



Tadcaster Grammar School Old Students' Association

NEWSLETTER

For former students and staff

Number 28 - March 2006



Chairman, Roy Gittins writes

A little over thirty years ago, as some of our younger members (those approaching fifty) may recall, we began to run Sixth Form courses in General topics, not so much as preparation for the A-level General Studies paper as to broaden the interests and knowledge of students

in the new-style Sixth Form. At that time the academic ambitions had widened across a much broader spectrum from 'Oxbridge' aspirations to those attempting to improve their C.S.E. (Mode 3) passes to two or three. These courses ran for half of a term and then the groups, which were truly comprehensive in their composition, moved on. One of the courses I presented was entitled 'Life in the Universe', the possibilities of which having fascinated me since I was a boy - it therefore had the added attraction of not requiring too much in the way of preparation!

Beginning with an introduction to the Solar System (initially I was surprised to discover that in each group there were those with little or no understanding of that term, or of words such as planet, or star) we progressed to, at least, a basic conception of 'The Universe' - basic certainly describes my own understanding. Somewhere in mid-course we considered the rapid acceleration in technological progress during the previous century, and to speculate upon what might be achieved in the next 100 years, or 1,000 years, or even 10,000 years, given a comparable rate

of progress. There could be civilisations out there which are 100,000 or even one million years in advance of our own - providing that they showed less of a propensity to self-destruct! (We were then deeply entrenched in the 'Cold War').

Had I been involved in this exercise today I would have been able to draw upon further examples from our experiences at T.G.S. For example, when we were required to prepare examination papers in the 1950s and earlier 1960s there was the painstaking and often exasperating business of using a metal stylus to write on a sheet of thin card covered with an even thinner waxy 'skin'. The scratches in the skin allowed ink to pass through onto duplicating paper in the subsequent printing stage, a potentially messy business involving the liberal use of thick, greasy black ink which had a remarkable ability to spread itself throughout the Printing room. As I recall the printer was declared out of bounds to the Teaching staff.

In less than 40 years, we have learned to produce our own examination papers and our own Newsletters far more quickly, cleanly, and with results of an infinitely better quality. Not only that, but in this magical world of the computer and the internet, that finished product can be displayed to all who may wish to see it at the touch of a few appropriate keys - beyond belief thirty years ago. As you will see elsewhere in this issue, Gerry Nutton has set up a new T.G.S.O.S.A. website which will be updated regularly and will be a further means of 'keeping in touch'. I understand that this has a link to the School website which will be of interest to many members of O.S.A. who ask of news of T.G.S. from time to time.

I would like to thank and congratulate Gerry for his time and expertise in this new venture.

The Horse Pistol

Thomas Lowe (1933-1939)



As I come through the front door and into the Hall my eyes first light on the Horse Pistol and I remember! I remember the day I shot one of the T.G.S. masters.

The pistol belonged to my great-grandfather. Legend has it he rode shotgun on a stagecoach. Be that as it may, I was allowed to play with it. I used to fill it with caps and when the trigger was pulled it went off with an almighty bang.

One day I took the pistol to T.G.S. and of course was dared to fire it. So I did, at the top of the stairs. Mr. Hitchen, who was halfway down, fell the rest of the way, scattering exercise books on all and sundry. Next morning A. H. Harries, the Headmaster, devoted Assembly to the stupidity of silly pranks and requested the culprit - with weapon - to come to his study within the hour or else. 'Else' was no Games for the whole school.

Trembling, I knocked on his study door. "Aha! Lowe is it? Your brother was a nuisance too!" I was given six of the best, expelled for a week and sent home with the report book written in red - "See my letter". My father dealt with me equally appropriately.

After winning the war in Europe (it took me five and a half years) I returned to University to finish my degree and sit for the Dip/Ed. The latter necessitated weeks of teaching practice and without thinking I opted to do my second at T.G.S.

I approached the dreaded study door with the same trepidation as all those years ago in the Spring Term of 1938. "Aha! It's you Lowe" said Mr. Bicknell. "I note your degree in Classics and History so I have put you under the wing of Mr. Hitchen." Gulp!! It could have been a disaster, but no - dear old Ike gave me an A+ and I went on to serve as a headmaster for 33 years in primary and secondary schools. The pistol has, of course, a place of honour in our house.

We're on the World Wide Web

Visit our new website at
www.tadcastergsosa.org.uk

After about a month of development and experimentation, TGSOSA was finally able to launch a website for members on Saturday, 11th February. If you have an internet connection please log on to our new website at tadcastergsosa.org.uk and see what you think of it.

We have felt, for some time and for several reasons, that it would be a good idea to have a website, so here it is. The site itself will spell out its aims. Check out the links, see how easily you can find your way around and let us know what you think via the 'Contact Us' page.

Perhaps the most important advantage of having a website will be that those members who so desire will be able to download and print a good copy of the Newsletter and relieve the association of the cost of postage - a cost which may increase substantially from August this year. Additionally we have, at our disposal, an easy means of communicating with some of members more frequently.

Another advantage will be our ability to post earlier issues of the Newsletter for people to download. The last four are currently available and Richard Hunt, who was responsible for the production of all the earlier editions, is going to provide the PDF files for us to post on the site.

Many members have kept their school photos carefully for years whilst others may have lost them or never had them. We have lots of web space available to post photos for others to download and will be happy to accept them from members. Please see the photographs page of the website for further information.

Experienced surfers will need no instruction on how to navigate the website but we know there are many who still find the business somewhat daunting and frustrating so we ask the more experienced members to bear with us when we seek to give a helping hand to those less familiar with the mysterious business.

Those fortunate enough to have broadband connection will find the site loads almost instantaneously. For dial-up connections loading times will be longer and the backgrounds will load after the text. I have aimed throughout to make the site visually attractive but if the backgrounds cause too much of a problem they can be removed.

It will be of great help to the association if some members can accept delivery of the newsletter via the website. The Committee has discussed the subscription implications of such a move and has concluded that subscription should remain the same for all members. One incentive to take delivery via the website might be the production of a colour issue on the website when the situation merits it - no promises, it *is* extra work.

We cannot emphasise too strongly that it is for each individual member to decide how they receive the Newsletter. There will be many who do not have and probably do not wish to have access to the internet. These people can be assured that the printed version will continue to be available.

We hope you enjoy this latest venture and ask that you do your part by responding via the form on the contacts page. The form is delivered by e-mail back to us through a secure connection.

Uniformity for Girls-Louise Smith (Jelf) (1958 -1964)

In December 1958, I moved home with my family from Lancashire to Yorkshire and started my first term at TGS in January 1959. Prior to starting my new school I was taken into Leeds by my mother to buy my new school uniform at Rawcliffes (then outfitters to TGS!) Uniform for junior girls was a navy blue gym tunic, either fully pleated or a waisted style with plain top. This was worn with a woven girdle/belt in the appropriate "house" colour. A white cotton long sleeved blouse and a navy "v" necked sweater worn with the aforementioned delightful gym tunic. The obligatory TGS tie, white ankle or knee socks and black shoes completed the outfit. Outerwear consisted of a lovely navy blue shapeless gabardine raincoat with buckled belt and detachable hood and don't forget the TGS school beret adorned with the embroidered TGS badge.

Summer uniform was a blue/white striped dress - any style was allowed in 1958 but by 1960 a standard dress was designed and was compulsory. This superb item of fashion was a shirtwaist style with short sleeves worn with a navy jumper or cardigan (standard uniform style of course) A navy school blazer (wool or gabardine) with the TGS badge on the pocket topped this. These trendy items were the basis of TGS girls' school uniform.

By the time we were in middle school (having moved up from Leeds Road to Toulston) appearance became a more important thing. Now we were allowed to wear navy pleated skirts instead of gym tunics. They could be of any style as long as they had pleats. Our poor mums were driven mad pressing the pleats in place ready for Monday school. Some of my form wore wide webbing belts with clasps and hitched up their skirts to make them shorter. The navy 'v' jumper was replaced by M & S men's 'V' necks in blue/green, black/white flecked wool pulled right down so just a few skirt pleats showed. An Army and Navy dark grey duffle coat was worn as a prized possession.

Summer uniform was still the blue/white dress but we "customised" it by wearing starched full petticoats underneath to be more 'with it'.

How we got away with all this amazes me, but it's nothing to what the little "Lolitas" of today are wearing to school.

The girls' cloakroom was a hive of activity in the mornings. Coats and berets were removed and out came hairbrushes and lacquer sprays as backcombed coiffures were created.

One of the other things I recall was the girls' games kit of white aertex shirts, blue skirt/shorts, hockey jumpers and the ubiquitous navy blue gym knickers for P.E., netball and athletics.

I remember hearing comments about our form girls going out to the athletics track past the science labs. A couple of girls were complimented on their slim waists and I got "As for you there's nothing of you but leg."

Sixth formers had the privilege of being allowed to wear just skirts and white blouses instead of the summer dresses and ties were allowed to be removed in hot weather.

Miss Richardson, in her role of senior mistress, would occasionally summon the girls into the school hall and give us a ticking off about what we wore. One of her gems was criticising the fashion of wearing diamond mesh stockings. She said "Some of you girls are wearing copper coloured criss cross on your legs. This is totally inappropriate and not allowed." I must confess that I was an offender.

Another essential item of school uniform for boys and girls was the school bag/satchel/duffle bag; know collectively as "Le Sac." You often heard calls around the school of "Have you seen my sac anywhere?" Briefcases became 'cool' in the sixth form and we thought we were wonderful wearing a prefect's badge and carrying a briefcase.

Many many happy memories. Please fellow TGS'ites of 1958-64 write in with your recollections. I would love to hear them.

School Dinners

[attributed to the pen of Penelope Dent - apologies if not]

If you have School Dinners set them aside
Lots of people didn't and lots of people died
See the gravy, thick and still
If that doesn't kill you, the custard will.

Louise is a member of the TGSOSA committee

My account of life at Tadcaster Grammar School from 1947 to 1952 (TGSOSA Newsletter Number 18) ended "Three further TGS years as Sixth formers lay ahead." How to write about those years? In hindsight they are just as interesting as the preceding ones, but the story becomes more personal, involving as it does advanced examinations, sporting achievements, girl friends, greater responsibilities; as well as the trials and tribulations of late teenage.

In the Autumn term of 1952 we entered the Lower Sixth with a classroom off the school hall of the old Leeds Road building. Mr Pocock, whose subject was History, was our form master though he was scarcely seen by those of us on the science side. We were a mixed bunch, divided not only between Arts and Science, with Geography as almost a separate discipline, but also by the need for some to strengthen O Level records of the previous year. My particular timetable allowed ample time for 'private study' which could have been passed in the Library. However this prospect was unattractive, so six 'free' periods were traded to resume Handicraft (forgone after the Second form by A-streams) under the individual direction of 'Woody' Fletcher. Several pieces of hand-made furniture in my present home bear witness to those extra classes.

Sixth-form science meant Chemistry with Mr Taylor, my father - which was no novelty since he had taught us since 3A - alongside Maths with Mr Bates, and Physics in the lab across the hall with Mr Heselgrave. Hessie, always a popular teacher, had taken over from Mr Tunstall who was on the verge of retirement, and he was new to Sixth form work. The intricacies of Magnetism and Electricity or Heat, Light and Sound occasionally troubled him as much as they did us and he wisely adopted a partnership approach to learning which worked very well. Chemistry involved much experimental work, not all of which would pass muster in the later 'health and safety' conscious climate. The text books by Durrant are a very faint memory but extraordinarily I have hung on to my 1952-55 Practical Record book, complete with its stains and shrewd comments initialled by E.A.T. This testifies that as novice scientists we dissolved sodium metal in alcohol and collected the hydrogen gas evolved by a vigorous reaction so as to determine the atomic weight of the element. My result of 20.1 was far enough from the actual value of 23 to place the Periodic Table in jeopardy!

'Scientists' took few other subjects: just several periods of English, French or Latin which might be required in General papers for university admission. Our weekly 'Current Affairs' class was nominally taken by Mr Bicknell, whose duties as Headmaster meant that he appeared late if at all, leaving us without supervision to gossip unashamedly. However it was the specialist subjects that mattered and these were our chief preoccupation. Under the charismatic influence of Mr Woodcock, Geography was a counter to the traditional subjects, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics (Pure and Applied) to which I stuck. My Applied Maths marks fluctuated disconcertingly; 72, 48, 96% in consecutive examinations, surprising Fred Bates, and putting paid to my dreams of becoming an aircraft designer. Instead chemistry became my focus which led in due course to research on the shapes and structures of molecules - a happy choice as I can reflect after a career spent in that field. At TGS we were well taught and had ample preparation for the three Advanced level subjects. The Scholarship papers gave scope to swot on favoured topics. Noticing that 'Discuss the contribution of Copernicus, Kepler and Newton to the study of gravitation' had been set in 1950 and 1952, I made this a banker and luckily it came up again in the 1954 Physics paper. Our results were known in August. The news of satisfactory marks arrived on the morning I was to take my driving test; after which even the prospect of a hill start on the steep inclines of Harrogate couldn't dampen my spirits.

Enough of studies; what else made up life in the Sixth form during the 1950s? There were few school clubs or societies, although photography flourished whenever sports' team photos were to be taken and printed for sale at sixpence each. A Scientific Society, meeting after school hours in the chemistry lab that was also the Upper Sixth form room, allowed tyro speakers to deliver short papers on topics of their choice - not always confined to science. The Symphony Orchestra is a subject I recall, perhaps because of my embarrassingly naive question "Where is

the piano?" (having not appreciated that only a concerto employs this instrument).

Our advance into the Upper Sixth brought Prefect status, denoted by a Boars' Head lapel badge. The duties were not onerous; we were called upon to exert mild discipline, enforced by the giving of 'lines' to offenders (does this useless punishment persist?), and we were required to supervise the lower forms during school dinner. As a Tadcaster resident who normally went home during the mid-day break, it was my first and only experience of this notorious institution. A special task was to read the Lesson during Assembly; hence the Prefects' room would suddenly empty if word came through that Miss Richardson was approaching, book in hand, to catch the next morning's reader.

TGS's scattered catchment tended to confine my friendships to school hours. However the situation improved as we became older and owned sturdy bicycles or I might even have access to the family car. Horizons widened with outings to Leeds to experience theatre and music - 'The Barber of Seville' on tour - or the YSO under Malko or Norman del Mar. There was the 'Top Twenty' stuff of Doris Day and Frankie Laine too, but that came over the radio or on records (no pop concerts then). With little spending money, we were glad to earn welcome shillings by delivering the Christmas post during the winter holidays or picking fruit in the summer. Half-term breaks brought a more exciting prospect: Field Weeks. The first of these - at the Holiday Fellowship Centre, Marske, North Yorkshire, in 1953 - was the initiative of Mr Woodcock, supported by Alan Cook and others of the younger staff. His successor, Arthur Coles, continued the series, taking groups to Conway in North Wales, the Derbyshire Peak District, and the Wye Valley area where I recall our facing a half gale in the Black Mountains that reduced several plastic macs to shreds.

These later schooldays - if not the happiest days of my life - were nevertheless the chance to enjoy sport; cricket particularly, where I played under a sequence of keen captains, Chris Attrill, Jerry Pettigrew and Gerry Nutton. My association with the team (which had begun as scorer) reached its zenith with a score of 30 not out, when batting at number three in my final term.

In the Sixth form I acquired the minor duty of Games Secretary, dispatching postcards to arrange football or cricket fixtures against Leeds Modern, West Leeds HS, Pontefract and Knaresborough GS, among others. Sport also had its social side because, as seniors, we could play mixed tennis on Friday evenings of the summer term on the hard courts of the Wetherby Road playing field.

1954-55 was my final year. For those bent on university, the Autumn and Spring terms involved a circuit of Cambridge or Oxford Colleges which held their own examinations - a sort of merry-go-round where the object was to spin off as quickly as possible. Our NUJMB results of the previous summer already guaranteed financial support in the form of State or County Major Scholarships but the challenge was to win a place against strong competition. Five of us gained Oxbridge admission and the twins, John and Wilfred Theakstone, achieved a remarkable double with awards from the separate Jesus Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. Two of our year, Christine Atkinson and Cecilia Hudson (later Mrs Gausden) on the Arts side, went to Birmingham, denied a fair shot at the older universities by the imbalance of the sexes which prevailed until the 1980s. News of 'Cec' told of her playing the role of Sally Bowles in *I am a Camera* wearing green finger nails - which raised eyebrows at that date. Others went as far afield as Exeter, the Head being of the firm view that university life ought to take us well away from home. We were in the process of spreading our wings, but continued to meet during vacations or to celebrate 21st birthdays. And so it was that we went our separate ways after October 1955, returning to school only to share experiences at the Leavers' Party. Two of my Sixth Form contemporaries, Celia Gausden and Gerry Nutton, went on to become staff members themselves; a fact which reinforces the strong hold that the old school had (and still has) on many of us.

The shift to Toulston was well under weigh by the mid-fifties. We of the 1947 intake were the very last TGS pupils to spend our entire school career in the Tadcaster building. Can it really be fifty years ago? And why have I linked U6S then with U3A now in the title of this article?

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Michael Taylor - continued from Page 3

Now for U3A

Two years ago, and well into my retirement from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, I opened a new chapter as a member of U3A, the University of the Third Age. This organisation has twenty branches in Auckland - a diverse city of one million people. The Parnell branch of which I am the Treasurer is small, with about 90 members. Beside meetings with an invited speaker, we run study groups that include music (both classical and jazz), literature, local history, art gallery visits, mastering the computer, and play-reading. In character or not, I recently took the part of Colonel Pickering in Shaw's Pygmalion. Another group 'Famous and Infamous' presents notable lives or events. Our subjects have included historical figures (Napoleon, Nelson, George Orwell), the explorer Shackleton, the actor John Thaw ('Morse'), Stephen Potter (the originator of Gamesmanship) and Christopher Milne (his real life spent escaping the 'Christopher Robin' label). Faithful to my northern roots I reconstructed for this series my one-time sporting heroes, cricketer Len Hutton and soccer player Tom Finney.

The mild intellectual effort of U3A is supposed to combat aging on the 'use it or lose it' principle. For a scientist, this can be reckoned a late venture into Upper 6A for a taste of the Arts side of life.

Wine & Cheese Evening

Having deferred the next reunion to 2007, the 450th anniversary of the school's foundation, the committee has decided to hold a wine & cheese evening in Toulston Lodge Hall on Saturday, 15th July. In order for the event to be a success we need to have a reasonable idea of how many people will be present. More on this in the next issue and on the website but, for now, please make a note of the date in your diary.

Paper Punishment

Ed

Reading Michael's superb article brings back many happy memories for me especially of the days when we both played cricket for the School 1st XI. I was particularly interested, though, in the comment he made about giving lines: it reminded me of a lesson given by his father in which Mr. Taylor called a girl to the front and said "Now my dear, for the past ten minutes you have been talking whilst I have been speaking. What do you think would be a suitable punishment, ten lines, a hundred lines or a thousand lines?" Being a bright lass she thought that saying "ten" would be a bit cheeky and "a thousand" just plain daft, so she said timidly "A hundred, sir!" The rest was pure E. A. Taylor. It began with the characteristic slow clearing of the throat which always presaged his more weighty or amusing statements "Er..hem.. that's funny, I was only thinking of giving you ten". Laughter all round, girl suitably chastened and no harm done. I'm pretty certain, having been taught by him for eight years and having spent seven years as his very junior colleague, that he, like Michael, didn't have too much time for paper discipline.

G.N.

Congratulations

We extend our sincere good wishes to Dorothy Moore (Foxton) who celebrates her 90th birthday this month. Dorothy is the author of the wonderful article entitled "Seven Sisters" in Issue 24 and who was photographed at the 2004 reunion with Thomas and Sarah Lowe (see Issue 26). Coincidentally, Thomas' article "The Horse Pistol" appears in this issue.



After TGS. The following is the second part of Robin Whittlestone's article started in the last issue. It takes up from where Robin had arrived at Bristol University

On arriving that September 1957 I had found myself in digs with 3 ardent Bridge players. Anyone who knows about Bridge, knows that you need 4 for a hand.... I played Bridge for the first two years, almost to the exclusion of all else, and the part 1 exams after those 2 years were a struggle! I moved into a self catering flat at that point, with only 1 of the Bridge players, and work gained some sort of precedence (along with being president of the walking, folk dancing and amateur radio clubs for the next 4 years).

After 2½ years of the PhD research [into heat conduction within a crystalline solid in case you ask], the results hadn't quite resolved the improving theoretical picture (developed by the Prof and his theoreticians), so I rebuilt the electronic bit of the apparatus and repeated the experiments at lower temperatures. However fate took a hand at this point. My DSIR grant had finished at the end of the third year, the University funded me for another 2 terms but I had upset their plans somewhat. They took an exquisite form of revenge. The room my complex apparatus occupied was a single storey extension to the 4 storey Department building. Originally it had been intended by its sponsor, HH Wills (tobacco), to encircle the hill at four storeys, but the money had run out after ¼ of the building had been completed and the end I occupied was the unfinished bit. Due to pressure on numbers in the Physics department, plans had been agreed to knock down my single story bit to build a 2/3 storey extension. The start date was July 1963, at the end of my third year of research. Building work started, but, to give them their due, they dug under and round my room leaving the structure intact while I worked on. However, my research required temperatures close to absolute zero using liquid Helium coolant, and detecting very low level magnetic signals. The slightest vibration made measurement impossible; yet during the day the whole place shook with the diggers, pile drivers and dumpers. So, I had to work at night, but this was against the grain for the liquid helium technician.

Helium is a very expensive gas, not because it costs a lot to buy, but at the time it was only found in the US and the cost lay in transporting the heavy high pressure cylinders to the UK. All helium thus had to be reused many times and part of the complexity of my apparatus was the need to pipe the evaporated gas back to a gasometer, which had a finite capacity. It took a lot of wheedling to permit me to transfer the liquid gas into my apparatus just before the technician left for home so he could pump out the gas that the cooling process generated (a lot of gas because the latent heat of helium is quite low and even though the cooled element of the kit was of as little mass as practical (increasing the vibration

sensitivity) it still nearly filled the reservoir in cooling down the Dewar flask and the metal bits). I was then left to get on with it and worked through the night until all the liquid had evaporated. This was not too bad, there were no interruptions from the Prof who during the day would come in at any time with a distinguished visitor to have the experiments explained (a visitor who as often as not spoke little English...). He used to come in dangling a lit cigarette from his lips, even when we were using liquid Hydrogen, despite hanging a large notice on the door saying "No smoking - Hydrogen in use"! After all, he was the boss! It was peaceful; even my supervisor was not about and I could get on with work. Unfortunately however I had married at the end of my third year research, so for 4 months I used to pass my new wife on the stairs; she going off to teach on the other side of Bristol, and me returning for sleep! In the evening I was out again before she returned. Despite 2 terms of this we are still together after 40+ years!

One day after I declared my measurements complete, the equipment disappeared, and next day so had the room. All that was left was a large hole. No going back for just another measurement!

After that, entry into the Scientific Civil service seemed very peaceful, though I spent the first month or so putting the finishing touches to my thesis in my "spare" time. The new job was fun too, in many and varied ways. After 27 years in the radio business as a "physicist/engineer" I ended up as a manager, running research programmes, working in London, but based in Malvern; commuting weekly by train, but managing staff in Malvern, Farnborough and Sevenoaks and research programmes in those places, and at Portsmouth as well. I was glad to retire at age 60 and get on with the walking, folk dancing, gardening and reading (not to mention listening to music, going to the theatre, stamp collecting and now, quite recently, the computer). These fill much of my time now that amateur radio is still on the back burner. I was reluctant to join the computer fraternity having struggled with Bill Gates' products at work for many years, and its infamous message "Application error - OK?" several times a day. I also managed Computer research programmes during my final years, and they did little to inspire confidence in the aforementioned software. It has improved with Windows NT and XP, but not enough.

Having attended several TGS reunions, from the second one when I found out about them, though not the last 2, I have only once met anybody I knew from my years; Susan Douthwaite, whose father wrote in the last TGOSA Newsletter. Where are my year? Have they vanished off the face of the earth, or are they uncharacteristically shy?