, in her large old estate car. She would drop me off and then go shopping in town. Perhaps I am being unfair? In the school magazine "The Yorkist" (1969 edition) John Hare, the House captain (and my idol and mentor, so I trust his judgement), devotes two thirds of his summary of the year to various sporting achievements. This sample gives a flavour of the prevailing ethos:

"In the week before the marathon, three people from the House 'eight' were off games. The final straw came when Regelous, the House cross-country captain, broke his arm days before the event. However, this only had the effect of making everyone doubly determined to win. Regelous decided to run, plaster-cast and all, gained fourth place and Roberts won the House trophy"

Well done Regelous! John Hare closes with these comments:

"It only remains for me to say thank you to everyone in and out of the House for making this year such a happy and successful one, and to wish the best of luck to everyone next year".

A happy and successful year? It's not how I remember it. Years later I read George Orwell's essay "Such, Such Were the Joys" about his prep school days in Eastbourne. I recognised Dominy and his wife in the portrait painted by Orwell

of his own Headmaster and Headmistress. I do not believe that they were as bad as Orwell's persecutors but they were not good people, unless they thought that tough love was good for us. Between them, they broke boys in the way that horses are broken. I found that the best policy was to keep your head down and hope for the best. And the best you could hope for was to be left alone.

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It is the emphasis upon sport and sporting achievement that is, I think, my greatest criticism of the School. If you go back and look at past copies of the "The Yorkist", the House reports at the end of each year are dominated by sporting news. Perhaps 50 or 60 percent of the text relates to success or failure in sport. Additionally, there are long and detailed appraisals of every team in every sport, with only a few pages devoted to non-sporting activities. Throughout the rugby season the school held "starred" matches, where compulsory attendance was required on a Saturday afternoon. Every pupil, whether they were interested in rugby or not, had to spend a cold and often damp afternoon watching the first fifteen in action against other public and grammar schools in the area. The penalties for non-attendance were severe. It was a form of institutionalised hero-worship. *"Here is the first fifteen, the gladiators of the school. Thou shalt come and worship them"*. Throughout the year there would be a constant cycle of inter-house matches in rugby, hockey, swimming, cricket, athletics, even tug of war. This sporting ethic was a kind of throwback to some glorified, nineteenth century view of education. *"Feed the body and not the mind"*. If you were no good at sports but clever, articulate or artistic it counted for less. Boys with talents in areas other than sport were rarely encouraged to follow their vocation, and in may cases were taunted for their pains. As a late developer, I was unsuited to rugby and hated the violence of it, the bitter taste of mud in your mouth, the dreadful songs, and the false bonhomie. Training seemed to involve endless circuits of the pitch, panting for breath in the cold winter air. I hated hockey as well, which struck me as being almost as dangerous as rugby. But I played cricket for the school and was always involved in impromptu games of football (not an official sport at that time, although it is now). In one of my school reports I was described as a "stylish hurdler" and I ran for the school at cross-country. I was also a keen gymnast and became involved in canoeing, judo (orange belt) and sailing. Yet by the sixth form I had opted out of sport altogether, a reaction to the prevailing

rugger-bugger sporting ethic. I spent most of my time during those last two years with fellow sport-haters, like Jed Gardiner and Porcs Lawrence. It was a stupid waste, because I enjoyed physical exercise and within a few years of leaving the school I was running proper marathons, including the first London marathon in 1981. In my opinion, the sporting ethos of the school was self-defeating, turning some people against sport, in some cases forever.

But perhaps all of the above amounts to jealousy on my part. It must have been a great feeling to be a sporting hero, admired by the rest of the school. I can see the appeal of it, but I was outside the loop.

This sporting ethic is on display in the school song, a sub-Kiplingesque piece of work called "Play Up Dukies". The words were written by a commandant of the school, Colonel Nugent, in the early years of the twentieth century and are a blatant steal from Sir Henry Newbolt's Vitaï Lampada. (*"But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks, Play up! Play up! and play the game!"*).

Chorus:

"Be it peace or be it war, Play up Dukies
As your fathers did before, Play up Dukies
For the honour of your name, take the torch and fan the flame.
Play the game, Play the game, Play up Dukies"

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A few days before my first term, playing on the beach at Ramsgate, I had cut my foot badly on a piece of glass. It became infected and I was told to stay in bed for two or three days. So I missed some of the inductions, including a nature ramble with Tish along the cliffs. I was in confined to bed in the dorm with the bigger boys, an outsider again, who so wanted to fit in.

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Some of the names from that first year. Mark Avery Lindsay Gilmour, Dominic

Godfrey, Peter Lawrence, Jim Carr, Dave Harris, Derek Regelous, John Hare, Gary Coward, Michael Barnes, Mark Sneyd. Something Baker. Something Moody. Something Liddell. I remember the surnames, because boys were known only by their surnames, not their first names. It was a method they used to take your identity away from you, part of the dehumanisation, to break you in. I made friends with Simon Daniels. Peter (Porcs) Lawrence was in my dorm. Now a retired teacher and artist I see him regularly. Hugh Creswell. Jim Carr. Who else? The names don't spring immediately to mind. There was someone in our dormitory who repeatedly wet his bed during that first year. I can remember his shame and embarrassment, but I cannot see his face. In the second year there was Jed Gardiner, Chris Merry, Peter Jarvis, Howard Leslie, Joe Corr.

They tried to kid us with bullshit when we first arrived. A favourite prank was to tell a new boy to go down to the Quartermaster stores for some elbow grease. All over the School grounds were small tombstones engraved with the moniker "LT Cables". (It stood for low-tension cables, apparently). The myth was passed on to us that during the war a Spitfire had crashed into the clocktower and the plane and its contents had been spattered for hundreds of yards in every direction. The story went that the pilot – Lieutenant Cables – was remembered with a small memorial at every place where his body parts had been found. Indeed there was a plane-shaped area of patched mortar on the Clocktower, which made the story almost believable.

Another legend involved an ex-pupil, a teenage drummer boy in the Crimean war who had been decapitated by a cannon ball. Forever after his ghost wandered the school grounds drumming his insistent and melancholy beat. You could hear him on dark winter nights when the wind was whistling in the pine trees, apparently.

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"We're drilled and dressed and disciplined,
We're proud of our great name
As Dukies, Play up Dukies.
We'll take you on at anything
And always play the game,
As Dukies, Play up Dukies.
The spirit of our soldier sires is, round about us still
And everything we've got to do, we work at with a will;
Oh we've got no use for slackers at the School on Lone Tree Hill.
Play up Dukies, Play up Dukies"

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We marched to lunch with the band on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It seemed like a long way to the Dining Hall. On Sunday church parade we wore our dress uniform (blues); the tight navy tunics made of heavy wool, buttoned around the neck (sure to induce fainting on hot summer parades). The navy blue trousers have wide red stripes down the sides and at the waist they are scalloped upwards at the back, with two buttoned peaks against the kidneys where the wide gauge braces may be fastened. On our heads we wore the navy blue berets, which hold the school cap badge, with the badge of our father's regiments pinned to our chests. On Grand Day, in July each year, each house marched as a company and the band paraded up and down playing "British Grenadiers", "Marching through Georgia", "Colonel Bogie" and likewise marches in front of parents and visitors sitting in the stands. The parade starts with the markers, small boys carrying a small flag on a large pole who march out together and pace out the distances between each company. They stand for what must seem like hours holding their flags. When it is hot they drop like bluebottles. This is part of the ritual of the school. Then the band marches up and down, the drum major in his bearskin throws his mace in the air (and we all watch expectantly hoping he will drop it), and then the companies march back and forth, and this is followed by the inspection and the march past and the salute, and the advance, and I am afraid that I have completely forgotten the order in which these things happen.

On Sundays, the parade ends at the school chapel where the colours are marched

in and the service begins, the lowest years at the front the sixth form at the back. The school chapel, with the transepts where the masters and their families sit and the gallery behind, with its two towers – one of them a bell tower - and the old school colours in their gauzy covers, like dragonfly wings, hanging from the rafters. There is a big bronze eagle lectern with its huge Bible and the choir stalls behind, the choirboys in their surplices or gowns. The Reverend Dai Davies, the School Chaplain, presides. We sing traditional hymns – *"Bread of Heaven"*, *"There is a Green Hill Far Away"* - and listen with blank faces to a traditional sermon. A sixth former strides up to the lectern to read the lesson. We all had to do it when our time came. During the last hymn they send around the carpet-cloth bags for the collection and you have to pretend to put something in. For seven years I sat in that Chapel, on every weekday of the term, and on Sundays too. Thankfully, the school did not believe in the language of modern evangelism. It was all solid, traditional fare from the Book of Common Prayer, The Creed, The Lord's Prayer (*"For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory"*).

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For the second year, in September 1969, I moved to Kitchener. The house system had been re-organised so that there were now only two junior houses instead of four, containing only first and second year boys, instead of first, second and third formers. The third formers switched from being top of the pile in the junior houses to bottom of the pile in the senior houses, so the year above me were the biggest losers in this change. The two junior houses had been extended with a new dormitory and common room. Dominy became the new housemaster of Kitchener. He lived with his family in the fourth wing of the house, and I ended up in the new extension.

In Kitchener house we sometimes had "fun" evenings with songs and games. We sang stupid songs like "Oh you'll never get to heaven…" where everyone had to sing a verse (*"…in a Playtex bra, because a Playtex bra doesn't stretch that far"*). Once they replayed the legend of the headless drummer. I was a drummer boy so they made me become the headless drummer, fitting me with an oversize tunic that sat over my head, padding it above my shoulders and stuffing a piece of gory gauze in the neck. As the deputy housemaster told the tale of the headless drummer the curtains to the dayroom's big picture window were opened and I walked slowly across the lawn, with a drum slung from my shoulder, beating out the mournful rhythm.

THREE

"Ticking away the moments that make up a dull day"

The day's routine went like this: 6.45am reveille. You were forced from your bed by the house prefects. We washed and dressed and then marched to the Dining Hall for breakfast at 7.30am, with much shouting and screaming to get everyone outside on time. Breakfast comprised cereal, fatty bacon, sausages, rubbery scrambled egg, toast and tea from huge steel teapots. The milk was in clear ribbed-plastic moulded jugs. Then back to the house for fatigues - a rota of tasks - mopping the washroom floor, dusting, polishing, cleaning, tidying. Then to chapel for 8.30am, the bell tolling us on our way, then classes from 8.50am. Have I got those times right? Then a bustle of boys milling outside classrooms, rushing from one end of the school to the other, the language lab, the science block, the main teaching block. Masters hurtling down corridors, their academic gowns billowing behind them. On Monday and Wednesday afternoons there is sport. Rugby in the winter term, hockey in the spring term, and in the summer term there is a choice of cricket or athletics. In later years we get the added choices of sailing, shooting or canoeing.

In my first term we are taught to play rugby, on the freezing playing fields below the assault course, beside the shooting range. This stupid alien, unnatural and dangerous game, for me at least who had always played football. On Friday afternoons, after the third form, it is the Combined Cadet Force or C.C.F, where we march and drill or learn about battle tactics, sitrep, the angles of fire, to read a map, how to disassemble and assemble a Lee Enfield rifle, to clean it with a piece of 6 by 2 lint, pulling it through the barrel with a drawstring. In the evenings we have a period of prep (homework) in the big Day Room, then off to supper in the Dining Hall and back for another hour of prep, followed by free time until bed at nine o'clock (later in the sixth form). On Saturday mornings we had lessons, then a free afternoon unless there was a starred rugby match. Then free time until the church parade on Sunday mornings. On Sunday evenings we had to write letters home.

They liked to keep you occupied. (*"We've got no time for slackers at the school*

on Lone Tree hill"). At bedtime, a house prefect came to extinguish the lights and turn on the dim night-light, a small blue bulb high up in the ceiling. One monitor – Lidell, he was good at the butterfly stroke - told us night after night to raise our hands. Fifteen small boys sitting in their beds obeyed. Then he would turn on the light and shout; "Many hands make light work!". I failed to understand the joke at the time. Every Friday evening the "orders" for the week would be pinned to the notice board, giving details of the week ahead and information such as punishments, team selections or promotions to prefect or to ranks within the CCF. These orders would be eagerly awaited and a crowd would gather to find out what the official line was.

Each house had a matron who lived in a little flat above the washroom next to the Housemaster's quarters. Mrs Hayball was one. Another was a strange lanky creature, a Miss Nicholson, who was suffering from Parkinson's disease. Each house also had a cleaner – in Wolfe it was Mrs Thraves, a cheery figure in her housecoat, she liked to share a joke and smoked about fifty fags a day. She had a rasping, throaty laugh and we called her Mutley, after the dog in The Wacky Races. Hurgh, Hugh, Hurgh, Hurgh. She spent more time chatting than cleaning.

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Some boys suffered terribly from homesickness and other forms of mental anguish. My friend Simon Daniels experienced severe homesickness in the second year, crying inconsolably for his mother, unable to do anything except concentrate upon his inner pain. He was probably clinically depressed. No one paid much attention. I had a bout of homesickness in the third form when I moved up to Wolfe House. I would walk along by the Sanatorium from where, on clear days, you could look across the sea to Ramsgate. It briefly consoled me to look across at my distant home, to imagine my family there, leading their normal lives, but afterwards I felt empty and desolate.

Bedwetting was one symptom of the fear and unhappiness of small boys, and Tish as usual treated the culprits mercilessly. She regularly inspected our beds in the morning and would admonish any culprits in front of their peers– *"…aren't you ashamed of yourself, you baby"* etc. These poor victims of homesickness or bedwetting were never consoled or helped. They were pilloried and left to get on

with their sad little lives, to sort out their own troubles. One evening I somehow soiled my underpants – the long boxer style cotton ones. I don't know how it happened but I lived in mortal anguish for days, hoping no one would discover them, wrapping them up carefully for the laundry collection in fear that they would be discovered. I did not have the courage or imagination to take them to the washroom and clean them in a sink or toilet.

In the fourth form my dear friend Bob Twells developed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), as a result of breaking his leg very badly. It happened on the rugby field, when he was tackled by Mark Stedman, and his tibia and fibula were shattered, leaving his foot hanging down like a piece of detached meat, or so I heard. Bob ended up in Dover hospital with a plaster on his whole leg. He was on a men's ward for four days and then moved to a private room iin the Sanatorium. His parents, who lived in London, did not visit him and this led to a breakdown in his mental state. It transpired that his parents had set off to Dover in their car but had been involved in an accident and had turned back. However, our abysmal housemaster, Willy Dixon, failed to pass this news on to Bob who felt abandoned and rejected. Many years later he also discovered that he had an aunt and uncle living in Dover who ran a fish and chip shop. He was unaware of their existence at the time. Lying alone in the bed in the Sanatorium his mind boiled with anguish, and the OCD developed as a way of protecting himself against the pain and isolation of his surroundings, something that was just for him, that put him in charge of events. He devised a set of rituals which involved undressing and dressing in a particular way. He would sit on his bed and remove a sock, holding it up for a certain length of time, placing it on the bed, mumbling to himself. He spent hours in these self-destructive rituals. He believed that if he didn't do them he would suffer bad luck or misfortune, and if he failed in his life he could blame the OCD, so it was a kind of perverse win-win situation as far as he was concerned. Bob also recited a mantra of names, six names of boys and masters, that he would repeat over and over again, holding his breath. These habits continued for years. Even as an adult he would sometimes drive ten miles to work, turn back and drive home, remove his clothes and climb into bed and start again, all because he had failed to follow his early morning rituals properly. When I have been with him in St Ives in Cornwall (where he now owns a flat) he refuses to take certain routes, short cuts, and in any supermarket he has to go up

and down each aisle in sequence, he simply cannot flit from one to another.

Of course the irony of Bob's condition was that his disorder took up so much time that he failed most of his exams and left at the end of the Fifth Form. We were all worried about him, but there was nothing we could do, although we did try to help him wash himself in the bath. We didn't know about or understand mental illness; we couldn't help him. You were just on your own, you had to pull yourself together. It was not something you could go the sanatorium about. No one on the staff recognised his condition or attempted to help him. The level of pastoral care was zero. Even Douglas Haig the RSM was unsympathetic. Bob could not eat close to the table because his whole leg was rigid in its plaster, so he spilt food on his tie. Dougie Haig threw him off parade for this offence. Bob left the school with a single CSE in Art (Grade 6). He joined the R.A.F. and educated himself, eventually becoming a Head Teacher in a Primary School. He and his schools won numerous national awards and he used to be drafted in to sort out troubled schools. He was an inspirational teacher who changed the lives of hundreds of young people. Only when he was in his forties was the condition properly diagnosed and treated at the Maudsley hospital. Bob's history is a tale of triumph over early adversity. The big question is, would he have turned out differently if he had gone elsewhere? In a perverse way has his bad experience at the Duke of York's turned him into the headteacher he is today, determined to treat children in a more humane and civilised way? He is now one of my closest friends (and the best man at my forthcoming wedding).

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Bullying was widespread in the school. It was seldom explicit or overly violent, although Chris Merry tells me there were two serious incidents where vicious beatings took place. But bullying was constantly present as a kind of undercurrent to daily life, manifesting itself in cutting remarks and minor mental torture. Natural selection was at work and boys, being primitive beasts, are often vicious towards each other. Mike Church, one of my peers in Wolfe, was taunted endlessly with a horrible nickname. This was done even in front of boys from lower years – a terrible indignity. He tells me that he once followed and confronted one of the bullies and beat him, for which he received six strokes from Willy Dixon, our appalling housemaster.

My strategy was to ingratiate myself with the bullies, when the moral choice would have been to stand up against them. In this sense, I was a collaborator but in my own mind I justify this choice by the fact that I was a late developer and therefore smaller than most of my peers, at least until the fourth form. To stand up to any of the bullies would have led to a certain beating.

In the sixth form, my good friend Tony Chantler became a virtual exile from his house – Roberts – because of the nasty bullying he suffered from his peers, and he spent much of his time in my company. None of this, to my knowledge, was ever picked up by the teaching staff. Pastoral care - a concern for the mental or spiritual welfare of the boys in their charge – appeared to be an alien concept to the school staff. I never felt that there was anyone to turn to, to seek help from. You were on your own and you had to make the best of it. Certainly for long periods in the third and fourth years my overwhelming memory of my emotional state was of fear – fear of being picked upon, fear of standing out, fear of being found out. You had to hold back the tears and bury your emotions otherwise you would be finished. You kept your head down and hoped for the best. The general culture was that telling tales was a mortal sin, so no one would ever dream of describing the troubles that they were experiencing – their lives would have been made infinitely worse if they had done so.

The main distinction was you were either cool or not cool. The dividing line between the two was fuzzy and changeable but we all spent our time striving for coolness, and the uncool were the butt of constant jibes. Cool meant wearing the right clothes, being good at sport, being good looking, listening to the right records, having the right attitude or simply being big. Not cool meant being not good looking, not being good at sport, listening to the wrong records, being interested in science, obeying all the rules unquestioningly, being a nerd.

Another key feature of school life was the lack of contact between different years. The only time you mixed to any degree with the years above and below you was within your own house. There was very little contact with people from other years in other houses. It would have been viewed with suspicion for any boy to become too friendly with a boy from a higher or lower year. Most of us would not have dreamed of trying to talk to older pupils on an equal footing and any attempt to

do so would likely to be met by indifference or worse. These age differences seem meaningless now, of course, but at the time they seemed terribly important.

> *"The type of boy varied greatly – from outstandingly fine individuals, to ordinary boys to a quite disproportionate number of boys…who had little to offer the school either from the aspect of intelligence or character"*
>
> **General Sir Archibald Nye 1954**

FOUR

"There are places I'll remember, All my life, though some have changed"

At the end of the second year I moved up to Wolfe House, the second house from the Deal gate. Named after General Wolfe, the hero of Quebec, and probably the most romantic of all the school Generals and the least nasty, or so I feel. He was only 32 when he died. Wolfe had a reputation as being one of the more liberal houses. In my intake there was Bob Twells, Peter Newman, Hugh Creswell, Brian Rome, Mike Church, Jim Carr, Andrew Whiting, Wilf McCallum, Paul Wood.

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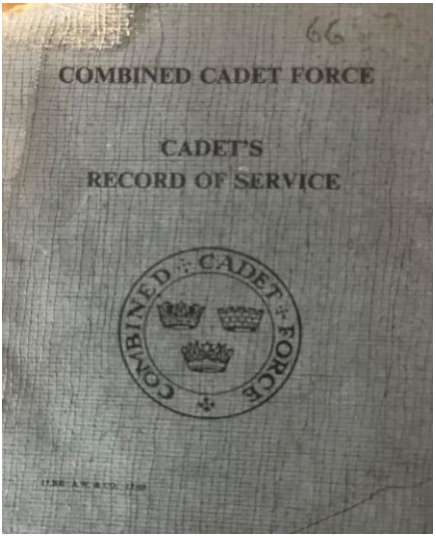

In the third form, (or was it the fourth?), we joined the Combined Cadet Force, the C.C.F. Every Friday afternoon was taken up with it. I disliked it. The itchy khaki uniforms, with the belt and gaiters that you had to paint with Blanco and the brass buckles that you had to buff with Brasso. We learned how to become soldiers, enduring long and tedious lectures on camouflage and battle tactics, drilling on the square, learning to shoot. Sometimes they broughtarmoured vehicles for you to have a look at. We were taught about the internal combustion engine. Then in the fourth form and upwards we went away to Summer Camp, to distant army barracks – Sennybridge in Wales, Sherwood Forest, Okehampton in Devon. The food was bad. The compo rations, issued in tins and pouches, were not much better, apart from the sweets and chocolate.

On one of these camps, Peter Hayball and Kendall Carter slid down a rope from a helicopter and suffered third degree burns on their hands. They were both fat lads

and the incident caused general merriment. Schadenfreude was a constant feature of school life. There were few obese boys in the school, unlike today. We learnt to shoot - .22 calibre in the indoor range, laying down with the telescope at your side, so you can see where the bullets have gone, then .303 on the outdoor ranges with the big Lee Enfield rifle that delivers a bruising kick to your shoulder, unless you hold it tight. The school armoury had thick armoured doors and smelt of grease and gunpowder , with rifles and sub-machine guns stacked in their wooden racks. During the summer terms you had a choice of sport – cricket, athletics, sailing, canoeing, tennis. One year I chose shooting and spent many hours on the range, with the big padded knee caps and elbow pads, and the rectangular ammunition boxes, painted and hybridised to take all your gear. I was awarded a marksman badge, which could be sewn onto the arm of your uniform. Once we went to Bisley for a national competition and I saw hundreds of Ghurkas squatting on the ground, a strange relic of Empire.

I became a signaller, with a heavy radio on my back. A teacher named Dotty Morse was in charge of our squad and the Signals' equipment was kept in a black single story, shed-like building near the Dining Hall. Morse was one of those boy-men who possessed a childish enthusiasm for signals work. One of his disciples was a spotty youth called Peter Day who became obsessed with rockets, which he would build and fire into the sky on the playing fields. I would end up as a signaller on these occasions, stuck far out on the perimeter of the landing zone advising passers-by to steer clear. Most of these rockets failed to leave the ground, but a few managed to shoot a few hundred feet in the air and then arc over and plummet into the soft earth, their cones buried a foot deep. On one summer camp I sat out at night alone with my radio on the silent moors waiting for groups and patrols to rendezvous at my checkpoint. I dozed off and woke to find myself surrounded by dozens of pairs of sinister eyes staring at me in the dark – a flock of sheep. I learned the signals language – Foxtrot, Uniform, Charlie, Kilo, Indigo, Tango.

Brian Arnold, our bouncy Chemistry master, was an officer in the C.C.F. One afternoon in Sherwood Forest he came to inspect our bivouac camp. I was the section leader and proudly showed him our dispositions. We had dug holes for the bivoaucs and covered them with vegetation so that they could barely be seen.

He bounced around saying how well camouflaged the tents were, when suddenly he dropped a couple of feet into the earth. Someone shrieked. He had stood on one of the bivouacs and landed on the head of young Aslett who was having an afternoon nap. On that same camp, the finale of the week, was a big mock battle in the Forest. I led my section through the undergrowth to our final battle position. We stopped and rested ahead of the impending conflict and all promptly fell asleep in the drowsy bracken, to be woken by loud bangs, the battle raging around us. All of us would have been dead if we had been playing with real bullets.

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In the fourth form we went on Arduous Training, driving through the night to Leek Camp in a three-ton truck, with canvas sides. There was no M25 in those days and we went straight through the centre of London. Caught short, we pissed out of the side of the truck, accidentally spraying the Nigerian ambassador's car next to us. In the dark we watched the lights of Nottingham and Leicester in the distance. At Leek camp I went down with 'flu and ended up left in bed in the hut, the stove in the centre of the concrete floor glowing red in the dark.

I was frequently ill with 'flu in the school, and often crept to the dark boot room to stretch out on the hot pipes; it was wonderfully cosy and private, the smell of drying mud all around you.

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Next to the boot room was a door that led to the underground tunnel system, which connected all the buildings of the school. Here were the pipes that provided our heat and hot water, from the huge central boiler house behind the swimming baths. The Day Room was where we did our evening prep, supervised by a master in the junior houses or by a sixth former in the upper school. It was also the scene of leisure activities – games and discussions. Some boys would spend hours playing war games with little soldiers or endless games of cricket, rolling a pencil with a number inscribed in each segment to obtain runs or wickets, and entering the results in an exercise book. Nerds.

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The Quartermaster stores was next to the Tuck Shop. A cavernous place with

shelves twenty feet high stacked with folded uniforms, greatcoats and equipment of all kinds. Opposite, was the school's single telephone box, always a queue of boys beside it. The Tuck Shop contained a post office and sold sweets and biscuits – ginger nuts and digestives were favourites, as well as Carnation and Fussell's condensed milk.

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Every year towards the end of the summer term we had the School photo – 450 pupils plus staff all assembled on benches in front of the Dining Hall. A moving panoramic camera was used – it slowly ticked around on its tripod, shooting everyone on the long benches which were arranged in a semi-circle. Every year without fail someone would stand at one end and dash round the back so that they could be photographed twice. We also had house photographs every year, by Ray Warner of Dover, all of us captured in time, our development charted as the years passed. I still have several of these. In my last year I was having a cigarette as the members of the house were assembling. As a consequence I rushed out without my white gloves and Major Willy Dixon, our housemaster was mightily displeased with the resulting photograph. I took my revenge by stealing the photograph when I left at the end of term.

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Over my seven years at the school I must have made the journey between Dover and Ramsgate on seventy occasions, including half terms. I would lug my suitcase to the station, with my mother. I honestly cannot remember if I wore uniform or civilian clothes but I do recall the embarrassment of these occasions. Standing on the platform with her, waiting, and then boarding the train; the old fashioned ones, with corridors and heavy buttoned seats. My mother would stand on the platform and I would be at the window, holding back the tears. She never kissed or hugged me (and I probably would have rebuffed her if she had tried). It was very formal, very English. Then the train would pull out, she would wave. The train passed my old primary school, the Volkswagen factory and the tower block where my sister lived, Minster, where the driver would change ends, then Sandwich, the slag heaps of the coal mines around Betteshanger, then Deal, Walmer, and into the tunnels that ran beneath the school followed by the long, curving descent into Dover Priory. From there I would drag my case to the bus stops in town and wait for the Deal bus. Back in the jug again.

FIVE

"Did you see the suits and the platform boots"

By the fourth and fifth form most of us were obsessed with clothes and our appearance. Looking back, I can see that the school uniform was actually quite elegant, although it didn't seem so at the time. Grey flannel trousers, collarless white shirts, button braces, and black knobbled leather shoes. Navy blue blazers with the white Rose of York on the breast pocket. We were taught how to bull our shoes, with your finger inside a duster coated in black polish, spitting and polishing in tiny circles for hours until the toecaps shone like mirrors. We had to press our own khaki and dress uniforms and blanco our gaiters and webbing and shine our brasses with Brasso. Your laundry was all taken care of. You handed in your underwear, shirts and socks twice a week on Monday and Thursday and received a fresh bundle from the House Matron, doled out from the huge wickerwork baskets that were kept in the washrooms, big enough to hide inside.

I have already described the blues that we wore on Sundays, but being a drummer I also wore a peaked cap, gold-sewn epaulettes and fancy braid across my chest. See the 'photo.

We fought a constant battle against the restrictions on dress – this was after all the late sixties and early seventies, the years of the Paris riots, Hippies, sexual liberation. Rebellion was in the air, and a whiff of it even reached as far as the cliffs of Dover. We knotted our ties with tight knots and only three inches hanging down, or with a huge many-knotted Windsor knot, and hoped it was enough to express our individuality, our sense of rebellion.

When we were allowed to wear civilian clothes on trips to town, we literally went to town. By the early seventies we wore platform shoes, patterned shirts with huge butterfly collars, flared trousers of heavy woollen material, or Loon pants with a 27-inch bottom, in burgundy, olive, plum. You could order them by post from the back pages of Melody Maker, from where we also bought records from the new, seductively attractive Virgin label – Tubular Bells was the first. We also

wore heavy wool checked overcoats, Crombies, cardigans with leather buttons, hippie gear. I bought a second-hand pair of leather boots with a zip up the side and Cuban heels. Khaki greatcoats from the quartermaster stores were suddenly in fashion. What did we look like?

In town we searched for entertainment. Woolworths seemed to have the best record stock. There were no HMVs or independent record stores then. The first single I bought was Maggie May. The first album was Van Morrison's Veedon Fleece, the start of a lifelong obsession with the grumpy genius from Belfast. (Twenty six years later I made the pilgrimage to Hyndford Street and Cyprus Avenue, driving down the Falls Road and the Shankhill in awe and wonder). Music for Pleasure issued albums of the latest hits, but these were usually cover versions and not by the original artists. You had to be careful.

The Berni Inn in Dover was the height of luxury. It was in a basement with soft lighting and big red banquettes and they served prawn cocktails in a pink sauce for starters and then steak with chips and those little button mushrooms and a grilled tomato. We did pub crawls once we looked old enough to be served, staggering home in the dark up the hill, past the dominating castle, the barracks of the Junior Leaders regiment, or else panting up the enclosed tunnel of Chalky Lane that led up to the back gate of the school. I was terrified of not being served and would hide in the corner hoping the landlord did not see me.

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Let me tell you about the food. Firstly there was not enough of it, and secondly it was often of dubious quality. The Victorians believed that a healthy body created a healthy mind, but our school food was positively unhealthy, with too much carbohydrate and fat, and not enough vegetables and fruit. I never came across anyone who was a vegetarian – it would probably have been seen as some form of moral perversion by the school authorities. There were no Muslims in the school and only one Jewish boy in my time, so whether he was served Kosher food I know not.

For breakfast and lunch we marched to the Dining Hall, house by house. A vast hall, or so it seemed then, with tiny doors that you squeezed through, tussling

with dozens of other hungry boys. There was a high hammer-beamed roof and ceiling, wood-panelled walls with dark oil paintings in gilded frames, long oak benches and tables, the walls adorned with details of past sporting greats, sport by sport, the sporting ethic uppermost. As always.

Traditional meals included beef curry with chips and battered fish and chips (on Fridays), egg and chips (Saturday tea), cooked breakfasts with rancid bacon, Toad in the Hole and Welsh rarebit (cheese on toast) for weekday suppers. There was a complicated rota for going up to the hotplate, and it was dreadful to be last because you had to wait for ages for your food and often the "best" dishes were gone by the time you arrived at the counter. We would empty our leftovers into a dustbin which was taken away for pigswill. So pigs ate the rancid bacon rinds. No wonder we had BSE. Any miscreants would be required to stand out by the high table throughout the meal, their hands behind their back.

A clan of Maltese did all the cooking supervised by one or two Army Catering Corps sergeants. These people lived in the staff houses near the Guston Gate. We thought they were Spanish, but we later discovered they were Maltese. Another relic of Empire.

You received the same portions whether you were a first year or a sixth former. Maurice Colclough, a huge red-haired shotputter and rugby player (he later played for England) was struck by the unfairness of this one day when a tiny first former appeared opposite him in the queue and was given the same portion of food (the senior and juniors boys filed in at opposite ends until they met in the middle). Colclough and the little boy meeting with their identical portions of food is worthy of a cartoon, I think. Thereafter, Maurice would send other anonymous looking boys out for top up portions.

In the mid afternoon, tea would be served in the hall – big white sticky round cakes (spunkballs!) and pots of tea. There was a rumour that the tea was laced with bromide to suppress our sexual urges. The prefects had their own room for afternoon tea, where they would summon miscreants and dole out punishments. They could make you write lines for walking on the grass, or, if you had been caught with your hands in your pockets (a heinous crime) they would make you

sew them up.
To supplement these meagre rations everyone found alternative supplies of food. From the Tuck Shop we bought ginger nuts and digestive biscuits (you had to

> *"Previous to 1850, tea cocoa and milk were practically unknown in the School, the staple liquid form of nourishment supplied being a light dinner ale commonly called "small beer" or "table beer"."*
>
> **Lewis Rudd 1935**

soak them in coffee for exactly the right number of seconds or they would fall apart), dehydrated Vesta beef curries, (with raisins – so exotic), cooked on the electric Baby Belling stove in the study entrance), coffee with tins of thick Fussells or Carnation instead of milk, or dried Marvel. Toast and butter. In the summer we would go fishing down at Dover harbour and come back with blue-green slippery mackerel, which would be fried in butter. Other boys would go off foraging in local fields and bring back sweetcorn. Every evening after prep the dayroom would be suffused with the smells of cooking. We were growing boys. We would play long games of football and come back to the house with our tongues hanging out, and drink gallons from the tap in the washroom.

SIX

"I used to get mad at my school, The teachers that taught me weren't cool"

Academically, the teaching was mediocre. There were a few exceptions. Charles Connell was a great teacher of English, fierce yet with a passion for his subject. We would spend hours breaking down sentences, studying the nuts and bolts of the English language, and for that I shall always be grateful. The gerund, the oxymoron, simile, metaphor, redundancy - "Salmon abound in great numbers in the rivers of Canada" was an example. We would act out Shakespeare and as a special treat he would read to us – The Woman in White. Rogue Male by Geoffrey Household was a particular favourite. Only much later did I discover that Connell was an established author. Even now, he has at least five titles on sale on Amazon. Legend had it that at the start of each term he would eye up a likely subject for a beating. Thereafter he had no trouble.

Danny Belcher inspired us in Biology and took us on field trips. He was also socially liberal and would turn a blind eye to illegal drinking or smoking. Is there anyone else? There was a young geography teacher – Middlemiss? He was good. He opened our eyes to human geography after all the rubbish that Neville Phillips had taught us.

During the second year, when I was in a middle set, I did particularly badly in a biology exam and the teacher upbraided me in front of the class. Was his name MacKay? I determined to show him what I was capable of and came top in the next test. After this I always worked hard and was promoted to the top set – 3i - and I went on to win academic prizes in the sixth form. The dunces were in 3ivg or 3t. They ended up doing metal work and woodwork. Some boys were held back for a year if they did particularly badly in exams. But the example of Bob Twells shows that this system of streaming was both flawed and damaging. Another of the rejects in our year is now an IT millionaire.

We did all the usual things. Dissected worms and rats in biology, made explosions in Chemistry, messed about in the "lingo" lab in German and French. In the sixth form I had a cage of gerbils in my study, refugees from the science lab.

Strangely enough, I remember the good teachers less than the mad or the bad ones. The school seemed to attract a fair proportion of English eccentrics, the detritus of the teaching profession - alcoholics, repressed homosexuals and paedophiles. In fact there is a particular case concerning a former housemaster which has still to emerge into the light of day. Dr Frank Andrrews was found to have taken illicit photographs of naked boys in the the washrooms and was sacked on the spot six years after I left the school but allowed to leave with a reference and without any charges being made against him. He had previously taught at Sir Roger Manwoods in Sandwich and went on to work at Barnardos! An ex-pupil has sent me a long witness statement of the abuse that he suffered at the hands of Frank Andrews and if you search on line for the Needle Blog you will find accounts from many others of similar abuse at his hands. He destroyed young lives. This was and is a moral disgrace and puts the school in a very bad light. I deal with this in my last postscript.

All of the masters were given (unoriginal) nicknames. “Golly” Robertson, “Taffy” Rees, “Boggy” Marsh, “Dotty” Morse, “Willy” Dixon, “Bony” Tritton, “Billy” Brooshooft, “Nobby” Clarke.

Jack “Nobby” Clarke was one of the worst. He taught history, and would stride the corridors, his academic gowns billowing behind him. He had a reptilian bald head and a huge, gouty bulbous nose. For ‘O’ Level we did British history 1688 to 1815. Blenheim, Ramilles, Oudenard, Malplaquet (BROMide, as a mnemonic to remember it). Walpole, Pitt the Elder, Pitt the Younger, the Window Tax, the War of Jenkins’ Ear. It was all dry as dust. Facts. Facts. Facts. Clarke made us do a weekly test, which was easy to cheat in but if he caught you or if you committed any other indiscretion he would grab you between the legs and put your head through the big sash window and lower the window upon your neck leaving you trapped there. He would also hurl his wooden blackboard dusters at miscreants. Percy the peaceful persuader it was called. He would grab other boys and use the same duster to apply yellow chalk to their noses, and they would have to sit for the rest of the lesson with the “Order of the Yellow Nose” on their faces.

Neville Phillips taught us geography. He had a clipped moustache and looked a little like his namesake Neville Chamberlain and, because of a recent stroke, spoke

with a slur. He would open lessons with a promising statement such as, *"Today, boys, we are going on a trip to the seaside"*. It took us a while to realise that he was speaking metaphorically, as he unloaded his slide projector and proceeded to show us snaps from his recent holiday. There was an aura of sadness about him, like Robert Donat in "Goodbye Mr Chips". In his day he had been a great sportsman.

Major Lee taught German and had a psychotic air. He looked like a Nazi war criminal, with a severe haircut, shaved to the skin high up above his ears and with a strange glint in his eye and an explosive temper. One day Bob Bees upset him and he kicked over his desk in a violent rage. He apologised afterwards, but he was clearly very odd.

Taffy Rees ruled the art room. A small fat Welshman with a florid complexion who looked as if he was constantly on the verge of a heart attack. He was a great friend and drinking partner of the similarly florid Charles Connell.

A woman English teacher next door taught us for a while, a strange drippy creature - she was incapable of keeping control. Connell had to come in and restore order. With her I wrote a popular story about the adventures of a family under Nazi occupation. I read it to the class.

Billy Brooshooft taught us science. He was a smooth customer. With his slicked back hair and his moustache he looked like a cross between Omar Sharif and Des Lynam. He always wore suede shoes. I looked after the house fish tank for him in Kitchener, where he was Deputy Housemaster, and we had a mix of different tropical fish, including gouramis. I had never seen this word written down and mis-heard it as piranhas – I once said to him, *"Sir, one of the piranhas has died"* and he had a good laugh at my expense.

Who else? Bill Buck, a big bear of a man who had played professional cricket. Probably a sadist. Brian Arnold in Chemistry. Crapper Cleaves who taught us Latin, I think. Willy Dixon, my hated Housemaster in Wolfe. Headley Marsh, our beloved and genial geology master who took us back to his home in the Valleys for a geology field trip that included a trip down the Maerdy colliery. Ben Johnson,

our great drama director and producer, a previous Head Boy of the School (why would anyone choose to return?), "Runson" Sampson who taught biology and set moth traps all around the grounds in the summer. I walked into one of his classes by accident one day and he was very unhappy about it. I met Sampson at the annual lunch in April 2003 and he looked exactly the same. Thirty years hadn't affected him – it was spooky. He denied being the moth catcher. I could consult the records and list more of the staff, but these are the ones who are lodged in my mind.

On the military side there was Regimental Sergeant Major Douglas Haig (surely his parents had not named him after the butcher of the Great War?) and Colour Sergeant Major Jack Forrest. They were a double act, the Little and Large of the Parade Ground. RSM Haig was a severe, thin man with a pencil moustache, always well groomed with highly polished shoes. He was fierce but kind, strutting around with his pacing stick. CSM Forrest was a big man, who looked like a cross between Charles Laughton and Bernard Manning, with the same rubbery jowls and a protruding lower lip that constantly sucked back his spittle. He claimed that his huge size was because he had been force-fed dried rice by the Japanese in the war, and they had then made him drink gallons of water to make him swell up. He was a Norfolk man and a stalwart of the Royal Norfolk regiment. He was famous for his funny sayings. *"Take a mental note in your rough books boys"* he would say, or *"I was all alone in the jungle, crawling along, surrounded by Japs, when I turned to my mate and said..."*

On Derby Day in 1973 I was with Dougie Haig and a group of pupils in the shooting butts on the range above the cliffs near Folkestone and he told us about his life. He listened to the race on a tiny transistor radio; he had obviously backed a horse. It was a beautiful cloudless English day, with ferries gliding across the mirror-like English Channel below. Haig looked like Enoch Powell - the same lean haggard face, the same trimmed moustache and jowels. Even in civilian clothes he always wore trousers with a sharp crease and shoes with gleaming toecaps. He was a real gent. I respected him and everyone I have spoken to since feels the same. He is buried in Guston churchyard with his wife.

SEVEN

"Everything passes, Everything changes,
Just do what you think you should do"

For some of us, all our energies from the fourth form onwards were directed towards the breaking of rules. We were unfortunate to be at the school at a time when long hair was the fashion in the outside world. We fought a constant battle against the authorities who were always trying to get our hair cut shorter than we wanted it to be. One boy, by an ingenious system of hair clips had managed to make his hair disappear into his beret during military activities and avoided the wrath of Douglas Haig and Jack Forrest. He kept a low profile in his perambulations around the school.

We spent seven years trying to find ways around the system. Ways to express our individuality, our humanity. When the skinheads were in vogue we were persuaded by the school barber, who visited every few weeks, to have a number one but even that met with disapproval, as it was too extreme, too non-conformist.

We were also obsessed with smoking. It was a game of cat and mouse. You had to find the time and the place to do it. Everywhere you went you would see boys huddled in corners, hiding in old pillboxes, in the bike sheds, slipping down into the underground tunnels to have a quick fag. They seemed to think it left no after-smell. In reality, the masters must have known that it was going on and turned a blind eye. It was an epidemic that was out of control. We had little machines for rolling fags and tins of baccy, with a slice of lemon to keep it fresh. Number Six was the favoured ready-rolled brand. Marlboro and Winston too. Only at the very end of our school careers could we smoke blatantly, in public.

Alcohol came slightly later. It involved sneaking into pubs in town and getting someone who looked eighteen to buy a pint for you. The first pint I bought for myself was a brown and bitter and it cost eighteen pence in 1972 or thereabouts. It was a badge of initiation to get blindingly and publicly drunk, puking up into the bin next to your bed and spending the next day in front of the TV, wrapped in blankets for all the house to see.

Generally, rebellion was low key and diffused but one day in, I think the fourth form, a boy named Butch Allison was rusticated (suspended) for singing too loudly or erratically in the Chapel. Somehow, a general feeling swept around the school to the effect that this was unfair and a spontaneous rebellion was organised. That day, the Headmaster had important visitors. At lunch, with the Head and his visitors sitting at the high table, the whole school staged a go-slow. We all walked out to the serving area and back as slowly as we could. A meal that normally took forty minutes took two hours. The Head was furious, but there was nothing he could do because the whole school had taken part. He could not cane 400 or more boys. He was outnumbered for once. Chris Merry tells me that Major Vince Collins participated in this protest. When my table walked out to be served he sent us back and made us go more slowly. Apparently, he was threatened with court martial, but claimed that he had only been trying to expose our childish behaviour. An odd incident.

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In the fifth form, we had the privilege of our own common room. It was the first room to the right off the corridor to the boot room. We spent hours here talking, studying and listening to music. One term I bought back a Monty Pythn LP, and we listened to it until we knew the sketches by heart. *"No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!" "And then he nailed my head to a coffee table"*.

All of the houses were linked with a series of tunnels, which carried the central heating pipes. I only became aware of these in later years when the doorway next to the Wolfe House bootroom was for some reason left open. We went down and timidly walked along the tunnel, expecting an engineer or security man to come marching around the next corner. They were clean and well lit and very hot. There were also air raid shelters but we never managed to get into these, or up into the clocktower. That edifice dominated those seven years and yet I never went up it. The school had many other secret places. There were also huge roof spaces above the day room and dormitories. Our suitcases were stored up there. In our boredom on a Saturday night we would frequently get up into the loft via a hatch in the washroom and crawl around the joists peering through air grilles onto the unsuspecting boys and masters below.

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We were generally ignorant of what was happening in the outside world. Broadsheet newspapers were delivered to the House, but few people read them. It would not have been cool to do so. In the midst of all this, one rainy afternoon in the school library I came upon a paperback copy of Orwell's "Down and Out in Paris and London" and was instantly captivated by the directness and honesty of the writing. Orwell has remained my hero ever since, the greatest English writer of the twentieth century.

There was a system of fagging. As a fag you did things like make tea, press trousers and clean shoes for your employer. I was fag to Keith Hodges, a camp

> *"…by the early sixties the School had become far less of a training ground for young soldiers, and more of an educational establishment with a military background. Far less drill and parades, and much more formal education in the subjects which would be useful to the boys when leaving the School to pursue any career whether in the Services or Civil Life."*
>
> **George Shorter**

sixth former but he treated me well. Fags had certain privileges; for example, as well as a weekly wage you could use your employer's study at weekends when they were out. We spent hours in Bob Guy's study listening to records, studying the sleeve notes. There was a two-way kudos in being and having a fag. The coolest sixth formers took on the coolest boys as fags, in a kind of unspoken pecking order, in the same way that studies were allocated once we reached the sixth form. I have been told that fagging had been abolished in most public schools by the mid seventies. It is striking that the Duke of York's adopted many of the emblems of the traditional public school – the houses, the prefects, the punishments, the fagging – yet it seemed slower than other schools to relinquish or abolish them. It was almost as if the school had to cling on to these old traditions in order to prove its credentials.

"*Quiz?"* someone would shout. *"Ego"* came the response. It was a scene out of "If", a film that captured the ethos of the school perfectly.

The school Sanatorium was a large building by the athletics track. It was run by Doctor Knight, an elderly slobbery-jowled man with an old black dog that hobbled along behind him, dribbling like his master. Neither of them looked very hygienic. The nurses were elderly Irish spinsters. The San was an oasis of calm and restfulness within the turmoil of school life. You had lovely beds with clean sheets and Ovaltine or hot chocolate at bedtime. After lights out the nurses would glide around throughout the night to check that no one had died. Once, Bob Twells, Pete Newman and me decided that we fancied a rest so we reported for the morning surgery with toothpaste in our mouths in the mistaken belief that this would heat up the oral thermometer. I was put in bed for a few days and it was lovely.

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At the swimming pool we would organise levitations, and faintings, where you crouched down and rocked on your heels, then jumped up and someone would squeeze you around the chest and make you faint. I've no idea why we did this – some kind of sexual thrill perhaps?

The smell of chlorine in the pool, the cold footbath you had to walk through, the swimming galas and water polo matches, the humidity and the cheers echoing off the rafters. Breaking into the pool on a hot summer night for a midnight swim at the end of our final term. We would roll up our towels as tight as possible and use them to flick other boys on the legs. It was very painful.

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Every Friday evening we would queue outside the housemaster's study for our pocket money. This was about one and six in our first form and rose to 50 pence by the sixth form. With 50p you could walk into town, have a couple of pints and a bag of chips and get the last bus home.

EIGHT

"We had a gay old time"

It is generally supposed that single-sex boarding schools are hotbeds of homosexuality. Deprived of female company boys resort to each other for sexual comfort and contact. If it existed I was never aware of it. All those boys cooped up together, you would have thought something would be visible. Chris Merry has since told me that there was a healthy gay sub-culture in the school but I never witnessed it.

Richard Sandells was a brilliant soprano. Four years below me, he sang solos in the School Chapel and played the female lead parts in the Stage musicals. He is now a successful actor but he had a terrible time at the school, because he was gay and felt like an outsider. Ben Johnson was the only person in authority who gave him any solace. To be a gay boy within the heterosexual rugger culture of the school must have been an ordeal.

In the fourth form an extraordinary new master appeared. Hilary Rudd was a small camp man with jet black dyed hair who minced around with a fur coat slung around his shoulders wearing a cravat. God knows why he was appointed; he was more camp than John Inman in "Are you being Served?" Perhaps the liberal side of the administration felt it would be an education for us. He formed around himself a coterie of like-minded boys. In retrospect, I realise they were gay even though most of us had no inkling of what that involved at the time. The word gay had not been invented then, or was not in widespread use. They were queers or poofters or homos. Hilary Rudd started putting on strange dramatic productions – *"The Son of Man", "The Murder in the Cathedral"* and an incomprehensible Japanese Noh play. They were much too highbrow for us.

Then it was suddenly announced that Hilary Rudd had died, apparently by sticking his head in the gas oven. There were rumours of relationships but nothing was never announced.

For most heterosexuals relief came from watching Pan's People and the endless

supply of porn magazines that circulated like samizdat literature through the school - Mayfair and Penthouse, Fiesta and Playboy. No one ever knew where they came from, because I never heard of anyone actually buying them. I stole a couple once at Retford Station on the way back from summer camp. *"The Virgin Soldiers"* by Leslie Thomas was one of the most circulated books, passed from hand to hand until it became grubby and dog-eared. The school provided no sex education, no warnings about the dangers of sexual diseases or how the male and female body worked. We had to pick this up ourselves. Had I come into close contact with an actual adult human female in the flesh I would have been more or less clueless.

Likewise, I don't remember any lectures on the perils of masturbation. I am guessing that most boys were at it, but the problem was how and where to do it. The toilet cubicles had large gaps at the top and bottom and boys were always peering over the doors. The best bet was to do it in bed at night, silently. Later, when we had our own studies it became easier.

This is despite widespread rumours that the authorities laced our tea with bromide to suppress sexual urges.

Interestingly, recent studies have shown that men who masturbate frequently are less likely to suffer from prostate cancer, so it seems we were doing ourselves good after all.

NINE

"The First Cut is the Deepest"

The canings were the worst. They always happened at bedtime and the anticipation was awful. it was in the air, like a malignant vapour that lingered throughout the day. When bedtime arrived it made you shake, even when you were not the victim. Those documentaries about the final hours on death row in the U.S.A catch the atmosphere perfectly. We would keep glancing at the victim to see how they were coping. Would there be a last minute reprieve? The master finally would come and call for the pyjama-clad boy, who would follow him out to the washroom. We strained to hear the whack of the cane. Then the boy would return. First-timers would cry and slink into bed like wounded cats hiding from the world. Regulars would proudly show the thickening welts on their backside, raw slices of violence on the fleshy buttocks, like thin stripes of liver. I was never caned, although Bill Buck once hit me with a cricket bat.

An incident from my first year. A third-former called Samby, who was responsible for mild bullying and having thoughts above his place in the natural pecking order, or so I heard, was selected for humiliation by his peers. One Sunday morning whilst we were still in our beds he was brought into the dormitory by several of the other third formers – John Hare, Derek Regelous, David Harris. He was dragged to the end of the dorm, by the big window where he stood sobbing quietly. His pyjama trousers were taken down and black boot polish was applied to his genitals. I remember his scrotum was small and taut and he was hairless. Then he was left standing there crying until they told him he could go. He never bothered us after that. It was a lesson in power and the violence that boys were capable of. Many years later when I read "The Lord of the Flies", I could understand the theme implicitly. I wonder what happened to him. I wonder what happened to all those who have never been back to any reunions. The missing. These are the ones I worry about.

Bog washing was a frequent form of assault. The victim would be held head down in the toilet pan and the chain would be pulled, leaving him with a soaking wet head. At least the water could hide the inevitable tears.

"Punishments were brutal, and Sergeants were allowed to inflict corporal punishment with a birch rod up to eight strokes without reference to higher authority…We read of three dozen strokes with a birch rod; of confinement in a "black hole", of dragging about a heavy log secured to the ankle by a chain, of solitary confinement in a cage for two or three days."

Lewis Rudd 1935

The school prefects were identifiable with a white braid stripe on their blazer cuffs, two for the Chief School Prefect. They could give punishments such as requiring you to sew up your trouser pockets if you were caught with your hands in them. Or they could give detention or lines, or sides. You would report to them in their private dining room at afternoon tea where you would find a gaggle of them guzzling cream cakes and slurping tea poured from the large stainless steel teapots. A few of them would interview you laconically and then your tormentor would pronounce the sentence - a scene straight out of Tom Brown or "If". They could also order you to stand out by the high table at meals, like villains in the stocks, for all to see as the rest of us filed past with our food.

Detention always took place on Saturday evenings. You had to report to one of the classrooms, and sit with a bunch of miscreants for an hour or more, missing all the fun and excitement that was going on in the House, (or what passed for fun and excitement in those days). The masters who ran the detention were even more pissed off than we were, and they showed it. It was a miserable experience.

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Considering that we were the offspring of men who had created the British Empire, you would perhaps have expected a mix of races and creeds. Yet there was a remarkable homogeneity about the school. Put bluntly, the pupil population was white, as were the teachers, and most were Church of England. We had one Jewish boy and a handful of Catholics. Then in the second year a new boy appeared, who

was black. The shock of it spread around the school like a distant earthquake. Anthony (Charlie) Watts received merciless treatment. Not in a nasty or violently racist way, more in an affectionate "Hello 'dere Sambo" racist way. Boys would queue up to rub their hands through his springy hair and curl up their lips, with their tongue sticking out like a fleshy upper lip, aping the stereotypical black man. They would sing "Old Man River" or "Mammy". If Charlie had been athletic he would have been better off, but in my memory he was flat-footed and poor at sports, not in the Linford Christie mould that the school required. He didn't stand a chance. I have spoken to Anthony since, and he seems remarkably level-headed about what must have been a traumatic experience. He cannot remember being called Charlie (after the Stones' drummer) but that is my clear recollection. In fact, he tells me that his nickname was Sambo (such wit!), although this was shortened to the less offensive Sam after a year or so.

On a trip to London, we played a game where you scored points for spotting a black or Asian person. *"There's one!" - "There's another!"* It became quite riotous and to their eternal shame the masters merely smiled and said nothing. I think Danny Belcher was one of them. We were not challenged about our casual racist behaviour and it makes me cringe to this day. This was long before the days of Anti-Racism but mere human decency would have been enough surely?

TEN

"And when the band you're in starts playing different tunes"

Within a week of arrival at the school a panel of teachers in the music hall inspected us. They asked a few cursory questions and then inspected our teeth. The teeth were the crucial thing. Good teeth meant that you were selected to learn a brass or woodwind instrument. Bad teeth (i.e. me) meant that you were sent across the parade ground to a mean wooden hut that housed the drum and bugle corps. Mr Wagstaffe was in charge here, a chubby ex-Marine with Italian blood. The buglers had slightly better teeth than us drummers and were taught at different times. Twice a week for two years we would spend an hour in Mr Wagstaffe's hut, a long wooden table down the middle of the room, shelves stacked with snare and tenor drums. There were about ten of us - the bad-teeth boys - standing around a table with a pair of drumsticks, tapping out rolls and paradiddles on the wooden table. The good and the bad, poor ungainly, unco-ordinated boys like David Bryant, with Wagstaffe breathing down our necks. He would rap you over the knuckles with a drumstick if you failed to meet the required standard.

Luckily I had a good sense of rhythm and was able to follow the instructions. After a year we were finally allowed to play a proper snare drum, one of the old wooden ones, not the new shellac ones used by the School. The drum was slung on a wide blancoed leather strap over your right shoulder and we would stand in a group whacking out our tunes, learning to read military drum music, (which is the same as proper music except it is all along the same line). 4/4 time, 2/4 time. "Colonel Bogey", "The British Grenadiers", "Marching to Georgia", Sousa's Monty Python tune ("Liberty Bell") – da dum da diddy de dum da daa da dum da dum da daa. Rumty titty tee tum tee tum ta tum ta tum ta taaa, and so on endlessly through mornings and afternoons.

The rejects from the music selections were sent back to the ranks, and became flag boys or mere marching fodder, but the good musicians, in the third form, finally got their place in the school band - a fifty-strong marching ensemble. Two rows of drummers at the front – first a row of snare drummers, graded by size with the smallest in the middle, then tenor, cymbals and the big bass drum in the second

row. Behind was the brass section - trombones, euphoniums, cornets, and then woodwind – clarinets and flutes with two rows of bugles at the rear. We were led by a bearskinned drum major in a braided scarlet coat, who was required to toss his mace from time to time. Peter Newman and Denis Lafferty both performed this role. We would practice in the big band room, Ernie Ough the Director of Music would be at the front and all the drummers at the rear, the instruments in front of us, playing tunes again and again, over and over, Ough tapping his baton, stopping and starting us. It was great.

By the sixth form I was the only one of my year left in the drum corps and I grew disenchanted, skiving off when I could until Wagstaffe called me in and asked me what I was up to. We parted on semi-amicable terms and I returned to the ranks. I became a corporal, with two braid stripes on my arm.

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In the evenings and at weekends, other music took over. We lived through the tail end of the hippie era and that extraordinary explosion of music in the late sixties and early seventies. Scott Mackenzie, "Let's Go to San Francisco", the end of the Beatles, the new sounds of Bowie, Queen, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd, the artists of the Virgin record label – Mike Oldfeld's Tubular Bells, Kevin Coyne, whispering Bob Harris and the Old Grey Whistle Test. But we were cocooned from it all; it was all a long way away in another world, up above us somewhere, up in the real world. We were like divers hundreds of feet below the surface looking up at the flickering lights and the dull beat of the music. A highlight of our week was Pan's People on Top of the Pops. Babs! We loved "Happy Days" – the Fonz was the coolest man on the planet and M.A.S.H was one of our favourite shows. In the fourth form I bought my own record player, with two speakers, and would it lug it back and forwards between home and school in my suitcase.

On Saturday evenings Bob Guy would allow us to use his study (Bob Twells was his fag) and in the semi-darkness, perhaps with a joss stick burning, we would listen to Melanie (*"Ruby Tuesday"*, *"I've got a brand new pair of roller-skates"*), Ralph McTell (*"Have you seen the old man outside the seaman's mission?"*) Led Zeppellin (*"…and she's buy..eye..ing a stair..air..way to heaven"*) – over and

over until we knew all the words by heart. Outside that tiny room the oiks were running around oblivious to the cocoon of cool just feet away from their ignorant lives.

Everything was vinyl; twelve inch Long Players or seven-inch singles. We would sit there in the half darkness religiously reading the sleeve notes, trying to find hidden meanings, sure in the belief that these artists knew the secrets of the universe. I can remember the impact that Bowie had when we first saw him on TV – it was an afternoon show like Magpie, a children's programme and I think he sang "Starman", wearing that multi-coloured one-piece bodysuit with the long boots, his arm around Mick Ronson – homoerotica on the TV! And we all said "what the hell is that?!".

The Strawbs were a huge favourite for some of us. Tony Chantler and Howard Leslie had all their albums. We even went to see them one night in Royal Tunbridge Wells, a long drive in the dark, and found ourselves stuck up high in the Circle, a long way from the band. Later, I went to see them alone, at The Rainbow, staying with Bob Twells in Mill Hill and getting lost in a long bus journey across north London.

There was a schism between those who favoured heavy rock (Zeppelin, Sabbath, Deep Purple) and those who favoured more acoustic/lyrical singer songwriters stuff. I was in the latter camp. The first single I ever bought was "Maggie May" ("It's late September and I really should be back at school"). Keith Dewery (?), a ginger haired charmer two years above, took our orders and set off to town each week. We were hoodwinked into buying the "Music for Pleasure" compilations of current hits, only to discover they were cover versions by unknown artistes. I became besotted with Dylan - John Hare made me a tape of his early stuff and I can remember listening to "House of the Rising Sun" and thinking it the most extraordinary thing I had ever heard. I still have the tape.

In the 4th form we were allowed to hold school dances in the Day Room. We would spend the days beforehand decorating, painting huge paper posters of Che Guevara and Jimi Hendrix – fifteen feet square - and setting up a lantern oil projector that screened psychedelic, glutinous patterns across the walls. The room

was made as dark as possible and there was a palpable sense of excitement as the appointed time for the arrival of the girls came. A bus load of them from Westbourne College in Folkestone alighted; the embarrassed sizing up across the room, the first tentative movements across the divide, the dancing, the bets about who could get a snog first. The post-mortem. Who did what with whom? In return, we went to dances at Westbourne College, a huge Edwardian house in its own grounds (since demolished) where all kinds of stories of sexual encounters circulated. There I met Hilary Snell, my girlfriend for a few months in the Upper Sixth. There is a vivid memory of walking to Folkeston West station for the last train after one of these dances, singing "Rocky Racoon" with John Hare and Denis Lafferty.

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After the school holidays many boys returned from overseas – Malaya, Hong Kong, Germany. After the long summer break, many would be tanned a dark brown and would bring back exotic novelties – Tiger Balm, or those sandalwood puzzle boxes which have secret internal mechanisms. These boys from overseas would often be brilliant swimmers – Bob Bees and Les Brooker, for example. I still have a silk kimono that John Hare gave me. The end of each term was always a time for the bartering of goods, for offloading surplus stock, buying and selling.

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Although military and sporting life dominated the school there were some attempts at promoting the arts. Mr. "Schmoo" Davey set up the Appreciation Society and we went on trips to Kent University and local theatres. We saw Ken Russell's "Savage Messiah" with a naked Helen Mirren. This tension between military and civilian life was a constant feature of life in the school and it made our time there in the later years interesting and bearable. Like any institution, the school was an enclosed society, with rules and a culture unique to itself. We became so tied up in our struggles and petty politics that it was often hard to imagine that there was a real world going on outside the school gates. We were living in a kind of cocoon-dream world. But fundamental changes in the outside world were underway and it was inevitable that these would have an impact upon the life of the school. The miners' strike of 1973 certainly had an impact – the power strikes affected all equally and we spent many long nights sitting in the dark with candles and hurricane lamps.

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One afternoon in my second year I was sent with another boy to pick up some tennis racquets from one of the upper houses. It was Wolfe House I think. I can recall the incident to this day. Nothing happened, it was like the Edward Thomas poem, *"Adelstrop"*. The hot afternoon, the torpor, asking a boy for directions; did they know Smith? Did he have the racquets? We waited outside the back door while enquiries were made. Your legs chafed against the coarse material of your trousers in the prickly heat. Flies buzzed lazily around us, an aeroplane droned in the distance, high cotton-wool clouds in a blue sky, distant voices echoing from the depths of the house. We waited in the heat of the afternoon. Nothing occurred, the boy was not found and we went away empty handed. But it was an incident in time; I can feel it still, the moment, the poignancy of it. "And no one went and no one came". Oh to be alive!

"Do you ever look back upon the long summer afternoons and evenings on the playing fields? I wonder where all those boys are now, who, year after year, have flitted over the grass with bats or footballs under their arms and an eager look in their eyes? Those glorious summer evenings when the shadows grow long upon the grass and the thrush trills his song from the shrubbery or the Chapel turret".

Captain G.S. Brown School Chronicle 1935

ELEVEN

"I have to admit it's getting better, a little better all the time"

One day in the first few weeks of my fourth year, John Hare sent for me. I found him sitting in one of the toilet cubicles with his trousers around his ankles. He asked me if I wanted to join the stage staff. He was the stage manager.

For some reason Wolfe House had always supplied the stage staff, with responsibility for building the sets and running the technical side of all performances in the Nye Hall. I accepted the offer of course (I was the first in our year to be recruited) and thus began my backstage career. The school put on four or five productions every year, culminating in the big musical at the end of the summer term, traditionally Gilbert and Sullivan (*"Ruddigore", "Pirates of Penzance"*) but with the arrival of Ben Johnson we started to diversify. *"Oliver"* and *"Fiddler on the Roof"* were the big productions of my last two years. Once the summer exams had finished we spent much of our spare time at the hall, painting scenery, making the sets, erecting the scenery. The stage had a fly tower and we spent hours up there hauling on the ropes that raised and lowered the black curtains and the screens. There was a lighting box where you could control the floods and spotlights. In the floor of the stage there was a trapdoor leading to a big boiler room. We would spend long Winter sunday afternoons at the stage and return to the house to watch the late afternoon serial on the BBC, *"Tom Brown's Schooldays"* was the best. I could relate to Flashman and all that drama.

At the back of the hall, up some stairs, was a projection box for the films. Other members of the staff during my time included Pete Newman, Bob Twells, David Jones, Allan Wood and George Gelder. In my last year I became stage manager myself (on the basis of buggin's turn) and had to recruit new staff. I was not good at being the manager, but I worked hard and everything seemed to fall into place by the opening night of the production. In the wings we roared along with the big numbers

"With cat-like tread, THUMP, Upon our prey we steal, THUMP, In silence dread, THUMP, Our cautious way we feel, THUMP, No sound at all! THUMP, We never speak a word, THUMP, A fly's foot-fall would be distinctly heard" etc.

We also ate the props (sausages in *"Oliver"* and pies in *"Sweeney Todd"*) and ogled the gorgeous second years who were dressed and made up as the lead women, or lusted after the real women, the masters' wives who put on their own production each year. One, "The Chocolate Soldier" involved the wearing of revealing Oktoberfest-style dresses. As stage staff we had certain privileges. One of these was the free use of the hall at all times. This meant we could go and smoke in the warm boiler room underneath the stage in relative safety. We could also sit behind the screen during the films, in armchairs and sofas, watching the film back to front with the plebs behind the screen. At the end of the sixth form we put on a revue, written mostly by David Lawrence, brother of Porcs, and it was a huge success. We performed a series of sketches which poked gentle fun at the staff. The tradition continues to this day, I believe. (Porcs came from nowhere – he was a quiet boy who suddenly emerged as this amazingly talented actor and artist).

We saw some incredibly controversial films in those last few years. It was surprising that they allowed us to watch them - symptomatic perhaps of the conflict between the civilian and military arms of the school and emblematic of the times we were living through. Whatever the reason, we sat through *"A Clockwork Orange"* and *"Straw Dogs"*. Some films we watched up in the projection box, projected small scale onto the back of the box. John Hare and Denis Lafferty with various women

sometimes. It was wonderfully intimate and electric. Here is the report of The Film Society from *"The Yorkist"* of 1973:

*"The aim of the Society has been to show films which could not be shown to the whole school …"adult entertainment" films (and) the more "artistic" type film, e.g. – "Performance". One of the results of the more relaxed atmosphere in the School this year, has been the almost total lack of censorship. The films shown were: They Shoot horses don't They?, Blind Terror, 'Z', Hospital, Midnight Cowboy, El Condor, Catch 22, M*A*S*H. On your screens next term: The Anderson Tapes, Klute, Every Home Should Have One, Asylum".*

I find it hard to reconcile this list with everything else that was going on in the school at the time. It seems almost schizophrenic. They showed us "If" for heaven's sake! Did they not think it would put ideas into our heads? There was an armoury full of guns and ammunition just nearby.

John Hare is or was an established architect and academic and was married to the late Lisa Jardine. What happened to Derek Regelous and all those other names from the past? Charles Harrison and Sean Young and Tony Felton at the Downs near Chalky Lane, when we went tobogganing on old upturned car bonnets and pieces of wood down long steep hills, them three years above us, sitting near them on snow on a cold, cold winter afternoon, trying to overhear their conversation, hoping to understand the secrets of the world.

Later at this same spot, in the heavy heat of summer in 1972 we set up camp for a signals exercise. I find I am even mentioned in the school magazine, as an assistant to the cooks. Many years later I wrote a poem about this weekend. Light aircraft circled overhead in an echo of the Battle of Britain and rabbits ran across the grass in the fields below. Hayball and Kendall Carter- two fat signallers – led the expedition. Hayball's mother was our matron in Wolfe and lived in one of the gatehouses on the Deal-Dover road. That evening we heard news that a woman regularly undressed at her bedroom window nearby. We went off in a scouting party to check it out, crawling through bushes on the school perimeter and lying in wait until she returned, and she did indeed stand briefly naked at the window. Such thrills made life worthwhile.

Persecuted by his housemates in Roberts, Tony Chantler sought solace with me and others elsewhere. In the sixth form we had a telephone system - installed by Mr. "Dotty" Moorse the eccentric signaller and languages teacher. Tony used to telephone me for advice about revision. Alf Hitch was in Clive and his grandfather had been at Rorke's Drift. Hitch was one of the characters in the film Zulu with Michael Caine. His red tunic was still in the school library – a surprisingly small outfit.

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A boy was killed one Sunday, walking below the white cliffs of Dover. Tons of chalk fell upon him. I can't remember his name. Another boy, died of asthma, walking up a hill without his inhaler. Lesser injuries were a constant feature of school life.

TWELVE

"Hey, that's no way to say goodbye"

Entering the sixth form was a kind of liberation after the five preceding years of oppression. The cloud of fear and uncertainty suddenly lifted. No more could the prefects persecute you. We had a pep talk from the deputy headmaster David Oxley, about how in return for all these privileges we also had certain responsibilities. Suddenly we had more freedom and power than we had ever known. The masters started to treat us as human beings. We inherited an autocratic society, where we exerted absolute power over hundreds of small boys, entrusted to us by the School administration. I became a house prefect and took on a fag – Steve Rogers. There were only four of my year left in Wolfe House by the time I reached the Sixth form – me, Andrew Whiting, Peter Newman and Michael Church – all the other friends and adversaries had departed – Jim Carr to Canada, Brian Rome, Bob Twells, Hugh Creswell, Keith Wood, Wilf McCallum. I felt sorry for them.

Which other boys made an impression from this time? In Wolfe, there was Shaun and Steve Rogers. Allan Wood of course, in the year above, who was the stage manager before me and was a great influence on my development. Mike Hodges also. I went to his wedding and was fag to his elder brother Keith. By the sixth form I was hanging out with Jed Gardiner, Steven Gerrard, Mark Stedman Peter Lawrence and Bob Bees, who was another outsider. We would spend time in each other's studies smoking and reading album covers. By the upper sixth I was working hard for my 'A' Levels and had little to do with my peers in Wolfe House. Companionship was found elsewhere.

I was elected onto the sixth form committee, responsible for our own building, the former staff common room. I was the Furnishings Officer, which meant buying lamps and decorating the place for the regular dances. The building comprised a large room, a side room, a kitchen, a boiler room and toilets with a large attic. We organised discos and other events, including fancy dress parties. I went as Radar O'Reilly from M.A.S.H and as Charlie Chaplin. Jed Gardiner went as a giant cigarette. Oh to have photographs of these occasions.

For the dances we would use huge black curtains from the stage to create a warren of cubbyholes and dark places in the side rooms, covering the floor with cushions, perfect for extended snogging and groping sessions. Jed Gardiner, Peter Lawrence, Steven Gerrard and Mark Stedman were my committee colleagues. We bought supplies of beer (Tartan, Newcastle Brown) and crisps from the Dover cash and carry and sold them on at a profit. We decided to brew some beer in the hot boiler room there, until the Quartermaster discovered it and we were punished.

The two years of the sixth form were the best years of all. I slowly extricated myself from all responsibilities and from military life, doing the bare minimum to survive. I gave up most sport, I smoked, I drank, I worked, I listened to music, and bought loads of albums – Pink Floyd, Dylan, The Band, Van Morrison. I had a few distant girlfriends from the local girls' colleges and we communicated with fumbling letters and 'phone calls. At the end of the upper sixth I even moved my bed into my study so that I lived more or less independently. They were two good years. I honestly believe that if I had left the school at the end of the fifth form, as so many of my contemporaries did, that I would have been back to bomb the place before now.

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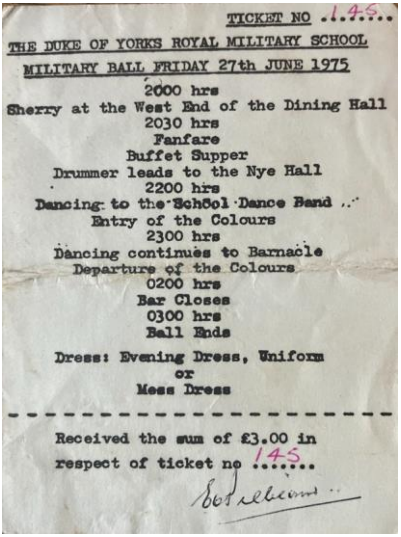
Grand Day was the crowning point of the year. In the lead up to Grand Day there would be a military ball, with dancing to a live band, a buffet supper and the marching in and out of the colours. Girls would be shipped in wearing long ball gowns and it went on until the small hours.

On Grand Day itself, prize giving was held in the morning in the Nye Hall, and there was a big parade on the playing fields in the afternoon, usually presided over by some bigwig from the Army, a General or Field Marshal. Parents would descend on the school from all over the world. After the parade there would be exhibitions in the school classrooms, gymnastics displays and in the evening the finale of the Drama production in the Nye Hall. Grand Day was often an anxious time for me, particularly in the middle years, due to the fact that my family had no car and my parents were older than average. During the morning the boys would be talking about the cars their parents would be driving, and I would be on tenterhooks hoping that my family would not be seen arriving in a taxi. I even

went so far as to explain my parents' age by saying they were my grandparents. I was ashamed of our straitened circumstances and the age of my parents. Its seems ridiculous now, but these things were desperately important at the time.



TICKET NO 145

THE DUKE OF YORKS ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

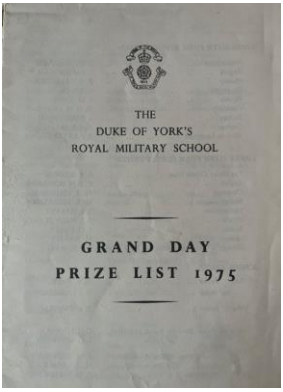
MILITARY BALL FRIDAY 27th JUNE 1975

2000 hrs
Sherry at the West End of the Dining Hall
2030 hrs
Fanfare
Buffet Supper
Drummer leads to the Nye Hall
2200 hrs
Dancing to the School Dance Band
Entry of the Colours
2300 hrs
Dancing continues to Barnacle
Departure of the Colours
0200 hrs
Bar Closes
0300 hrs
Ball Ends

Dress: Evening Dress, Uniform
or
Mess Dress

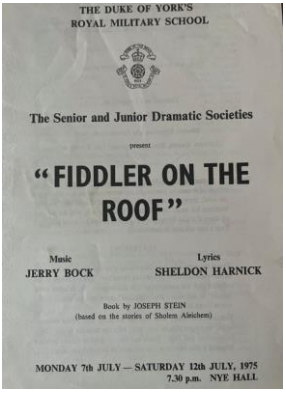
Received the sum of £3.00 in respect of ticket no 145.

As Grand Day approached an air of rebellion spead around the school. Those close to leaving would extract their revenge for the years of misery they had endured. Strange sights would appear. Underpants flying from the flagpoles. The Dining Hall piled up with tables and chairs, thirty feet up to the ceiling. One boy managed to fire the ceremonial cannons that stood opposite the school chapel. In my last term the period between the end of the exams and Grand day, about three weeks, was the best time of all. We would sleep in, play tennis on the grass courts, visit the Dover pubs, work on the stage sets for Fiddler on the Roof, and generally be free of all cares and responsibilities.



THE
DUKE OF YORK'S
ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

GRAND DAY
PRIZE LIST 1975



THE DUKE OF YORK'S
ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

The Senior and Junior Dramatic Societies

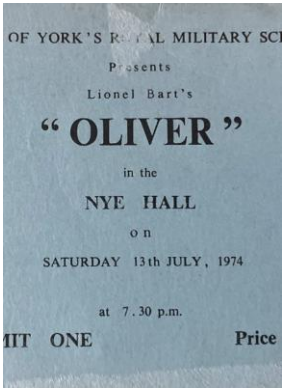
present

"FIDDLER ON THE ROOF"

Music JERRY BOCK
Lyrics SHELDON HARNICK

Book by JOSEPH STEIN
(based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem)

MONDAY 7th JULY — SATURDAY 12th JULY, 1975
7.30 p.m. NYE HALL



OF YORK'S R AL MILITARY SC

Presents

Lionel Bart's

"OLIVER"

in the

NYE HALL

on

SATURDAY 13th JULY, 1974

at 7.30 p.m.

IT ONE Price

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On the Sunday after Grand Day, the leavers would drift away – it was a sad affair to see former heroes now in their civilian clothes heading towards the gates to start their new life. I remember Geoff Silk, the SUO in my first year, dragging his suitcase towards the Main gates on the day after Grand Day and I could sense the poignancy. My last day at school was similarly poignant – more a whimper than a bang. Passing through the gates for the last time, that final taxi-ride to the station. What did I expect, flags and banners? Life went on. It always does, until it doesn't.

Here is the last verse of the School song – "Play up Dukies". It is as poignant and bathetic as the last verse of the Eton Boating song, I think.

"When veterans and pensioners,
We're drifting down the hill,
Play up Dukies, Play up Dukies.
Though death be in the valley
We will face him Dukies still
Play up Dukies, Play up Dukies.
And though our lonely graves be dug in some far distant land,
Our spirits coming back again will hover near at hand,
And the boys will hear us whisper, and the boys will understand.
Play up Dukies, Play up Dukies."

****

And finally there is the School Hymn, written for the centenary of the school in 1901, by the Rev. G.H Andrews, with music by J.H. Maunder.

"Oh LORD, Thy Banner floateth o'er us,
Beneath its folds we stand and sing,
In Majesty go Thou before us,
Our Saviour Christ! Our Captain-King!
Sons of the Brave! our hearts now hail Thee
Bravest of all! and cry to Thee
Oh LORD, make us Thy faithful soldiers,
And lead us on - to Victory!"

And so on for another three verses. Sons of the Brave. Indeed.

I could go on, trawling through my memory for incidents and impressions. But this is enough. I hope I have captured the essence of the time and the place.

LAST

"The time is gone, the song is over, thought I'd something more to say"

As I write (September 2023) it is over 48 years since I left the school. Between 1980 and 2003 I did not set foot in the place. But the school is still going strong. It seems to survive changes of government and many of the same rituals and routines continue, no doubt. Yet there have been fundamental changes. They take girls now (how different our lives would have been if we had grown up alongside girls!) and I hope that the level of pastoral care is better than it was for us.. The turnover of pupils seems to be much higher than in our day. Now, pupils often stay for a few terms and no more. Most of our intake of 1968 stayed for at least five years, so the common bond of experience is stronger. The school is also much more diverse with a high proportion of Black and Asian pupils. Whenever I have re-visited the school at Remembrance weekend I have been struck by the sloppy drill and the haphazard dress with berets worn at strange angles. The standard of the school band also leaves a lot be desired, but perhaps that is just me being an old fogey.

All my fees and expenses were paid for by the school, by the Ministry of Defence. I don't know if that is still the case, because it must be a very expensive place to run, considering the ratio of staff to pupils. Why did my parents send me there? I don't know and I cannot ask them because they have been dead for nearly four decades. Cost may have been a factor. I was the youngest of five and my father's salary did not go very far. How would I have turned out if I had gone to my local grammar school? I can't answer.

Some of my near contemporaries have died; Bob Guy in a car crash on Salisbury Plain, Neville Lightfoot in the Falklands conflict, Wilf McCallum of heart disease, Andreas Relf of cancer, Tony Spencer in a dentist's chair, John Ellison of cancer. No doubt there are others that we do not know about. Their lives are unrecorded. By the law of average, others of my cohort will start to disappear over the next few years, and the memories and shared experience will go with them. Hence these scribbles.

I have seen a few brief memoirs of the school over the years – most are in the mould of "wonderful place, best days of my life, what a laugh we had, never did me any harm" etc. I hope this memoir takes a more balanced look at the school. When I attended the annual lunch in April 2003 with Bob Twells, we spoke to the Headmaster about our school days. I pointed out the problems that Bob had experienced and the fact that he had overcome them to become a successful headmaster himself. The Head's response could be summarised as, "The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there". Well, perhaps, but that is no excuse. The lack of pastoral care was shocking.

Some of us loved the school, some of us hated it, and some, like me, sit somewhere in between. I have wanted to get these thoughts and experiences down on paper for some time, in an attempt perhaps to understand those years and the impact they had on me. The fact is that for five or seven years we were forced into intimate and continuous contact with our fellow human beings, with little prospect of escape, except in sleep. It was probably the most intensely-lived period of our lives and therefore the most unforgettable. It has led to some of the closest friendships of my life. All of us went through it, and whether, like Larkin's view of death, it was *"whined at or withstood"*, none of us can pretend it did not happen. Perhaps there is an element of survivors' bonding going on - even survivors of the Soviet Gulag hold reunions, apparently.

It was a time when everything was put on plate, when you knew what you had to do from one minute to the next. You could not plan ahead because everything was planned for you. In this sense it destroyed initiative and left us institutionalised, unfit to deal with many domestic situations. When I went away to University, I had absolutely no idea about cooking or proper nourishment, and ended up becoming malnourished. Perhaps this is why so many boys went on to the army, to recreate that feeling of safety and familiarity.

But the sad fact is that unhappy times tend to incise a greater scar upon your memory than happy times, and I was desperately unhappy for considerable periods of my school years. Yet I also experienced periods of great happiness, particularly in the sixth form when we were suddenly free to go our own way. So although I cannot condemn the school completely, I fear some boys were damaged

by the experience and a few remain damaged to this day. The chief crime was the damage done to our emotional lives. Many of us were like one-man-submarines. We battened down the hatches and submerged our true emotions for the duration, on the basis that if you were foolish enough to put your thoughts and feelings on show you were likely to suffer for it. Some have never re-surfaced. We keep our distance and this can make it difficult to love or be loved. It took me years to become normal, and I am still not there.

On the debit side there was the ignorance, the bullying, the stupid discipline, the corporal punishment, the suppression of free will and individuality, the lack of contact with the female species, the madness and cruelty of some of the staff, the physical isolation, the absence of pastoral care, and the elevation of sporting prowess beyond all other talents. But on the credit side there was the freedom of the sixth form, the range of sporting experiences, the military experience, the opportunity to meet people who had lived across the world, the sheer strangeness of the place, the extraordinary liberalism of the film society and the stage staff, and the strong friendships that have survived over the years.

It was and is a unique school and to some extent I am grateful to have been given the chance to go there. If you ask, would I have been happier had I gone elsewhere? Would I have turned out differently? How can I answer? I don't know. I simply don't know.

END

Appendix 1

Letter from Major Jack Dominy to my father. Dated 1st August 1968 (Grammar and spelling as in the original)

Dear Mr Wiles

As you will have been informed by the Headmaster your son has been allocated to Roberts House. This house, like the others, has three dormitories which are called Lucknow, Kandahar and Paardeburg. I have enclosed a brief account of the career of Lord Roberts, after whom this house is named, and from this you will see why our dormitories are so named.

During the time your son is in the house I hope you will feel free to visit me or to write to me at any time. Included in the school letter you will have noticed that visits to boys are permitted under certain circumstances. It has been my experience that the boys who take the longest to settle down and make new friends are those whose parents visit them frequenelty. Boarding school life is very full and within this house we have many weekend events and activities in which the whole house takes part. Boys who go out with their parents, aunts, unlces and guadians miss these things and are therfore, in the eys of most other boys, not playing their part in the house.

As I have said life here is very full and there is little time for the new boys to hang around with nothing to do. Do not expect your son to write more than once a week and this he will do each Sun evening, in the 40 minutes specially set aside for letter writing. During the past year there have been a number of boys whose parents have made regular arrangements for them to be rung up at certain times. This often means queuing up outside the telephone kiosk, perhaps in wet or cold weather, risking punishment for missing an arranged house activity or even in extreme cases boys have been known to miss meals because they have had to wait so long for their turns. This is really just selfishness on the part of the parents and doesn't give the boy a chance to adapt to boarding school life.

A point which has to be continually stressed by the headmaster and one on which

I ask for your very fullest cooperation is that you do not send money direct to your son. I apreciate that it is not always possible for the word to get to grandmothers and aunts etc but boys who do receive cash gain an unfair advantage over boys whose parents keep to the school rules.

It is also a great help to me if you will send once a term enough money to keep your son's account in credit and from which i will buy any new cloting or sports kit. Pocket money in this school is to buy his stamps, models, paperback book club purchases, nominal subscriptions to clubs and hobby groups, photographs and cinema as well as his sweets at the tuck shop. All this, together with the house sub from which we hire a Tv set, buy games for the wet days, additional newspapers and drinks of squash for boys after house matches, training sessions and on social evenings amounts to about £9-£12 depending on the cost of the rail ticket. The receipt of cheques will not be acknowledged.

Within the house we run a small shop which opens when the schooll tuck shop is closed. It is absolutely unnecessary to send any tuck whatsoever. For birthdays my wife is always prepared to obtain an iced cake for approximately 15/-.

We have funds available for newspapers and magazines etc and i therefore feel that now that your son is starting a secondary course of education comics are "out". Boys are able to buuy selected paper-backs through a book club to which we belong and it is much better (for them) if you agree to their having extra pocket money to buy these books twice a term.

From the information sent you will have noted those items which must be brought by your son and in this respect I have the following comments which may be of help:

1. If your son has already got a navy blue, single breased blazer, white shirt and a grey V necked slipover then he should wear them when he comes to school.
2. If he has long grey trousers he should wear them too for even if not of school pattern they will be able to be used as cricket trousers.
3. Do not buy new long trousers or blazer for him to come to school. If necessary the school outfitter will supply.

4. Football boots if already in possession shold be brought but again do NOT buy new. Wellington boots are useful.
5. You will find enclosed 12 Cash's name tapes which I would be glad if you would sew in the following items which will be kept until the end of term:-

1 vest 1 pr pants 1 white shirt
1 handkerchief 1 pr grey socks 1 grey slip-over (if you have one)
Dressing gown 1 pr swimmingtrunks wellington boots

Please keep the spares so that new underclothing which you may buy during later holidays can be sent back to school correctly marked.

6. Toilet bag – this should be of the type with a draw string through the top as each boy has a hook upon which his bag is hung. Haircream (is used) and hair shampoo should be brought in plastic containers or tubes but not in glass bottles or jars.
7. A brief case or stachel is essential as classrooms, laboratories, and workshops are spread over a large area and boys taek their books from the house at the beginning of the morning. The stachel should be as near as possible, but not larger than 15" x 10" high. Cheap plastic ones are most unsuitable.
8. A plastic mug is required for drinks in the house.

Each boy has issued to him the cap of his father's regiment. In many cases this is now a brigade badge. I would like all fathers to obtain their old regimental badge which the boy could wear on special occasions. Badges such as the Essex Regt., RASC and RWK have practically disappeared from the scene wchish seems a great pity when it was in these "units" that the period qualifying the boy to enter the school was obtained.

If you have any queries please write to me. I shall be back at the end of August and will be ale to answer them well before the beginning of term. Cheques and drafts should be made out to , "Roberts House Account" and it would help a great dael if they were sent no later than Sept 1st.

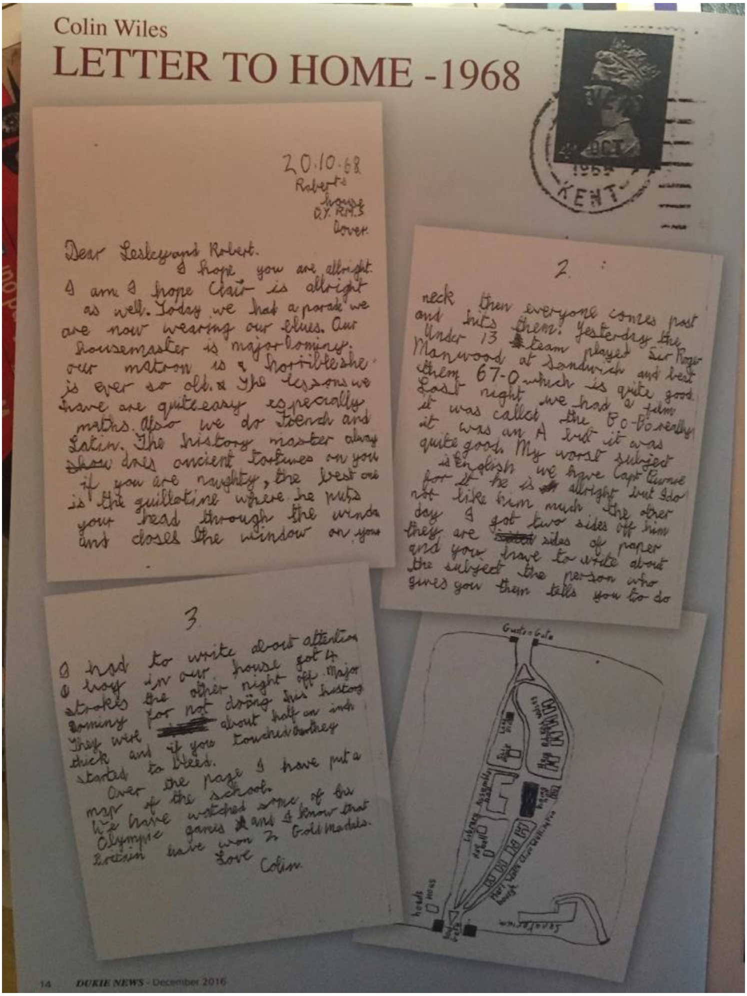
Finally your son will probably never think of the expression "homesick" if you

don't mention it. And he will look forward to and enjoy your letters if they are cheerful and full of news without putting unnecessary stress on the fact that he is away from home.

I look forward to meeting you and your son,

(John Dominy)

Appendix 2



Colin Wiles

LETTER TO HOME -1968

20.10.68
Roberts
house
D.Y. R.M.S
Dover.

Dear Lesley and Robert.
I hope you are allright.
I am I hope Clair is allright
as well. Today we had a parade we
are now wearing our blues. Our
housemaster is major Dominy.
our matron is a horrible she
is ever so old. & The lessons we
have are quite easy especially
maths. Also we do French and
Latin. The history master alway
~~show~~ dues ancient tortures on you
if you are naughty, the best one
is the guillotine where he puts
your head through the windo
and closes the window on your

2.

neck then everyone comes past
and hits them. Yesterday the
Under 13 team played Sir Roger
Manwood at Sandwich and beat
them 67-0 which is quite good.
Last night we had a film
it was called the Bo-Bo really
it was an A but it was
quite good. My worst subject
is English we have Capt Cunne
for it he is allright but I do
not like him much the other
day I got two sides off him
they are sides of paper
and you have to write about
the subject the person who
gives you them tells you to do

3.

I had to write about attention
a boy in our house got 4
strokes the other night off Major
Dominy for not doing his history
They were about half an inch
thick and if you touched them they
started to bleed. I have put a
Over the page
map of the school.
We have watched some of the
Olympic games and I know that
Britain have won 3 Gold Medals.
Love
Colin

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1. The Duke of York's Royal Military School 1801 –1934
Its History, Aims and Associations by Lewis Rudd ("An Old Boy")
G.W.Grigg and Son. "St George's Press" Dover 1935

2. "Play Up Dukies" 1801-1986
Published by the Old Boy's Association (all non-Lewis Rudd quotes are from this book)

3. "The Yorkist" – various editions

[Note: It may not be obvious to those who did not live through (or spend their youth in) the Sixties and Seventies, that the Chapter headings are all taken from lyrics or song titles of that era. In order, the artists are Kevin Coyne, Pink Floyd, Pink Floyd, The Beatles, Mott the Hoople, The Beatles, Bob Dylan, The Flintsones, Rod Stewart/Cat Stevens, Pink Floyd, The Beatles, Leonard Cohen, Pink Floyd].

POSTSCRIPT #1

Since writing a first draft of this memoir I have shared it with a few of my peers from that time. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Most have agreed that I paint a true picture of the school. Most agree with my criticisms. For many, it has unlocked long-suppressed memories, some good, some bad. One thing that strikes me is that I have perhaps under-reported the level of bullying and violence. One contemporary, who was a senior prefect, describes the level of bullying as a "moral disgrace". He refers to the cruel nicknames that he and others endured and states that the prevailing regime was a case of "out of sight, out of mind". In other words the administration cared little for the welfare of the boys so long as it did not impact upon them. He notes the hypocrisy of our daily attendance at Chapel where the Christian values of love, charity and compassion were espoused and the contrast with the uncaring regime that prevailed beyond the chapel doors. He also draws a comparison between this aspect of boarding school life and the collaboration of many French citizens during World War II. He feels the same human instincts were at work, albeit on a lesser scale. Certainly my survival strategy was to ingratiate myself with the bullies, a fact that I shall regret always. But few of us had the moral or physical courage to stand up to our tormentors.

Chris Merry, (Kitchener/Wellington 1968 –1974) has helpfully corrected some of my factual errors. His memory of our school life is remarkable. I spoke to Chris more during the writing of this memoir, both by telephone and e-mail, than I ever did during six years at school. He has also been particularly helpful in relation to the gay subculture in the school. His response to my comment that I saw no homosexual activity was, *"Where did you keep your guide dog?"*. He is aware of at least thirty boys who were involved in a range of homosexual activity. He says that I was simply not interested or involved and therefore did not see it. Bob Twells tells me that, in his first year, he came across a group of boys sitting in a circle and masturbating each other. According to one unconfirmed source, the Hilary Rudd incident came about as a result of an "affair" with a pupil. Mr "Schmo" Davey, housemaster of Haig, had taken a dislike to Rudd and pursued him until the affair was exposed. Rudd may have been suffering from clinical depression at the time, but then, as Chris says, who wasn't?

Mike Church has provided some useful memories of his school days. He suffered terribly from bullying and was badly affected by his time at the school. In particular, his memory of the daily routine is precise and is set out below. *"They are etched on my memory for all time"*, he says.

6:45am	Reveille (i.e. arise from your bed)
7:30am	Breakfast
8:25am	Chapel
8:45am – 9:25am	1st period
9:30am – 10:10am	2nd period
10:15am – 10:55am	3rd period
10:55am – 11:15am	Morning break (milk and biscuits)
11:15am – 11:55am	4th period
12:00pm – 12:40pm	5th period
1:00pm – 1:40pm	Lunch
2:00pm – 2:40pm	6th period
2:45pm – 3:25pm	7th period
3:30pm – 4:10pm	8th period
4:10pm – 4:30pm	Tea (tea and cakes in the dining hall)
4:30pm – 5:10pm	9th period

"The sports (Monday & Wednesday) and CCF (Friday) afternoons were 2:00pm – 5:00pm, as I recall", says Mike.

Chris Merry doesn't remember the queues at the single telephone box. He says Jack Dominy banned 'phone calls except in "personal emergencies". You were expected to write letters, which was little use to him as his mother was blind! He also shared my agonised embarrassment about the age and infirmity of his parents, something that causes him deep shame to this day.

I admit to being worried about circulating this essay too widely in case it found its way into the hands of those who are criticised here. I had a recurring image in my head of Jack Dominy suing me for libel, him towering above me in the witness box like an angry hanging judge, me cowering in the dock, back to my frightened eleven-year old self. But so many people have confirmed that my recollections of those far-off times are correct that it no longer bothers me.

POSTSCRIPT #2 - THE 35 YEAR REUNION 2003

Partly as a result of writing this memoir and sharing it with a few of my fellow ex-pupils, I made contact once again with Bob Twells. We arranged to meet up at the Old Boy's Association annual lunch at the Marlborough Hotel in London in April 2003. I had seen Bob a few times over the thirty years since he left the school. Andy Lane, Chris Merry, Tony Bentley, Dave Morris and Pete Barton were also present from our year. In the course of an beer-fuelled afternoon (I have no idea how I got home that night) we agreed between us that "someone" should organise a reunion for the intake of 1968, firstly because other years had organised several successful reunions and secondly because we were aware that some of our number had already died. Thoughts of mortality concentrate the mind, at least they do in my case. In any event, I decided that the "someone" should be me.

Writing this memoir had helped me to exorcise some demons and so I volunteered to take on most of the work in compiling lists and tracking people down. This task would have been almost impossible five years earlier, but through the internet we were able to trace over half of our year, although a few appear to have disappeared from the face of the planet. (Af Hitch, Peter Ellender and Jimmy Jenkins to name three). With Pete Barton and Chris Merry we came up with an initial list of 74 names, including a few who had arrived late and/or left early. School lists in those days were a lot more stable than they are today. Most of us did the full term of five or seven years. The first stop was the old boy's website, then Google and Friends Reunited. It could be frustrating, searching through page after page of Google and sending off e- mails to the likely suspects (*"you may not remember me but…"*), particularly trying to locate people like Steve Gerrard, who shares his name with the Liverpool and England footballer. Google led me to Pete Lawrence, Dick Catt and a few others. An e- mail group was put together and I sent out communications over a period of months until we had a list showing all those who would "definitely" or "possibly" attend. A few chose not to reply to any form of communication, but I was surprised that most people were overwhelmingly positive about the prospect of a reunion and pleased that "someone" had finally got their act together. Throughout the planning stage I remained in close communication with Chris Merry in Amsterdam. We agreed that the response (or lack of response) we received would partly reflect the way

that our peers saw themselves now. Did they feel that their life had been a success or a failure? Had they aged faster than the norm? Were they still suffering from the bullying they experienced?. It also became apparent that old rivalries and tensions were still in the air, even with a gap of thirty years. We worried that some of these tensions would spill over on the weekend itself.

The 2003 remembrance weekend in Dover was agreed as the date and venue for the event and thirty seven of our year turned up, plus assorted partners and family members. This was and is an all time record for any year group, the previous record being twenty-two. Most people arrived on the Friday afternoon and evening and the bar of the Churchill Hotel became a scene of much shouting and laughter as middle aged men shook hands with and hugged other middle aged men they had not seen for twenty eight or thirty years. We had put together a display of photographs and letters for people to read. It was odd how little most people had changed – almost all were instantly recognisable, and their teenage characters and mannerisms were still evident. It was a remarkable event which went on until three o'clock in the morning. The next day we assembled for a tour of the school, and a welcome from Mr John Cummings the headmaster. We split into groups of seven or eight to look around our old houses, and visited the Dining Hall and the tuckshop. There are now as many girls as boys in the school and the dormitories have been partitioned to create study bedrooms, but fundamentally the place was the same. It had a softer feel, with carpets and duvets and soft chairs, rather than wooden floors, iron beds and hard chairs. But many of us were shocked by the state of some of the buildings, particularly the rotting (hundred year old) window frames. Apparently, there is some talk within the MOD about the long term viability of the school, given the high staff to pupil ratio and the expense of its upkeep. It was noticeable that the school population is much more diverse than in our day, with many black and mixed-race faces to be seen.

On the Saturday evening, many of us attended the OBA dinner dance in the County Hotel (since demolished - a very dismal affair) and retired to the Churchill Hotel afterwards. Then on the Sunday morning there was the remembrance parade, with a contingent of over a hundred old boys who fell in and marched to the war memorial, ably led by Jeremy Lewis (*"thwee in a wank"*) and all trying to remember how to march correctly. It quickly came back, although I could have

managed better without Andy Lane shouting abuse behind me. The band was still the same, although some of the marching looked a little ragged. We all stood around the war memorial for the two minutes' silence and then marched up to the Chapel, where we sang *"Jerusalem"* and *"Sons of the Brave"*, lustily. This was followed by coffee in the Nye Hall and then a quick drink in the Swingate before departing. How long until we all meet again?

The weekend was a poignant affair. It was too short to have meaningful conversations with anyone. Some people commented that they almost turned back as they approached Dover, but I think everyone appeared to enjoy the occasion and it was a milestone event for many of our number. Arising from the reunion, both Grenville Ward and Mike Church have set up websites.This e-mail from Grenville Ward seems to sum up the weekend perfectly.

"The whole weekend was brilliant; the school tour particularly – it was very odd to see how much the culture of the school had changed (girls, etc.), and yet in many ways everything was just how I remembered it. Walking around the school, and speaking to the pupils who were acting as our guides prompted more memories – they advised that they're still breaking into the swimming pool after lights out, still diving off the balcony, and still smoking in all the places we used to use! Most interesting was the reaction of Simon Daniels' wife, who was in our party – she honestly had no comprehension of the sheer scale of the school, and the facilities in it – I know the latter have improved since "our day" (squash courts, fitness centre, etc), but even so, with hindsight, I doubt anywhere else I could have gone to would have offered me the chance to go sailing, rock climbing, free use of the art room and darkroom, etc, etc. I guess that despite some of the undoubtedly bad things that happened it's a mistake to dwell too long and deeply on them – who knows? What I have taken from the weekend, and for which I thank you most of all, is the understanding that we did truly forge life-long relationships at DYRMS; that is something I intend to realise more fully in future."

Enough said.

2003 REUNION – Tour of the School with multiple hangovers

POSTSCRIPT #3 – The 50 YEAR REUNION 2018

34 of us gathered in Dover at Remembrance weekend to celebrate 50 years since entering the school. It was a remarkable event, with people coming from Australia, Canada, Florida, and Europe. The bonds run deep.

POSTSCRIPT #4 2023

This is my final update, in advance of publishing this memoir as a physical booklet. In 2018 I moved to Sandwich only a few miles from the school. I grew up in nearby Ramsgate and we had bought a flat in Sandwich in 2005. Three sisters live nearby. In 2022 I became a Town Councillor and volunteer with a number of local groups. It is a typical small town with all the usual curiosities and prejudices. But I discovered that the sadistic paedophile Frank Andrews was living nearby, a scion of the local history society and a respected local figure. He is frequently seen walking the streets wearing skimpy shorts and exposing himself, dragging along a fat Corgi. I have tried to tell anyone who will listen about his sordid and shameful past. He was been three times investigated by the police but no action has been taken. I believe there should be no time limit upon the prosecution of

those who have destroyed the lives of others though paedophilic cruelty. One of the remaining ams of my life is to bring him to justice. Failing that, I want the town to know that this monster is living in their midst.

Anyway, I am now sending this text out into the world. One or more copies will be deposited in the school archive for others to read in the future. Perhaps in a hundred years from now someone will be interested in reading this snapshot of life in a minor military public school in the third quarter of the twentieth century.