

Tim Chavasse looks back.....



I was sent to Durlston Court in September 1939 shortly after the outbreak of war. What I remember most about that time was going down to the cellars just before an air-raid, having our photographs taken wearing our gas masks and watching dog fights between our own and enemy aircraft.

It always seems to happen when one is young summer days are long sunny and warm. However, one summer term there happened to be a long hot spell which was broken by a violent thunder storm, and that night our entire dormitory lent out of the window watching the forked lightening, when suddenly there was a massive purple flash instantly followed by what sounded like a crack-of-doom, and a large oak tree about 200 yards away was struck by a bolt of lightning. We all scuttled back to our beds terrified out of our wits. Next morning, all that remained of the tree was a blackened stump.

I was one of the many boys who developed a great interest in Lepidoptera and Ornithology which I have kept up throughout my life, although these days, living in Portugal, I do not kill butterflies after catching them, but release them when I have discovered what species they are. Nor do I collect bird's eggs. To this day I do not know how boys were able to walk into a chemist and buy as much Cyanide, as we required. From this cyanide we made killing bottles simply by pouring plaster-of-Paris over the cyanide and, putting a cork bung into the neck of the bottle.

By the end of the summer term, the cyanide had become rather weak and butterflies flapped about for days on end before they died, probably from starvation. We also tried killing butterflies in a jar with crushed laurel leaves, but the butterflies took even longer to die than in weak cyanide.

Earnshill was a wonderful place for boys to grow up and learn to appreciate nature, for not only was there a wonderful variety of butterflies and moths (it was before the days of chemical fertilizers) and there was a huge variety of birds, reptiles and wild animals. I remember one day walking through a field with Michael Lushington, when up got a couple of hares which proceeded to run in a circle around us. Our thoughts immediately turned to food, but seeing nothing to throw at them, we threw our shoes, one of which hit a hare and stunned it. It took no time to kill it, either by hitting it hard on the head or by strangling it; I forget which. We took it to our hut in an old pollarded elm where we cooked it in a saucepan over a "Tommy's Cooker" (a small metal container filled with solid paraffin

and used by Soldiers) and then ate it. I do not remember if we enjoyed it, but we did enjoy puffing on our pipes afterwards.

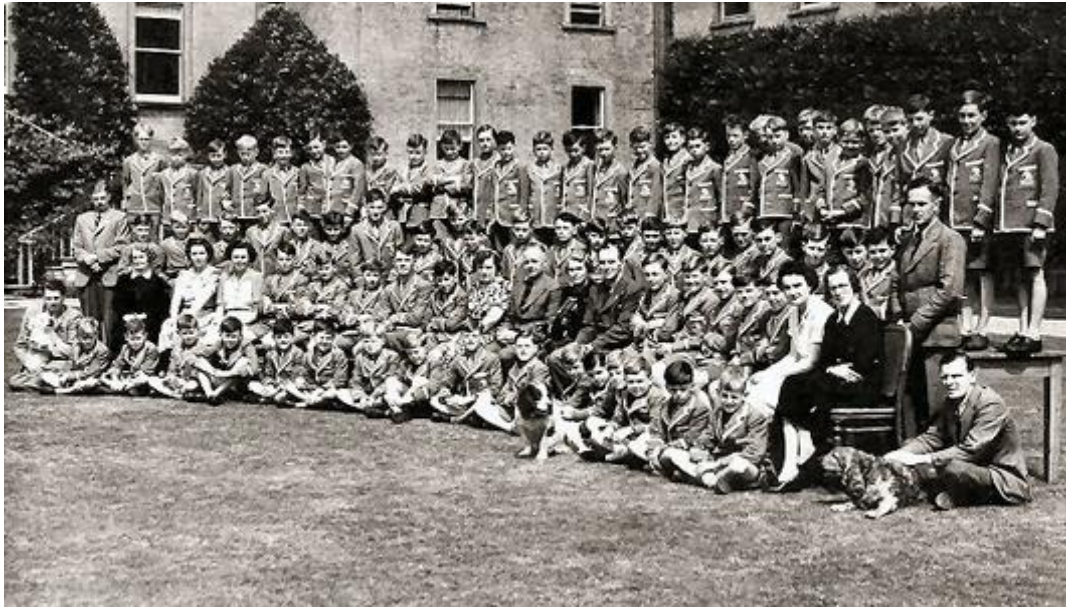
Both Anthony Dix and Sir Rowland Whitehead have a very much better memory of the staff than I. I do, however, remember Miss Dawson; who doesn't? and what a wonderful teacher of French she was. Thanks to her, I can 'get by' if I go to France. Of course I remember 'Cockeye' and 'Eli' with affection even though I was beaten by both on a number of occasions.

What wonderful men they were, and I never ceased to be amazed as to how they managed to run the school during, those war years. I remember Miss St. Croix, the music teacher. I must have been the bane of her life as I did not have a note of music in my head. At the end of each summer term all boys had to play a piece of music that we had been taught during the year on a piano, on the stage and in front of the whole school and staff. Everybody was brilliant, except me, as I could not remember my piece. By the time that my turn came I was in a cold sweat of panic, so in desperation gave the school a rendering of "God Save the King" and was severely reprimanded by Mr. Cox afterwards.

There were a lot of moles in the school grounds. Anthony Dix and I somehow succeeded in catching one and we decided to have it stuffed by a taxidermist. We found an advertisement for a taxidermist in a book, put the mole into a box, and sent it off by post. About three weeks later we were summoned to Mr. Cox's study, and there on his desk was our parcel which, to put it mildly stank. The taxidermist to whom we had sent the mole (guts and all) had gone out of business in the 1920's. We were told to get rid of the parcel and its contents.

I have so many happy memories of Durlston Court, some at Swanage, but most at Earnshill, and so much that I learnt there both academically and during our free time has stood me in good stead. Although Durlston has changed without recognition from those war years, the boys and girls of today will look back in sixty years time with many happy memories like the boys of my day.

School Days with David by Anthony Dix



A Tribute to David Franks

I shall always remember my first night at Durlston Court. The school had been evacuated from Swanage to Eamshill a Georgian mansion near Currey Rivel in Somerset. I was a month late in starting the autumn term, having lost two front teeth in an accident. The train was three hours late on account of the bombing and my mother and I did not arrive at the school until seven in the evening. I was hurried off to a dormitory with six other small boys and afforded the kindest and warmest of welcomes. Jon Franks seemed to be the master of ceremonies whereas David who was in the far corner was more reserved, as if summing me up. Immediately the lights were put out, each little boy produced a torch and started making animal silhouettes on the ceiling, and I thought this place wasn't going to be so bad.

My second winter term at Durlston, I found myself in a dormitory at the top of the house looking out over the park. Out of six boys I've kept in touch with four of them for over sixty years. They were Timothy Chavasse from an old established family in County Cork, Jonathan and David, and the prefect in charge was none other than their elder brother, the suave Roly Franks. David displayed a remarkable talent for telling ghost stories after lights out. The denouement of one particularly hair-raising tale went something like this: "and suddenly {pause} a knife {pause}" followed by a blood curdling scream from Chavasse as a slipper whistled past his ear, then David's familiar chuckle.

Early on I became aware of David's sang froid. We were once chasing a snake along a hedgerow. We assumed it was a grass snake, but it might have been an adder. David took off his shoe and threw it at the snake. He was convinced that he had wounded it, but just then it disappeared down a rabbit hole. Determined to close with his quarry, he put his arm down the rabbit hole and pulled out the snake more dead than alive. When I gently reproved him saying that it might have bitten him, he said, "Oh, no". Since it went down head first he figured he would be able to grab it by the tail. I was not so sure.

The river Parrett flowed through the water meadows below the Park. In most places in summer it was possible to wade across, in the winter the water meadows frequently flooded. My second summer term David, Timothy and I were walking by the river one warm June evening and we

thought it would be fun to swim across. We were about eleven at the time. Timothy and I could swim, but David couldn't do more than a few yards doggy paddle. In truth, we were only out of our depth for about six feet. "That's all right", we said to David, "We will swim on either side of you and, if necessary, hold you up." All went well to start with, then David put his arms out on either side and all three of us went under. Timothy and I emerged spluttering but for a second or two there was no sign of David. He eventually surfaced and later recounted how he had reasoned in a flash that if he continued his journey on foot he would eventually reach the other bank.

The following two summer terms, it must have been 1942 and 1943, a number of us took to swimming regularly. We found an 'L' shaped bend in the river where the bed had been scooped out and it was deep enough to dive. Many a warm July afternoon was spent lazing about in the muddy lukewarm water – completely naked of course.

With almost a quarter of the school decamping to the riverside every Saturday afternoon and returning for tea, reeking of river water, it is hardly surprising that the authorities decided to put a stop to it. Mr Moss, a particularly slimy younger master, was sent out to approach from downstream from whence he could come upon us without being detected. Suddenly, the river cleared and several boys made off across the field clutching their clothes. That night Mr Cox beat fifteen of us. It was not the last time that I stood in silence in line with the Frank's twins. It is in such moments, rather as it must have been awaiting the guillotine, that one appreciates the true meaning of comradeship.

There was a further occasion when David threw a tennis ball belonging to me up onto the roof. Georgian houses often have a balustrade round the top of the outer wall. It was then that I conceived one of the more hair brained schemes of my life. We couldn't climb on the roof during daylight in full view of the headmaster's study, but we could climb up an overhanging yew tree in the hours of darkness. Unfortunately, the tree was perilously near the headmaster's bedroom. Towards the midnight hour and halfway up the tree, the timorous voice of Mr Cox was heard saying, "Is there anyone there?" Apparently he thought at the time that David, Jon and I might have been burglars. There was a deadly hush, then David piped up with, "it's me Sir, Franks" and our fate was sealed.

Much energy was expended at Durlston in building huts; the smaller boys spent many happy hours on the woodpile; the bigger boys built more elaborate constructions in the wood. One often sees pictures in children's books of gnomes living inside large trees, but I never thought it was possible until one day, the Frank's twins, a boy called Horner, and I were walking across the park at Eamshill.

The north view of the house had a vista with venerable oak trees on either side looking out over the haha down to the river. Several trees had water trapped at the base and the bowl was steadily rotting. This was manifest by large growths of toadstool-like fungus growing between the roots. As we idly hacked away at the fungus with our penknives, we realised that the whole of the inside of one of the trees was hollow.

Eventually, by turning sideways, we were able to squeeze between the roots and found ourselves standing in a small chamber in about a foot of water. We tried baling out the water but it was too laborious. Just then, an older boy called Lushington came by. he was the sort that always knew what to do in such situations, and he went off to fetch a crowbar. Soon the water gushed forth and

flowed down the hill. For several weeks we worked like beavers, hacking out the rotten wood, laying a brick floor in the sludge and even cementing in a small glass window between a couple of roots on one side.

For our last five terms at Durlston, we spent many happy hours sitting in our hut. On a Sunday afternoon we would heat up tins of soup on a candle, or smoke rotten wood in home made pipes. There were bamboo bushes in the wood and the bowls of our pipes were hollowed out of Elm while the stems were made of bamboo.

Our early attempts at cooking nearly ended in disaster. We had filled a small biscuit tin with paraffin and were trying to light it, when suddenly the whole tin became a fireball. I had gone back to the changing rooms in the old stable block to get some more matches. Suddenly David appeared breathless and white as a sheet – “the hut’s on fire”, he said. I raced back to the hut, followed by David carrying a bucket of water. Already a small pall of smoke was drifting across the park. Somehow we got the blazing tin of paraffin out of the hut and spent an hour dowsing down the smouldering walls. Our clothes reeked like a bonfire for days and how we were not detected, I shall never know.

The Franks family lived at Norney Cottage in a hamlet called Eashing just south of the Hogs Back. It was a spacious Edwardian family house with substantial garden on the south side overlooking a broad meadow on rising ground to the west. Hardly an Easter or Summer holiday went by without an invitation to stay.

Mrs Franks performed miracles feeding a husband and three growing boys on wartime rations. She kept a few chickens in the backyard and in the school holidays, the boys had to feed them and clean the coops out. David seemed to form a special relationship with each hen. Every chicken had a name and he used to chat to them like old friends.

One summer’s afternoon, the farmer opposite invited Mrs Franks to send her boys across to pick mulberries. The tree was of considerable size, standing right by the farm gate. I remember sitting up in that old mulberry tree, long after our basket was full, picking the fruit until our brown corduroy shorts ran purple with mulberry juice.

Just beyond the trees to the south was the new Godalming bypass. One Easter holiday, Jonathan had been given an air gun, and we spent hours taking pot shots at almost anything that moved. It was about a year before ‘D’ Day and there were Canadian troops stationed all over Surrey. The Canadians used to exercise their tanks along the bypass; just below Norney it ran between two high banks. This was the ideal place for an ambush and we used to lie in the bushes firing furiously at the tanks as they rolled past, pretending they were Germans.

All members of the Franks family were big talkers and even I, not noted for reticence, had to take my turn in the queue. I remember the convivial family lunches at Norney often enlivened later by Roly’s nautical yarns when on leave from the New Zealand line. What a contrast with my own family where my father said little and my sister even less. If anything, the quietest member of the family was David and he seemed to become more taciturn in early manhood.

Not always however, on one occasion my parents arrived at Durlston with a picnic lunch and invited Timothy Chavasse and the Franks twins to join us. We were sitting on an old fallen tree trunk in the

park and David was doing most of the talking. Meanwhile, Timothy was ploughing his way steadily through the sandwiches. Suddenly, David stopped talking, looked at Timothy and said, "well, one advantage of not talking is that you can eat more".

There were return visits to my parents home at Chantersluer Farm, near Charlwood in Surrey. One summer holidays we chopped down a young Ash tree in the nearby spinney and dragged it over two fields, singing the Song of the Volga Boatmen all the way. Our aim was to haul it up between two young Elm trees and make a bridge into our tree hut. Our final problem was to get my six year old brother up into the tree. I still have a photograph of John peering nervously over the edge of a farm bucket suspended ten feet above the ground.

There cannot have been a boy at Durlston whose family before the war had not kept at least a cook and a parlour maid. When the war came, demand for labour, not only by the armed forces but also the factories drove up wages. Together with a severe curtailment of middle class affluence, this led to domestic servants vanishing. It meant that the Mums had to buckle to and cook, something for which they were not necessarily qualified, as many of my contemporaries will recall.

A distinguishing characteristic of the Frank's twins was their impeccable manners. On one occasion after staying at Chantersluer, they both thanked my mother profusely. David (age 13) added, "and I can truthfully say Mrs Dix, I don't think that we have had a single dud meal the whole week!"

I was sent to Tonbridge School in the Michaelmas term of 1944 and Mr and Mrs Franks thought that, among other reasons, it might be of some advantage if the twins had a friend at court. Accordingly, the twins followed me into Parkside House in the Easter term. We found that first year at Tonbridge unspeakably depressing. We were cooped up in what had once been an ugly Victorian villa with bleak dormitories for the younger boys. The older boys each had a sparse cubicle about the same size as a prison cell. There was no park, no river, no beauty and little freedom. Moreover, the food was worse than it had been at Durlston.

Tonbridge, like many public schools at the time, seemed stuck in a time warp of the twenties and thirties. One did not appreciate at the time, the rationale underlying many of the institutions and practices then in vogue. For example, discipline: which was draconian, was entirely in the hands of praeposters – the most senior boys. At the same time, there was little bullying and no loutish behaviour. One had to stand to attention when addressing a senior boy, but this prevented over familiarity and all that which it might have led to. Even the institution of 'fagging' was not without its merits. It was no great hardship to be sent off to buy crumpets for one's allotted 'prae' on a Saturday afternoon. It gave a new boy a personal relationship with 'his prae' to whom one could take one's troubles. Besides, if you have experienced being a servant, you learn how to treat servants. David fagged for a Canadian boy called Macrae with whom he got on perfectly well.

As a result of living in a tightly controlled environment enforced by endless punishments, usually learning a poem – David, Jonathan and I practically know Palgrave's Golden Treasury off by heart. It did mean, however, that one could be on relaxed terms with the masters. Many of them were excellent men and at least three of them held Military Crosses.

The one master, for whom the three of us had limited respect, in retrospect, was our Housemaster, John Knott. Although amiable enough, he took little personal interest in us. He had played cricket

for both Oxford and Kent and was a former All England Racquet's champion. If you weren't much good at ball games, he wasn't interested in you. In other respects, his horizon did not seem to extend much beyond the saloon bar at The Rose & Crown.

For the whole of our second year at Tonbridge, the head boy of Parkside was Gordon Bowler, a good athlete, but otherwise running 'Flashman' a close second. We were terrified of him; he once beat poor David, for the usual offence of "talking after lights out", and drew blood.

One idyllic summer's afternoon, Bowler was batting for the School. It was Collin Cowdray's first term also playing for the School. The Tonbridge ground is one of the most beautiful cricket grounds in England. Mr Somervell, the senior history master, happened to be seated on a bench next to a pompous little man. Every time Bowler scored a run the latter would clap loudly and shout "shot". Suddenly, he said, "Oh dear, that wasn't a very intelligent shot". Mr Somervell, who had endured the ordeal in silence then turned to him and said "well, it's not very surprising because he's not a very intelligent boy". Whereupon the pompous little man said, "what do you mean, that's my son".

Enormous emphasis was placed on team games. Taking some sort of exercise every day was compulsory. To skip games or be late for chapel were both offences that would have led to a beating; I never remember anybody skipping either. I persuaded David to come to an old boy's reunion several years back and, perhaps as a result of the ingrained habit of taking regular exercise, there was hardly anyone there who was overweight.

David, as we all remember, was lean and hard without an ounce of spare flesh on him. It was, I know, a disappointment to both the twins that they had not got the eye to make cricketers, especially as old Mr Franks had played for Malvern and even got a Kent trial. David, if not the fastest scrum half Tonbridge had ever had, nevertheless played two seasons for the School. He was always in the thick of the fray. With his fair hair I used to think that he was rather like a Saxon warrior of old, placid by temperament but formidable when roused.

A particularly creditworthy aspect of the system was that however distinguished academically a master might be, and for the most part they were graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, all would take third and fourth year classes.

Thus David, Jonathan and I were each, at different times, taught by Mr Whitworth, the Headmaster. His was a rather dry personality, yet there was little doubting his sharp intelligence. Realising that most boys would give their eye teeth to have owned a motor bike, he used to turn to Jonathan and say, "but of course Franks and I would far sooner own a good strong cob". The hallmark of a successful teacher is that one remembers what he said. He once turned to David and said "Franks, you know, almost the saddest lines in the Bible are: 'your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions'."

The Franks family had a connection with Tonbridge because it was where their grandfather had started one of the most successful coal businesses in Surrey and Kent. Tonbridge was Mr Franks' home town; a sister was married to one of the school doctors, and the unmarried sister, Aunt Dossy, lived in a flat near the school. Many Sundays David, Jonathan and I would repair to her flat after morning chapel for coffee and cake, and an hour in a civilized environment.

Mr Franks was lucky to have missed the trenches, but he had volunteered for the Royal Naval Flying Service in 1917 as a pilot, in the days when it was almost as dangerous to take off as to go 'over the top'. I shall always remember him as having had the most perfect manners of almost any man I've ever met, something which he managed to transmit to his three sons. Mrs Franks' family were substantial farmers in Hampshire and to her I put down the twins' love of the soil and unshakeable moral integrity.

The common experience of Durlston drew us closer at Tonbridge and the twins and I went everywhere together. One of our great common interests was music. Mrs Franks had been instrumental in introducing her cousin Joyce St Croix as music mistress at Durlston. She had drawn out the marginal talent of David and I for the piano and she had been a first class choir mistress.

Under the indefatigable Dr Bunney, the Tonbridge School Choir was almost up to Cathedral standards. All three of us sang in the choir and choral society. In four years David sang treble, alto and bass. The chapel itself was one of the most impressive school chapels in England, and a haven of beauty and culture in the otherwise drab surroundings of Victorian classrooms.

In the course of four years we sang at morning chapel and at Evensong on Sundays. Most Sundays the choir sang an anthem or motet. The peak of the year was the Festival of Nine Carols and Lessons. Then there was the Choral Society. Each winter term we did a major choral work: Bach's Matthew and John Passions, Handel's Israel in Egypt and, of course, The Messiah. Every summer term we did a Gilbert & Sullivan Opera: The Pirates of Penzance, The Mikado, Iolanthe and The Gondoliers.

When David left Tonbridge he had to wait about six months before being called up so Mr Cox took him on as an assistant master at Durlston for two terms. He was good as a rugger or football coach but my brother, who was at the school at the time, aged 12, remembers that Mr Franks' equations didn't always come out.

His great love at the time was his horse, an old chestnut cob called "Gleam". One day he went out hacking on a nearby common and found himself cantering down a sandy track. Like all horses, once they turn for home they seem to spring to life and the canter soon turned into a gallop. David knew there was a main road dead ahead. In vain he tried to rein in his excited steed, but to no avail. When we asked him what he did, he replied "oh, I just threw myself off". I have often wondered if David ever really knew the meaning of the word "fear".

Eventually David had to report to the excellent Home Countries Infantry training battalion at Shorncliffe near Folkestone. I had passed through the same unit six months earlier and can vouch for the rigour of the training under sergeants and corporals, most of whom had served in the war, and also the bracing sea air up on the cliffs. He was then posted to the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Eaton Hall, the former seat of the Duke of Westminster, outside Chester. Under the system then prevailing, one was commissioned into a British Regiment, but as likely as not to be posted to a colonial one.

David was commissioned into The Queen's Royal Regiment, the county regiment of West Surrey and the oldest English regiment, being 2nd of the line. He was then seconded to The Mauritian Guard Company guarding ammunition dumps in the Suez Canal Zone. Anybody familiar with that part of

the world will confirm that it was about the most barren, fly-blown, God forsaken station in the whole of The British Empire. One consolation was that Robert Halliday, an old friend from Parkside, was posted to the same unit. He recalled many happy hours spent fighting with David over the lilo in the swimming pool.

I did not see so much of David and Jonathan after I left school. My life as a bank trainee was so different from theirs on a market garden. I did persuade David to come on two holidays. The first was when he first came back from Egypt and we had a fortnight in Italy which cost us each £25.00 all in. We took the train as far as Stresa on Lake Garda and then hitched to Venice, down to Florence and on to Rome. The youth hostels in Italy in the post-war era were a bit primitive to say the least but we consoled ourselves every evening with a huge plate of spaghetti and a couple of litres of wine. The sad fact of going on holiday with a boyhood friend is that you gradually realise that you are growing apart. This became more obvious when, in our middle twenties, we went skiing.

David was a much better skier than I; snow conditions in the Tyrol were dreadful, and we tended to wander off on the upper slopes by ourselves not realising the dangers. One morning, as we cut along the mountainside, David suddenly started to move off downhill on top of several hundred tons of snow. Fortunately the slope was gentle and he came to a halt after about half a mile.

In search of better snow, we went up to Obergurgl, the highest point in those parts. There we were paid a compliment I shall always treasure. On our last morning we caught the last lift up before, owing to deteriorating conditions, the whole system was closed down. All was silent and we seemed to have the mountain to ourselves. When we later emerged in the outskirts of the village, it was snowing quite hard and two young Austrians expressed some surprise that we had been up to the top. The I heard one say to the other, "oh, they are English".

One of the joys of old age is returning to the friends of one's youth. For the last few years, I have been going down to meet David on the Isle of Wight. If I had to name a quality of his I would say that he never seemed to change. I felt that he was a familiar landmark, like an oak tree you thought would always be there. He remained true to the soil. You could go for a walk with him along the Down and he would suddenly stop and say, "listen, that's a 'something or other' warbler, I haven't heard one for a long time".

He retained a straightforward simplicity to the end. When I finally took his hand he just said, "Goodbye old boy" and his grasp was firm and his voice was strong.

Erectus non Elatus-o! The Golden Age of Durlston Court



Sir Rowland Whitehead
pictured in the gardens at
Earshill in 2003

“Twanky-dillo, twanky-dillo, twanky-dillo-dillo-dillo; A roaring pair of bagpipes made from the green willow” sang a couple of middle-aged men and sixty little school boys sat cross-legged on the floor in front of them in grey shorts and grey and white ties and clapped and shouted with appreciation. This was entertainment we had never seen anything like this before. The Great War has ceased to be great or a war about twenty years ago, ancient history enough to take its place with Agincourt and Crecy, but here were songs from that period in the past which we found enchanting. Who was the girl in the garden where the Praties grew, what for that matter were the Praties ? And the Banner with a Strange Device, what on earth was that ? A little bird sang Willow-Tit-Willow-Tit-Willow and a Japanese Gentleman seemed to be in charge of absolutely everything.

Cox and Ellis, fine baritone voices, joint headmasters of Durlston Court Preparatory School, formerly situate in the town of Swanage in the county of Dorset, knew instinctively how to reach the minds of active, intelligent school boys. The combination of serious philosophy, mystery and the unexpected, good humour and fun, these made the magic of Durlston. Neither Cox nor Ellis were professional school teachers. Both had served in the Great War and Cox had emerged as a Captain in the Grenadier Guards. We did not know where he had served save that he had been wounded at some stage. “You see I was wounded in the Bundy”, he would say. We rather took it that a bullet has entered his posterior but we didn’t like to ask. Badges on Hippy uniforms of the 1960’s used to say “wounded in the Arras” so perhaps we were not far out. While Cox was the extrovert, Ellis was silent and so we never knew anything of his past.

The school has been founded in 1903 ‘when Edward was King o’er land and sea’ and we had to presume that it was bought as a going concern by these two ex-soldiers in the early twenties. How much of their unique philosophy was brought in at the start and how much developed one does not know. Suffice it to say that by 1940 we, who were there, saw a polished and highly sophisticated system running smoothly along lines which seemed to have been set up in the dawn of time.

My bother and I, we were twins, went to Duriston for the Easter term in 1940 when the school was in Swanage. My father, serving in the Oxon and Bucks, drove us down to the school and, to make the

occasion more palatable, booked us in to the local hotel for a couple of nights to 'get used to the place' before the term started. It was freezing cold. With my teeth chattering in a draughty bare hotel bedroom, on my knees, hands clasped and the smell of a wool blanket in my nose, I prayed. I prayed hard. Could the Lord, perhaps, spare time, in a busy life to set fire to the school? I wouldn't ever ask such a difficult thing again of him.

Next morning we woke to hear that fire had broken out at the school and the opening would be delayed by three days. First time I have ever since, I promise, asked the Lord to do such a monumental piece of work.

With us, also enjoying a run up to the term, were two other new boys, the Goodisons, with their father, an Air Force man in a very snappy grey blue uniform. We all felt proud of our fathers who would win the War. One of the Goodison boys went on to become Chairman of the London Stock Exchange and a world expert on clocks. They were both very homesick and received letters of support from their parents and urgings to cheer up. I know because we once committed the ultimate schoolboy crime of reading one of these letters. This was, perhaps, the greatest unwritten law of boys of our age, one never, ever, read other boy's letters to or from their parents. If I am to appear before St Peter and am asked to come clean about my sins, then this will be the first to get off my chest. "Remember to fly the Family Flag" urged Wing Commander Goodison of his sons. There I have made a full confession...

The Easter term, always the shortest, went coldly by. Icicles hung from the eaves, as indeed they had done from the firemen's hoses and uniforms, snow piled up in the corners of the playground, we crouched in the cellar at nights when German bombers came over Portsmouth, we made friends and sat at wooden desks with ink pots at the top right corner and scratchy pens with nibs upon which was inscribed 'Waverley', 'Pickwick' or 'Owl'. The boys from rather well off families had Conway Stewarts and Swan pens that filled up and wrote for pages and pages. One such had a pen with a spiral glass nib which was always put back into its cardboard box after use with great care.

Two new boys fascinated us. Karl-Heintz and Hans Hoffmann were German refugees, Jewish I suppose though we had not the faintest notion what that meant at the time, and the sons of a textile manufacturer now settled in the north of England. Karl-Heintz, the older boy spoke good English and had a tuck box filled with what, nowadays, we might think of as 'trade gifts'. Probably badges, pins and the like from his father's business. These went down enormously well with everybody and he was a centre of popularity for a long time. Hans, his brother, must have been scarcely more than a child, had virtually no English, had warts on his pudgy little hands and sucked his thumb continuously. Not a very good start at an English prep-school with the Germans on the doorstep. Both boys, however, made it through with the schoolboy sense of decency and fair play from their fellows. In fact there was no bullying in the school at all.

Twins at the school were a norm after Cox had made clear in one of the school magazines that he would welcome some. The Cannings and the Franks were joined by the Whiteheads to confuse the staff and our friends alike. We were, of course, all identical twins. Names stand out in cameo. Perkins who made model aeroplanes from balsa wood and tissue paper that flew like beautiful birds on a twisted elastic. Bowker and Bowdler, like Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, were neither friends

not exact contemporaries but one cannot separate them in the memory. Croft, a superb carpenter and craftsman. Hancock whom we called 'Ping, the elastic man' after a cartoon character for reasons which were perfectly clear to us but probably not to the staff. Savill who remained cool and calm when three of us got lost in dense mist on the cliffs above Duriston Head. And then there was Rose, the son of the managing director of Thorn, a company that made radios. Rose was sophisticated, worldly wise, having grown up in the business world of North London but, more important, Rose possessed a bright red radio. We listened entranced to Beethoven and Schubert in the dormitory after 'lights out' on the understanding that, though strictly speaking, radios were banned, the staff found that the ensuing peace and quiet was preferable to the usual pillow fights and ruckus of young boys.

When not listening to the radio we told ghost stories. These, often blood curdling fantasies, were little masterpieces of invention though many of us had read the Conan Doyle stories and could draw on an experience far beyond our own. The supreme story-teller was Dunne. 'Dopey Dunne' as he was known to staff and boys alike and not without reason. His manner was detached and vague and he treated all of us with a kind of distant amusement. His ghost stories involved lonely walks at dusk along vast beaches with the waves incessantly lapping at the feet and an unknown, unnameable, unidentifiable, creature clambering over the breakwaters and eventually catching up with the terrified man who screams for the Vicar to save him. 'But I am the Vicar!' announces the beast

Dunne's interest in the occult must have been in his genes. His father had written the famous 'An Experiment with Time' which wanders between past and future by way of dreams and anticipates much modern thought. He lived in a castle and Professor Dunne had designed the Dunne Biplane in the thirties. It is not difficult to imagine how we found him so fascinating.

The summer term arrived and we resumed school life at a brisk pace. Sixty pale and skinny little boys with tiny bright red trunks, looking a little like cherries on cocktail sticks, rushed across the sands at Studland Bay and plunged with a whoop into the sea. We always did it like that, all together, we were Durlstonians. Ellis looked on approvingly.

Outings to Corfe Castle and walks above Swanage Bay were regular features. We built 'huts' in the field beside the school; rather crude affairs of branches and what was known as 'foliage'. This was a completely new word to me and I used it as much as possible thereafter. Beyond the field lay a sandy path to the cliffs over the bay and at the end lay a schoolboy's Eldorado. The Belle Vue café. Here was a 'tuck shop' which despite the hostilities would stock all imaginable sweets and chocolates. Mars Bars, Crunchie Bars, Bulls Eyes and Barley Sugar Sticks, and, most exciting of all, 'White Chocolate'. Our family did not go in for sweets so the Crunchies and Mars bars were unknown to me. As for White Chocolate, I still experience a little shiver at the thought of it and of the memory of the 'By' as we called it. Needless to say the place was totally out of bounds to us. 'I went to the By in the middle of the night, and there I got a terrible fright, for Old BV Man had died in the night, and there was his ghost so white, white, white', chortled Dunne to the tune of D'ye ken John Peel. His version of PopEye the Sailor Man is unprintable, even after sixty years.

The summer was warm, the sun shone endlessly, we had ample time to amuse ourselves and the memory of what we actually learned in lessons is correspondingly vague. There was Maths, French,

history, Latin and some geography — a bedrock for the future. The senior boys performed Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the magic of the set, the island, Prospero, Miranda and Trinculo and, especially Caliban and Ariel, have been etched in the memory. One never forgets the 'first time'.

The Cadet Corps took on new significance with a war being fought and the lines of Boer War rifles, stacked across the wall of a classroom, were often taken down, cleaned and shouldered as we marched up and down the playground. One day in an idle moment I slipped a 'blank' 303 bullet into the breach of a rifle and pulled the trigger. Being still in its rack in the classroom the noise from the rifle was deafening, the smoke alarming, and teachers ran from all corners of the building. 20 lines of 'copper plate' writing were imposed.

Belligerent attitudes extended all over the school. The boys, about six senior ones, whose dormitory was in the small turret of the school building, were known as the 'Turret Toughs'. They were what we all would like to be. Strong, fearless and unconventional. They could do things — they could get away with it. The highest point, and the test of the true Turret Tough, was to pick up a full 'slop pail' and swing it in circles around one's head. Then one qualified. Modern sanitation probably precludes a bucket of foaming yellow liquid standing at the end of a line of beds throughout the night; in those days it was quite normal.

Prayers were said daily and we had chapel on Sundays when quite senior churchmen would visit and preach. Somebody came and spoke about Tubby Clayton and TOC-H, somebody told us that Archbishop Temple's cassock had come back from the wash labelled 'One Bell Tent' since he was a giant of a man, others urged us to pray for peace, well actually they didn't, they asked us to pray for Victory. We sang *Onward Christian Soldiers* endlessly.

Cox's pep talks got into high gear and Germans were called variously, Boche, Huns and Jerries. 'Its not — if we win the war, its when we win the war' he snapped at us having heard one of Churchill's speeches the night before. To little boys without television, mass reading of newsprint, wireless, political plurality and parents who had said little to us about Europe or the World, the subtlety of 'if' and 'when' was lost on us. The humour of Temple's Bell Tent, though, made sense.

Catchy songs filled the corridors during the intervals between lessons. 'It's a grand holiday everywhere, for the Jones Family in the Grand New Year, Mr Franklin D Roosevelt Jones'. Who these people were we didn't know but the tune was great. 'Run Adolf, run Adolf, run, run, run' was another favourite

By the end of the summer term it has become obvious to all that the school would have to move away from the coast and to a country venue. It was announced that a large house had been taken in Somerset and that the Winter Term would start there. An idyllic seaside summer had passed and a new, unknown chapter would begin in the autumn. By the end of the summer term it has become obvious to all that the school would have to move away from the coast and to a country venue. It was announced that a large house had been taken in Somerset and that the Winter Term would start there. An idyllic seaside summer had passed and a new, unknown chapter would begin in the autumn.

In exercising my brain for memories of Durlston in the early forties, I see minute cameos, tiny snapshots as viewed through an old Kodak Box Brownie, pictures with exquisite detail but with no beginning nor end. What were 'Pollywugs' I mused and then remembered. We had learned to fold and roll a handkerchief into a shape like a tadpole with the mass of the hankie tightly bound at one end and one remaining corner trailing at the back. The whole thing was so enormously neatly done that all one saw was a seamless piece of cloth swollen and heavy at the front and with a dainty tail at the back. How was it done ? Probably with the same cunning that we fashioned paper aeroplanes with more than ten folds to give them strength and stability. Ordinary paper darts were for beginners ... Alas! I cannot now make Pollywugs or decent paper planes though I did recently learn how to make the 'Typesetter's Hat'. This was, in the good old days, a cap made out of a sheet of newspaper, elaborately folded, by the senior man in the typesetting room as he came in for the day. He wore the cap all day to keep his hair clean and, probably, as a mark of authority. Next day he made a new one.

Another snapshot. Dimoline (that was his name, wasn't it?) upside down in mid air with only one leg sticking out of his pyjamas. Now that was something! Beds are, of course, for bouncing on and Dimolene had perfected a sort of back somersault which, with a little egging on from the rest of us, he could also perform with one leg tucked behind him into the seat of his pyjamas. I suppose that Miss Lattimer must at some point have restrained him.

And then, sorrowful vision, a tiny bird, a pathetic bundle of soft feathers that lay at my feet one April day. That term we had all brought elastic from home and cut forked twigs. A strip of leather and a piece of string and we each had a catapult. Keen to try out our skills I had, rather casually, aimed at a small dot at the top of the bare branches. Down came the creature, a Small Tit most likely, without a flutter. I prayed forgiveness from I don't know whom and the code words of that time haunted me "You Rotter!".

One summer term we performed Shaw's Androcles and the Lion, outdoors, and in the natural theatre setting before the steps to the 'front' of the house. It was probably Miss Howard's idea though Miss Dawson had a lot to do with it. I can't place the actors too well though Murray Hudson could well have been Androcles. He was an extrovert little boy, vivacious and fun loving, though enjoying huge respect both from teachers and boys. I was the introvert, withdrawn, terribly shy, and no self-confidence. Oh! That I could be someone like Murray Hudson! Cooke-Hurle took the part of the lion. It suited his Puckish humour and he growled and snarled and roared inside his brown lion suit waving his claws at Romans and Christians alike. Though of course we couldn't see it, his red curly hair exactly matched the mop on top of the lion's head. It was excellent casting. Although my twin brother was an outgoing type it was judged, rightly, that neither of us were actors and so we appeared at the start of each scene holding the two sides of a painted paper banner announcing what was to come. The fear was that we should turn in opposite directions for our exit and the banner would be ripped apart. It was all right.

The other entertainment was the cinematograph, for that is the best word for the whirring, flashing and erratic machine that Cox set up in the main front room once in a while to give us the latest, and mostly, humorous films. The smell of warm celluloid is still with me. What did we see ? Well there was always Will Hay peering over his spectacles and engaged in some improbable exploit. Frankly the jokes were above me though at Cox's bidding we all showed our appreciation to the

'projectionist' who had come over from Taunton with his machine and films. Another such comedy was called 'Alf's Button Afloat'. This must have been one of a series since the button in question was a 'magic one' and gave Alf all his wishes as the scenes moved on. Here now Alf was in the Navy with his button. Things go pretty well for him till, inadvertently, and in a tight situation, he cries out "Well stripe me pink", whereupon his face is crossed by bands of dark lines. Well, that was the rub because the film was in black and white. We were very slow to realise the joke partly because of the lack of colour co-ordination and partly, I suppose, because our delicate upper class ears had never heard this Cockney expression.

Finally there came *The Lady Vanishes* with the wonderful Margaret Rutherford. A film story that has stayed with me forever. The two cricketing enthusiasts, unwittingly involved in the plot, trying to remember the notes of the secret tune which the plump lady had taught them, the code for rescue, only to forget entirely the music as they enter the Foreign Office corridors and then, thus bashful and crestfallen, to find the comfortable, copious Miss Rutherford, safe and sound after all, seated at the grand piano with a huge string of pearls on her bosom, playing the tune ... I must go and see it again.

Today it is unthinkable that sixty young boys could be cooped up for weeks on end virtually without any contact with the outside world. No television, no 'newsreels', an anodyne film once or twice a term and Rose's wireless seemingly left at home after our transfer to Earnshill. Without laptops, without mobiles, without PlayBoy computer games. No one can say which generation has 'got it right' and the raven that sits with his claws into our shoulder croaks into our ear "Nostalgia".

And how was religion at Durlston? Prayers were said every night and we sang hymns Ancient and Modern whose tunes and words reverberate in the mind ever since. 'Thy justice like mountains high soaring above', 'singing songs of expectation stepping fearless through the night', 'before the hills in order stood or earth received her frame', 'where stands a wing-ed sentry all skilful in the wars', 'but would strike the living fountains from the rocks along our way', 'and hearts are brave again and arms are strong'. And, of course, "The Hopes and Fears of all the years". We knew the words and music of all these popular hymns and sang them gaily. Henry Scott Hollands's thunderous hymn 'Judge Eternal', though, really did fill me with dread. Once I lay awake in the dormitory all night, sleepless in my little bed beside the green mantelpiece, with the hymn blasting like organ pipes in my ears. 'with Thy living power of judgement cleanse this world of bitter things', 'and the city's crowded clangour cries aloud for sin to cease'. The words tramped through my tired brain with a dark majestic echo. Even today I shudder.

At prayers Cox would read short pieces from the Bible in a clear firm voice. Once this went slightly wrong. A passage of stern invective from the Book of Kings suddenly came to 'and you that eat your own dung and drink your own ...'. Here Cox suddenly realised that he had overstepped the mark. "Well – they were being jolly rude!". We giggled happily and tried to remember the verse and chapter to look it up later.

One or two boys still got on their knees beside the bed at night but it was not easy when the rest of the 'dorm' were chanting Jabberwokky at the tops of their voices. 'T'was Brillig and the Slithy Toves did gyre and gimble in the Wabe'. We even found a hymn tune to go with it. Now that was magical poetry and like all crazes it lasted about a term.

Cox himself was not above this sort of nonsense. New boys were expected, indeed instructed by the older ones, to go at the start of the first day of term to the Headmaster's study, knock on the dark oak door and enquire of Cox if he could give them their 'Elbowgrease'. Cockeye would roar with laughter, china blue eyes twinkling, and explain that it was a joke played on all new boys. "You silly little Juggins" and send us back smiling to the breakfast table. Incidentally strange to us was the habit of putting marmalade on our sausages. It was a Durlston custom and, actually, it is still rather nice, I think.

And so the years passed. Shipton pulled Cooper's nose so hard it bled and he was known, even to this day, as 'Trunk'. Shipton endlessly sang 'I'm forever blowing bubbles' in a squeaky voice. Chevasse one day pulled out his dental plate with a tooth attached – we were horrified. Tennant, cool and poised, was easily the most knowledgeable butterfly expert with a copy of Frohawk's fine book of British Butterflies, something that we all coveted hugely. Barlow made wire frame aeroplanes by soldering dozens of pieces of metal together, reputedly uttering dreadful swearwords every time a soldered joint came apart. One of my school reports stated 'this boy must watch his tongue'. My father assumed that I had been swearing. I hadn't – I didn't know any words. But how could I explain that to an anxious parent ?

Bond, I am sure, was dyslectic though in those days this was probably an unknown ailment. To hear him read in class made us squirm and we all felt sorry for him. That's the past and the present day finds him, I am quite sure, happy and resourceful as anyone else. Rose, surprisingly musical, played the British Grenadiers on the piano and suggested once that if suitably clothed in green he would perform Greensleeves. Hancock illicitly taught me Chopsticks and, since the tune was, rightly, forbidden in school, I believe it was the reason for a beating by Cox. "This is a flea bite to what I will give you next time", he said. The pain of my first beating was not very great but I took care that it was not repeated. The carousel turns gently round and faces and names come before me and vanish. One hopes that some of those named and, of course, others of that time will put in a word.

Cox did have one very real fear – constipation. It came about because, we learned from others, a boy in his care at the school had died from causes in some way connected with the function of his bowels. Every head of every school, very rightly, fears a death at the school. "Have You Been Round?" he would ask if he saw a boy looking slightly pecky. 'Going Round' and its importance was always explained to new boys. 'Thank you, Cockeye, for your wise advice' I still murmur.

What on earth was I like ? Perhaps someone will say. Perhaps no one noticed me. Full of fears. Heights, older people, public presentation, the attention of others, rigger tackles to the ankle rather than the easy clutch at the waist, public speaking or acting. A host of uncertainties. Luckily our playtime 'escape' was to a hollow tree at ground level but I can still feel that prickle of fear climbing a tree at Earnshill even ten feet above the ground. Now that seems to have changed. I can speak happily in public. Even to a thousand people in Ceauceseau's Palace in Bucharest with the President beside me – and in Romanian. Jumping out of a plane at 12,000 feet, gulping mouthfuls of pure Gloucestershire air, spinning at 120 mph and 'pulling' at 5,000 feet to drift peacefully to earth presents no nerves or problems. Abseiling seven hundred feet off Canary Wharf Tower is a morning's pleasure. The old fears seem to have vanished. I can be as noisy and boisterous as the next man.

Did, perhaps, the shy little ten year old at Earnshill learn and store up things during those days that came to fruition later? Did Cox and Ellis, indeed, Miss Dawson, Miss Howard, Mr Shelly, Mr Warlow, gentle Mr Stanley and perhaps even the unkissed Miss Price have a message or guidance for my future? Who can say? Despite Mr Freud, Mr Jung and R D Laing of 'The Divided Self' and a host of intellectuals most of us still don't know who we are or what we are. Perhaps it is better that way ...

Sir Rowland Whitehead

24th June 2003

I Remember When in the 40's



My first recollection of school was a governess called Miss Knight in the schoolroom next to the kitchen. Aged 7, I was sent to the Wells Cathedral School's junior department and at 8, I was sent to Durlston Court Preparatory School at Swanage. In 1940 we seemed to spend much of the time in the cellars, sheltering from the German raids. The School was evacuated to Earnshill at Hambridge near Langport in Somerset, much closer to home for me. This was a large 1930's country house owned by the Coombes family. Mr Coombes had recently been killed in the war.

My schooling was a great concern to my parents since I was quite good at Maths but I was totally unable to read. I had many hours of extra lessons under Miss Dawson whose character was emphasised by her bright yellow bicycle. I believe that if I had been educated today I would have been diagnosed as dyslexic.

The local farmer was called Harry Forward and we as children used to help out (I am sure we really got in the way). He was considered to be a very forward-looking farmer. He had about 60 shorthorn cows and a brand new cowshed with a milking machine and a bucket plant. The milk had to be carried to the dairy and put over the cooler into churns. At a later date between my Army time and going to the Royal Agricultural College (The Royal Ag), I spent 6 months being a farm student at Harry Forwards. I learnt to hand milk during this period since the machine was not considered to be efficient enough and every cow had to be 'stripped' in order to get the last 1/2 pint out.

He brewed farmhouse cider. The men had their own cellar and were allowed to take their flagons of rough cider to the fields instead of paying them overtime. It had a high alcohol content and was very rough to my pallet. Harry had his own cellar and brewed it in port or sherry barrels. The result was a

much smoother brew. Two occasions I remember to this day. An army platoon called in one evening on its way from Windsor to Cornwall. The soldiers were allowed into the men's cellar and the officer encouraged to join the farmer's. The next morning the men were legless and not one of them was able to turn the taps off.

On another occasion when I returned as a student myself and two other students had been having a Saturday morning drink and the other two decided to cut off my mangy looking moustache, a relic of my army days, with the cow clippers. I feared for my nose but they got half off. I was relieved of an embarrassment.

Stephen Bond

Patrick Lucas Remembers

Getting in the hay.

Manpower was very short, as so many men had gone into the armed services or other essential services for the duration of the war. The school was asked if they could supply some of the older students to help one of the local farmers get in his hay.

I was one of the students who was selected to go, I don't think that we volunteered, we were just told that we were going and do a good job. It was a warm summer's day, and after a while we got pretty thirsty. The farmer produced a large stone jug of his own homemade draft cider which we gulped down with enthusiasm. In no time we were all sound asleep in the field, and not getting on with the job as we should be. I think the farmer learned his lesson, and we learned that home made draught cider is pretty potent.

The Spotters Club

I very much enjoyed being a member of the spotters club which was run by Mr Hawke-Glen. Besides the packs of cards with black and white illustrations of aircraft, we used to watch countless lantern slides of aircraft also in black and white, taken from the top, bottom, sides, head on etc, of enemy aircraft and our own. We were given tests in which we had to identify not only the name of the aircraft but also the model number. We all became pretty proficient in quite a short time.

I can well remember Mr Hawke-Glen telling us something that was most confidential, and that we could not tell the other boys who were not members of the club. He told us that the allies were developing an aircraft that could fly without propellers. It was called a jet aircraft and that it would be faster than existing planes, the only drawback would be that it would never have a very long range. We thought that he was having us on, planes could never fly without propellers! I am not sure what we were meant to do if we ever did spot an enemy plane. Duck for cover I suppose.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness

Before we went into meals we had to line up for inspection. At the head of the queue you held out your hands, first the tops, and then you turned them over to show your palms. Heaven forbid if

there was any dirt in ones finger nails. I cannot remember what the punishment was if you offended, but I am sure you would have been sent to see Mr Cox if you were caught too often.

Sweets

We arrived back at school after the holidays with our sweet ration in a tin. These were kept in a cupboard with your name on it. I dont think the cupboard was opened every day, but when it was it was about the most important time of the week. One kept looking to see what choice toffees or chocs the other boys had, and there where many envious looks.

A special treat

I think that it was once a term that we had a very special treat. We went by bus into Taunton and went to the movies. From memory I think it was to the Odeon, and the film was shown non stop, not like at school where the film stopped at the end of every reel when the reel was changed. A large screen and good sound it was hard to believe, even if we watched through a cloud of smoke as most adults smoked in the cinemas in those days. Afterwards we went to a cafe, it might have been a Lyons Corner House or something similar, for a slap up high tea. I remember on one occasion our bus on leaving Taunton nearly collided with another vehicle. Mr Cox got up and praised the skill of our driver and he got a round of applause.

Going to church

On Sunday mornings we went to church by bus to the nearby town of Curry Rivel. The service was not only for the school, but the normal service for the locals as well. The vicar used to give a very long and very boring sermon. We had to sit and bear it and not be to restless. I might be doing the poor man an injustice, but I have always thought with so many young boys in the congregation that he could have made his sermons shorter and more interesting to our age group. I have always wondered how many of us went on to become clergymen.

The crash of the german plane.

When the german plane crashed not too far from the school I was one of the boys who jumped on to his bicycle to go and have a look. My memory is that several of us hacked and broke off pieces of the plane and took them back to the school where we concealed them in safe places. Again from memory the most senior boy bagged the piece with the swastika on it. I definitely got a piece, I got it back to Falmouth in Cornwall where I was living with my grandparents, my sister remembers it propping up a door in my grandparents house. I was told that when a RAF team arrived down from London that they were most upset. Apparently this aircraft had something on it that was new, and the plane was supposed to be able to avoid being detected by radar. If this was true or not I dont know, but it makes a good story.

Growing food

To supplement our food, not only did we grow veg's in the vegetable garden, in our dorm we used our face flannels. We would make them damp and then sow mustard and cress seeds on to them. It was a race to see whose would be first to be harvested. Mustard and cress never tasted so good.

End of term treat

On the last day of term we were allowed to go up to Hambridge and buy a bottle of fizzy coloured

drink. This was absolutely forbidden during the term time. The bottles were large, and there was a sort of spring contraption at the top of the bottle that kept the lid in tightly to stop the fizz from going flat. I think that the red one was the most popular, it had a sickly sweet taste, very artificial. Things that are usually forbidden always taste so good.

Bombing Bristol

In that little corner of Somerset the war seemed a long way away. However at night we were reminded of the war when the German bombers flew overhead to bomb Bristol and I suppose Bath as well. The constant droning noise they made, and the distant sky was lit up when they dropped their bombs. We felt so safe where we were as there were no strategic targets anywhere nearby.

Looking back over sixty years later I realise just how lucky I was to go to Durlston Court at the time that the school was evacuated to Somerset. It was a happy time, in beautiful surroundings, with mostly very caring teachers. We had a lot of freedom, I used to cycle for miles in all directions on my bike and do a lot of exploring. I was quite sorry when I had to move on to my public school in Buckinghamshire.

Incidentally I went before the war to Furzie Close at Barton on Sea, the very place that Durlston Court eventually moved to. My uncle John Dwight who is still alive and living in Cambridge also went to Furzie Close, so I have an association with both schools.

My life as a boarder at Furzie Close in the late thirties would be quite different to life today. We were up by 6.30 and had to have a cold bath before we changed into singlet and shorts, even in winter. Then quite along run whatever the weather was like. Back at school a hot mug of cocoa, changed, and an hours class before breakfast. On Sunday afternoons a long walk two by two in a crocodile formation. A special treat was to go into Bournemouth and go to the ice skating palace, with a palm court string orchestra playing. Another treat was to go to the New Forest and have a picnic, with tea and thick jam sandwiches.

I am just so glad that so many old boys from Earnshill days have written down their recollections, several in great detail, as in far off Australia it has brought back so many very happy memories of prep school days in England.

I am so glad that the school has prospered and grown to what it is today.

Kind regards

Patrick

Surgeon Captain Peter Beck (retd) Royal Navy

I went to Durlston in the autumn term immediately after the start of the war and finally spent two terms at Furzie Close, leaving as head boy at the end of the term before the fire in 1946.

I have few memories of Swanage but many of Earnshill. Inevitably they are more about life and the ambience of the school rather than the acceptable image that would have been reported in the

Durlstonian At Swanage most of us were terrified by the night bombing but only too keen to go outside to watch the occasional dogfight and collect the empty shellcases as souvenirs. The German aircraft were making for Portsmouth or Poole The latter was the main base for our Motor Torpedo Boats and for the training of Commandos. The radar station at Worth came much later . The development of radar was a well guarded secret which raises the question how Cockeye knew at that stage that it was to be a radar station?!

I remember little about the building at Swanage or the building of outdoor shelters but I vividly recall watching the older boys playing a very vigorous form of hockey on roller skates on the circular playground. Roller skating at Earnshill was largely confined to an oversize chicken shed. In our day Cockeye's interpretation of Erectus non Elatus had progressed from 'Chests not Stomachs' to 'Upright not Cocky.

Earnshill was an inspired choice for evacuation and was a naturalists paradise. In those days butterflies and moths were prolific and many boys became knowledgeable lepidopterists. Several had large collections of specimens and a number of us kept caterpillars, fed them and saw them through their development to imagines. Many boys had butterfly nets and killing jars. The best equipped had cyanide as the killing agent but crushed laurel leaves was an acceptable alternative. Once dead the specimen was impaled with a pin through the thorax and carefully set out on a mounting board. This was a length of paper covered cork about 4 in. wide and 10 inches long with a groove down the centre. With the body in the groove the wings of the butterfly or moth were then pinned out with ultra-fine pins to display both pairs of wings. When dried out and fixed the specimen was transferred to a display tray. Apart from butterflies and moths there was also the pond with tadpoles, dragonfly and caddis fly larvae etc. Birds egg collecting was not as popular but Murray Hudson caught, reared and trained a jackdaw called Herbert. He took him home for the holidays but unfortunately Herebert flew into the side of a building and was killed.

Looking from the front at Earnshill House, Durlston occupied the centre and right wings. The owner Mrs Coombe retained and lived the left wing. Next to the right wing was a large wood crisscrossed with paths and with a rookery. Behind the house was a semicircular lawn bounded by an haha. Beyond the haha the field stretched down to the river Isle and to the area of the river used for swimming. The field was used for grazing cattle. The dormitories on the outside of the house at the rear overlooked the lawn and it was a simple matter to climb out of and back into the dormitories from the lawn. I forget whether it was 1943 or 1944 that we had a gloriously hot summer but we used to sneak out at night and go down to the river for midnight skinny dipping. Inevitably we were eventually caught and received a whacking from Cockeye. The staff had got wind of what we were up to, formed a posse armed with torches and revealed us in the water before giving chase. The memory of naked boys running back to the house with pyjamas under their arms must have been a talking point in the staff common room for many weeks. We were never quite sure how the staff found out what we were doing. It may have been that one of them did rounds and found an empty dormitory. We credited it to the finding of traces of cowpat on someones slippers. Each morning we had to make our beds. They were done very neatly with hospital corners and with ones chair and slippers on the top so that anyone inspecting the beds would be able to notice soiled slippers.

One of the highlights in our day was listening to the American Forces Network on the radio. We listened as soon as we were free at the end of the mid-morning break. The programme we listened

to was of swing and jazz records. The DJ was a Corporal Monaghan (later Sgt.) of the US Army and our particular favourites were Glen Miller, Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey and the other big bands of the day. As far as I remember the catalyst for this interest in the pop music of the day was Roger T.Hancock. I always imagined that he was Tony Hancock's brother. If so they had a lot in common. Roger was a fiendish fast bowler, was very handy with the bat too and was captain of cricket. He was also a very good soccer player and was most effective on the wing.

As befits boys there was quite a lot of fighting at school. The woods provided an ideal scenario for a form of mechanised warfare on bicycles. I think the objective was to cause ones opponent to dismount or fall off. The sides were quite evenly balanced and were selected, not on ones school team but upon whether one was a Roundhead or a Cavalier. This had nothing to do with whether one was a Royalist or Cavalier by political inclination but whether one was circumcised (Royalist) or not (Cavalier)!

Cockeye used to give us a daily briefing on the progress of the war. The preparations for D-Day were plain for all to see and we used to cycle out to the air strip at West Zoyland at the weekends to watch Dakotas fly over and pick up gliders from the ground. D-Day itself was memorable as throughout the day the sky was black with wave after wave of aircraft making their way south, many towing gliders.

I have many more memories but hope to unlock even more doors on OD day.

Addenda

One late spring when the rooks were nesting and there were many young rooks finding their wings, Mrs Coombe got her handyman to shoot as many as possible and also to shoot the nests to destroy any remaining eggs. A couple or so days later Miss Bater (or was it Baker) the domestic science qualified head cook and housekeeper produced game pie for the staff evening meal. We boys eat supper earlier than the staff who dined on their own for dinner. It seems that the staff enjoyed the pie. One or two of them realised that at that time of the year no game were in season for shooting other than rabbits and that it was certainly not rabbit pie. When pressed for the main ingredients, Miss B finally admitted that it was rook pie. Reputedly a number of the staff immediately went a whiter shade of pale and hurriedly left the room! The next morning all were present and correct.

Cockeye used to like to help out the farmer near the entrance to the drive to Earnshill and each summer we used to help out with the haymaking. On one such occasion Eric Warlow, a young master waiting for call-up into the services, dislocated his big toe when a cart ran over his foot. On another occasion the farmer (Mr Forward?) asked for help when one of his cows had an obstructed labour. Cockeye assembled a tug-of-war team of older boys who went up to the farm to pull on a rope passed around the calf. The calf was delivered successfully, much to the relief of all concerned and especially the cow.

Nesta Howard, a Dawn French prototype, was a plump young graduate mistress who taught Latin and Greek. I think it was on Sundays after lunch, she used to read to us Agatha Christie books. The sessions were entirely voluntary but were well supported and much enjoyed.

Swastika in Somerset?



Probably still hidden at the bottom of the deepest cellar in a country mansion in Somerset is a swastika hacked from the tail fin of a German fighter-bomber.

In the early 40's, my prep school was evacuated to a large estate at Hambridge in Somerset. The school lived in one wing of the mansion and the owners lived in the other.

One hot sunny Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1944, my chum, Kirk, and I were standing above the ha ha at the rear of the main building when we saw what looked like a German Heinkel losing height rapidly and apparently crash-landing in a field about two miles from the school. The plane didn't explode on impact probably because it had run out of fuel. Keen to be the first at the scene of the accident, Kirk and I rushed to our bikes and pedalled like hell to the area where we thought we saw the plane crash.

After about twenty minutes we found the plane which was on the ground in the corner of a field. Apart from a certain amount of oil spillage and minor damage to the nose, the plane was intact. The two-man crew were nowhere to be seen (are we surprised?!) so we got into the fuselage of the plane and proceeded to pull out some of the radio equipment as souvenirs.

We then hit on a brilliant wheeze (as it was called in the Just William era). Why not cut one of the swastikas off the tail and get it back to the school where we could hide it? We had a few tools in our saddle bags, including a small hacksaw, and after a while we managed very crudely to hack off the oil-covered swastika, which was about three feet square.

Then we realised our main problem - how to get the jagged piece of metal back to the school? We decided the only way to achieve this would be to get on our bikes and hold the piece of metal between us as we cycled unsteadily back there.

As it was late on a Sunday afternoon, nobody was about when we finally made it back to the school grounds. We then remembered that, although totally out-of-bounds to the pupils, we had in fact illegally recced the deep cellars in the house a few months before. The upshot was that we did

manage to hide the tail fin in one of the dusty unused cellars and I'll be surprised if it's not still there today.

I only wish I'd retained the fearless (or stupid!) quality that I had on that summer afternoon over sixty years ago.

Roger Hancock

Wartime Childhood

The first impact of the war upon our daily lives was the arrival of evacuees. Train loads of them arrived at the railway station and were duly allocated to be billeted in the larger houses of the district. Memories fade of the ordeal for both parties involved, as it did not last long. But to our shame, we did not find it easy to share favourite toys and eventually to lose them to strangers seemingly from another world. Somewhere later I picked up the rumour that one such evacuee to Wells was the gorgeous actress Jean Simmons, but alas she was not allocated to us. Later we took in a dozen or so girls from a school evacuated from Bristol. Thereby at least was provided the amusement of lobbing berries through their windows. There were also schemes to put holly in apple-pie beds, but I doubt if there was bravado enough to carry them out. In recent years one who had been billeted on us remembers well her stay, if not the berries.

Soon sirens were sounding, at first in practice, then for real. It was a stomach-churning sound, the warning note rising and falling, followed by the welcome continuous note of the all clear.

My mother was one of many who donned the green uniform of the WVS - the Women's Voluntary Service. I remember helping her 'on the door' as she helped provide cheap meals in the Town Hall. At home any change of diet was only gradually noticed and it could hardly be said that we were under fed, certainly compared with wartime conditions elsewhere. Yet Mother, as everyone else, began to hoard tins of food in case of emergency, probably to an extent that may have been illegal. I remember secretive cupboards piled high with such. Certainly any occupying power would have had little difficulty in extracting them from us.

At some stage rationing was introduced. I still have my 'Ration Book', a pale buff coloured affair with tear-off squares for a week's allowance of basic items - meat, butter, sugar, eggs, cheese, bacon. I particularly remember that the size of the butter allocation for a week was half an inch off a normal half-pound packet. May-be this is the reason for my treatment of butter as a treat to this day. But the rationing was not harsh, especially as it could be supplemented by procuring from a friendly farmer the occasional rabbit, before the days of myxomatosis, and a few extra eggs. Nor was it difficult for us to accommodate a change of diet. We had never been allowed to be fussy over food. I remember having to swallow sheep's brain with good grace, and another time we were stood over while it got dark until some other unappetising dish was finished. Certainly our subsequent health has not seemed to suffer. Nevertheless that we managed well was testimony to my mother's good housekeeping in the face of a challenge, as well no doubt to a good deal of self-sacrifice on her part, quite apart from the unsung heroism of the merchant seamen on the Atlantic crossing.

I have already used the term 'Mother', for then it was the accepted form of address by children, as

was 'Father'. Any more modern day intimacy was not contemplated in what was a somewhat Edwardian upbringing. Maybe the war did something to modify this culture and to bring parents and children closer. Similarly children, for example, were not promoted to the adult evening meal until the age of twelve, but again there was a wartime relaxation of the custom, as with so many other traditions. In fact the war brought about a radical change in lifestyles. For example gone was the heavy reliance on domestic help. 1940 saw the end of the employment of three out of four full time staff-cook, parlour maid, nurse, the gardener who had fought in 1914 remaining in his tied cottage - as they went off to the war in some capacity, never to return. It was no secret that this, for my mother, was a massive relief. She became her natural self as 'Mother'.

What of the war itself? To counter the threat of aircraft landing on one of the few flat areas of the Mendip Hills piles of peat were built on Blackdown, and at Burnham-on-Sea posts were erected on the sands. The Mendips also had the unenviable honour of being a decoy to attract bombing intended for Bristol. Residents lived somewhat perilously, and a few casualties were reported. Bristol would have had barrage balloons flying, to deter low flying aircraft. Pictures of them looking like inflated elephants were familiar but none were visible from home.

Two other features appeared nearer home. One was a line of defence, part of a major line along the southern fringe of the Mendips. There was, and still is as 'listed' buildings, a series of pillboxes, placed strategically on the southern edge of woods overlooking Dulcot. More conspicuous was a broad anti-tank trench dug in open land below Tor Woods. One may well wonder how effective all this would have proved, as also the local Home Guard contingent. I once spied it drilling nearby, hopefully bolstering in us a little more confidence than Dad's Army.

One of the more disconcerting warnings we were given was of booby-trap devices dropped indiscriminately from the air. A toy or innocent looking pen lying around and picked up could prove lethal. Around us we never heard of a fatality, but they were an unpleasant additional danger.

Even so in most of sleepy Somerset the enemy himself seemed a long way off. There was the constant reminder on posters that "Careless Talk Costs Lives", and we made much of the imagined threat of spies and fifth columnists. Anyone clad in overcoat and trilby hat was an immediate suspect and conjured up all sorts of ideas of fame from single-handed capture. It is true that a German bomber was grounded near Priddy on the Mendips, but I don't remember inspecting it which surely would have been attempted if it had been allowed by the authorities. Perhaps in any case it was prevented by lack of transport at that time. With petrol severely limited, the car, a 1936 Wolseley 10, was laid up in the garage for a time. Despite these occasional excitements, life continued as usual with the round of term - holidays - term, with little to ruffle it.

At a much later stage in the war we came face to face with the enemy in the form of prisoners of war. Part of the grounds of a nearby big house was commandeered, first for Italians who soon were trusted with farm work, and later for noticeably more surly Germans. I don't think there were any local feelings of fear from having them so close; we could, and often did, go for walks a few yards outside the perimeter fence. After the war the site became a desirable housing estate, one of what must have been many such prime sites exploited only on account of the war. Such is the occasion for progress, if progress it was, compared with the former glory of the big house. I remember previously having gone up the long drive to deliver something and having met the grand old lady herself. She

was living in faded luxury on the first floor, where the elements were penetrating through the floor above. It was not long before it was pulled down as beyond repair, as not a few other relics about that time. Thus it was the war, which further accelerated certain rapid social changes.

Two other small omissions in life must have registered as a result of hostilities. Church bells ceased to be rung, one supposes in case they were taken as a signal of invasion. The eventual victory peal therefore made all the greater impact. Also road signs were uprooted, and any indication of locality was ruthlessly removed, with the object of confusing would-be spies. They were not the only people confused, although we soon learnt to do without them.

Did we hear sounds of war? Familiar to most of us early on were the dreaded drones of aircraft, the German bombers being distinguished by their pulsating sound. The fear they engendered, however unreasonable, was very real to one with a vivid imagination. Once it became too much during a sleepless night and Father moved his bed in as a reassurance to me. He also took his turn as a firewatcher on the roof of the cathedral. Their buckets of water and sand, surely inadequate, were thankfully not required to be used.

The bombing of Bristol must have been audible, and certainly visible as fires lit up the night sky, although Wells itself was not targeted. Of course for this to have been seen by us, our own lights would have had to be turned off, for the blackout was strict, with all windows covered with blackout material from the earliest days. But I don't remember the glass having to be stuck over with something to reduce the danger of splintering as was common elsewhere I think. Yet I do remember rehearsing a bedding-down under the big dining room table, though it was never needed to be done for real.

All too real however were the bombs, which exploded too near for comfort during my first full term away at Prep School. Somewhat surprisingly Forres School had been evacuated away from Swanage where invasion was feared, to Penn in Buckinghamshire, proving to be rather too near London for comfort. Sure enough a stick of three bombs was dropped by a fleeing plane less than a mile from the school. Being at night it was all the more frightening, with the explosions becoming ever closer. The experience may have been somewhat compensated for by the gleaning of bomb fragments the next day (mine has since been mislaid) yet it was one we could have done without. It was enough for parents to make a rapid application for me to move to another school nearer home and well out of the way of danger. The school in question was none other than Durlston Court, one of Forres' rivals in Swanage, the hope being that it might return to that matchless site for schools in the near future.

All I remember of hostilities while Forres had been in Swanage during the summer of 1940 is limited to a very cramped bomb shelter that was hastily dug in on the south side of the school. Sometime I must go and check if any signs of it remain. I had not been there the previous year when it was reported that a German fighter had strafed the beach at Swanage, without causing any casualties. Also I missed the bomb, which apparently landed on the doorstep of the chapel at Forres, in which I later preached, causing no more than the loss of some windows. Sadly, well after the war a boy from the school was blown up by a mine on the beach, which had somehow escaped the mine clearing operation. He was not to be the last of delayed action casualties after the ceasefire.

Durlston Court School turned out well, being evacuated to a peaceful Somerset backwater. Earnshill was a large country house at Hambridge, near Langport. We were in our element having the run of a large estate of open fields and woods, complete with its own farm and a river for fishing and swimming. Particularly memorable were the large hollow trees in the parkland. Inside them two or three of us could sit round a fire in the middle. On one occasion I vividly remember the trunk inside caught fire and panic set in as we made a scramble for the narrow exit. It was not an unusual sight to see smoke rising out of the top of several trees during a weekend when we were left very much to our own devices. It meant an early introduction to the habit, or rather the trial, of cigarette smoking, fortunately later dropped in a stricter disciplinary setting. It also meant some daring nocturnal expeditions and not a few 'dorm feasts'. Thus it was in this somewhat more relaxed atmosphere and in such a rural setting that the necessities of war had a beneficial effect on us.

If however we thought we would not hear something of the war even there we were mistaken. Pat Cox, the epitome of the old type of Founder/Owner Headmasters, who was himself an old soldier in the 1914-18 trenches, was intensely patriotic. He fed us, though judiciously, on gory realities of the trenches. Two stories stand out. His companion fatally peered over the parapet and received a marksman's bullet. On another occasion he was buried for hours in a trench by a friendly tank, then a recent innovation. He formed us into what I can only suppose was an apology for a Cadet Force, a rare introduction for those so young. I remember being treated to a very loud explosion as part of our education in things military, but only at a safe distance.

Tragically we learnt of the death in action of the owner of Earnshill, leaving fatherless a boy of about the same age as ourselves. Also the Headmaster's own son was wounded in the D-Day landings. It all helped to bring the realities of war to mind, though we were hardly able to appreciate to any extent its real horror. Rather, in typical fashion, we tended to feed on its glory. In retrospect it is commendable that Pat Cox never expressed to us any feelings of hatred for the enemy, nor any form of vindictiveness, and this was typical of others of his generation with whom we came into contact.

Certainly we failed to understand the significance of the arrival at the school of two German Jews. They shared little of their experience of course, and fitted in well. May-be they should have had a salutary effect on us but the truth was hidden from us. We were however fully introduced to the life of Hitler. All I can now remember from it was that he was born on the river Inn, in Austria, I think. I also remember making a hash of it in an essay for entry to my next school.

Hence by and large life itself was little affected. No doubt restrictions on the use of petrol denied us some away sports fixtures, though nothing was allowed to prevent the Sunday coach ride to Curry Rivel Church. We lived a very closeted and shielded life. It may be thought that the quality of the teaching staff would have suffered when young members went off to the war, or in one case we thought a new master should have gone off to it. Yet we were most fortunate to have some excellent women replacements, and creative and artistic activities flourished. The classics lady, whose name I forget, must be commended for getting some early Greek into me. Similarly a certain Miss Macroix, a French escapee, for persevering with me on the piano. And there was no one like 'Daddy' Stanley for enthusing us in carpentry - I still have some of his productions for he did most of the work - although his, and my, maths had something to be desired.

Similarly one might question how good the teaching was in less than ideal conditions, in draughty wooden huts, even in passages, and without many of the normal teaching aids or sports facilities.

Yet it is a truism that it is the quality of the teacher, which is paramount, and not the conditions of teaching. Certainly I can bear witness to that in wartime Earnshill. We were fortunate.

The war's progress was avidly followed. That was to no small extent due to having others with whom to share the news. Even without them, there had been two earlier memories of hostilities, which had remained. One was the Italian attack on Albania in 1939, and the other was Russia's attack on Finland. In the latter dramatic pictures of Finns in manholes attaching mines to the bottom of Russian tanks were gleefully poured over; we seemed with everyone else easily to be able to switch our allegiances once Russia became an ally. But now in 1942 we were at the stage of presuming, quite unjustifiably, inevitable victory. The war maps in newspapers (remember no television) always had big arrows pointing in the right direction; reverses were hidden or explained away, and the numbers of aircraft downed were always favourable to our side. After all, God, of course, was fighting for us. One of our members kept a scrapbook of cuttings, which if still extant will be of immense interest. We enjoyed being Air Spotters; I still have my manual and can tell you a few of the key features of the main combatants. Competition to identify planes was strong, especially of those occasionally caught in the crossbeams of local searchlights. We prized making models of famous fighters, the kits being skilfully crafted by 'Daddy' Stanley. All in all war was fun.

Oddly enough nothing seems to remain in the memory of Stalingrad nor even of El Alamein, although Stalin and Montgomery were clearly seen as heroes throughout. But one event, which seems to have stood out for some reason is the German capture of Rostov, as they turned south beyond the Crimea. One supposes it may have had something to do with their threat to the great oil fields of Baku on the Caspian Sea, so vital to the German war effort. It was very different when the time for D Day came. Surprisingly there were no obvious signs locally of the build up for it, although it may be true that we were rarely in a position to view them. But there was much speculation amongst us as to the selected spot for invasion. There was one called Homer who claimed to have inside information which he guarded jealously with furtive hints, and those who were not his closest confidants failed to extract the secret from him. I forget now if we ever did find out whether he was right.

Winston Churchill? I don't remember that he particularly stood out. It may be that we had come by then to take him for granted, not having been able to compare him with those who came before him. Nor were we able to appreciate fully his rhetoric. I imagine my parents to have been deeply moved by it. But in 1963 when Churchill died we fully celebrated him at Monkton Combe.

On the other hand VJ Day (victory over the Japs) remains firmly etched in the memory. It was holidays and coincidentally we were having a barbecue on the Mendips, called then a 'sausage sizzle'. I was told, in true Victorian style, that as the youngest male my task was to propose the toast to the King - "the King, God bless him". It was something of an ordeal for a stuttering youth, which made a lasting impression. But there is a better reason for VJ Day being memorable for it touched the family directly. Brother Bernard would be returning from Burma.

It may be all the more surprising therefore that the preceding VE Day, signalling the end of the nearer theatre of war in Europe, hardly seems to have registered with me, at least in the long term. It was during term at Marlborough College and the cricket term at that. It is perhaps another

illustration of how little the horrors of war had touched us. It is indeed true that school, as well as home, had protected us, so that life was a world away from reality. May-be for the present generation at school, such a culture will never return. Yet such an upbringing is not thereby to be disparaged. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and one is bold to claim that Durlston Court is one amongst many, which passes the test. I can name not a few of my contemporaries who amply fulfilled the hopes of such a tradition. There was a certain MacMurtrie who was even then mad on military matters and who thereby became the butt of many a prank, yet he if anyone was to be one who would lead an attack over the top. I met him at a reunion recently and it was clear that that impression of him had been fully justified. Also outstanding was a particular friend of mine, Bill Canning, who distinguished himself as the commander of a destroyer in the Falklands conflict. And there are many others in all walks of life whose early inculcation in traditional values has made incalculable contributions, benefiting the world at large. And so one could go on.

Andrew Salmon 2003

What on earth did we read?

Looking back at the 1940s and Earnshill I seem to have a complete blank in my mind as to what we were taught. This is hardly flattering to the many teachers who toiled at desk and blackboard and suggests that either our places, like commissions in the First World War, were somehow 'bought' at the public schools we went on to or that a process of osmosis fed the information into our little brains to be spewed out on the exam paper at the right time. More probable is the answer that learning, indeed that better word 'education' is a continuous process and there are few itemised fixtures in that calendar. For instance I hated Maths in each and every direction from the multiplication tables to geometry to algebra. Long division took an age and spidery numbers trailed far away to the bottom right of the page without much significant information emerging along the top line. Oh! For a pocket calculator ...

Algebra was a curious thing. Something must have gone in (osmosis?) because when in the 1980s I had my first PC I was able to teach myself to write 'Basic' computer programmes with no trouble at all. Algebra was dead easy!

We had Kennedy's Latin Primer with its stilted sentences and totally useless information about Caesar's antics in Gaul, we remembered "Elefas, Mas, Gigas, As" for some reason but, with giggles, pronounced the last vowel with a long stress throughout. Kennedy's book was never new and all had had been passed down through generations of schoolboys. Hence each and every one had the word LATIN transformed with heavy black ink to (B)AT(T)IN(G). Poor Kennedy was probably alive in those days.

Jasper H Stenbridge wrote simple Geography books which devoted a chapter to a country and an aspect of it that would appeal to young readers. These were really rather good and conjoined physical geography with industry, commerce and agriculture. But who on earth rejoiced in the name 'Jasper H Stenbridge' ? We never knew and perhaps he was an American but the name lingers on.

History, French, English or other books of learning I haven't the foggiest notion of what we read. I will have to leave that to others.

Private reading is another matter. The library had shelves of G F Henty, Percy F Westerman and other Empire promoting works all in hard covers with well thumbed pages and large creases where corners had been turned down to mark the place where reading paused. I never read Henty, to my shame, but lunged into Westerman and reveled in the brave young men of the North East Frontier, pistol in right hand, left outstretched to encourage their men, whistle in top pocket (for what?) and snappy jodpurs and high boots. It was easy to identify with these clean featured products of the Public School. Westerman did in fact write a book entitled Building The Empire. His prose still lingers. 'The bolts of the Gurkhas' rifles clicked in a businesslike manner as in response to an order they loaded their weapons'. 'Halting in front of the Viceroy, the lieutenant saluted and stood to attention. A mist seemed to swim before his eyes, through which he could see nothing but the clearcut features of India's ruler. Deftly the Viceroy pinned the bronze cross upon the breast of the lieutenant's uniform'. One may laugh today but what will the 'deathless prose' of cyber-space adventures, already looking a bit thin, look in fifty years time? We'll laugh again.

Equally appealing and of a more gentle nature were the books of Arthur Ransome. We read the lot. I had a small wooden sailing dinghy at home on the Thames, I loved campfires and outdoor life, holidays were spent in the open air. Ransome's stories perfectly appealed to a ten year old with their restrained adventure, sense of decency and lack of any interference by the 'grown-ups'. The simple drawings gave a sort of magic to the Lakeland and Broads scenes. There was a strapping young girl called 'Titty' but we passed that name without a thought as, I am sure, Ransome himself did. Inuendo is for a later age – alas.

AEW Mason had written a book called No Other Tiger. Spine towards me it sat on the shelves throughout my stay at Earnshill. For some reason I couldn't bring myself to open it. Funny thing book titles... On the other hand a book called Thieves Nights intrigued me. A man, our hero, walks into a den of miscreants wearing a red glove and a green sock. He tells a tale so arresting that, upon finishing his story, when the curtains are drawn back from the windows dawn has already broken. What had been planned for the night had been aborted and the police swooped. Fifty years later I discovered this book in a secondhand shop. Rattling good yarn.

The Sherlock Holmes stories were a very staple diet and we knew them by heart. The titles were brilliant. The Speckled Band, The Engineer's Thumb, The Lion's Mane, The Dancing Man, The Seven Napoleons, The Five Orange Pips. Conan Doyle always seemed to reach out beyond our experience and imagination to an ending surprising but logical. The volumes that we read did not have illustrations and that was probably a good thing since it kept the stories from being anchored too far in a remote past.

Actually Basil Rathbone was my father's first cousin and he has become, for everybody, the way that Sherlock Holmes actually looked.

Very much in the past was a wonderful collection of The Strand Magazine, bound volume after bound volume, along some shelves in a corner of a classroom above the stables. They belonged to the Coombe family. Like the Readers Digest in later years, though infinitely better written, the Strand Magazine appealed to our young minds. There were stories, situations, facts and, intriguingly, inventions. Greatest of these latter was a diagram of a Perpetual Motion Machine. This fascinated me. A wheel with a series of hollow spokes containing steel balls. The spokes were so cunningly curved that the balls rolled to the centre of the wheel on the 'up' side and the perimeter on the

'down' side. Hence the wheel would turn. For years after I tussled with this idea drawing endless sketches but never seeming to capture the magic of the original. Two months ago that very illustration came up in a popular magazine and suddenly I was back in that small room over the stables, musty smell in my nose, dimly lit by a skylight and fearful of being called away by the bell for supper.

One day, for no particular reason, save that I admired it, Hancock gave me a copy of Janes Sailing Ships of the World. The book was small but quite thick and gave drawings of all the classes of sailing ship from Barque to Barquentine and Brig and Brigentine and so to Schooner and fully rigged Ship. They were named – Lock Ettrick and others I have forgotten – and all showed in perfect detail every sail and rope on the boat. Soon I could name all the sails from Royals to Topgallants to Studding sails and, what fun when the wind was light, 'Sky Sails' right at the topmost pinnacle of the mast. The ropes, hundreds of them, were fixed in my memory, too. I drew pictures of sailing ships endlessly on any scrap of paper I could find. My pockets were filled with pieces of string so I could practice knots; sheetbends, reef knots, bowline and sheepshank and, a little later Turk's Heads. Probably that was the book I liked best.

Again of a practical nature was the series entitled Aircraft of the Fighting Powers. Published each year on superior 'shiny' paper and bound in blue the books showed accurate drawings of all the aircraft likely to be seen around the world at that time. The planes came both from the Allies and from our enemies, the Germans, Italian and Japanese. How the plans of hostile countries came to be pictured we never bothered to contemplate. The main thing was that, from these excellent and detailed drawings, we could model our own replicas. Construction Kits did not exist and we had to make do with bits of wood picked up from the floor of the carpentry shop and to saw, cut and sandpaper away till the final shape came out. Quietly, during a lesson, one would take a roughly formed wing or fuselage from the pocket and gently sand it to more perfect shape. Thereafter acetone smelling glue, clear and quick drying, a covering of 'aeroplane lacquer' and red, white and blue identification roundels in transfer would bring the model into being. I still have some of these planes and they are really rather good.

One extraordinary book we read was a sort of compendium, the ring binder of today, containing pages of closely typed text and photographs with cellophane pockets with all sorts of trivia; bus tickets, cigarette stubs with lipstick on them, book matches, scraps of paper torn from a diary and a piece of cotton stained, it seems, with human blood. Very mysterious but of course these were the famous Denis Wheatley detective stories where the 'clues' were thus tangible and we were invited to solve the murder ourselves. Never seen them again.

Lushington, the younger one, was tremendously keen on the Biggles books and, almost vicariously, we all got to know the stories. "Then the Mechanics pulled away the chocks and Biggles and Ginger roared across the tarmac". That sounded fine to us. No question then of Biggles' orientation though nowadays it is fashionable to question exactly what these manly heroes, with not a pretty girl in sight, were actually up to ...

Oblique to all this derring-do was that great schoolboy William. Richmal Crompton's Just William was not to everyone's taste; we'd probably call him 'down market', but the sheer silliness of it all made us turn the pages. Curiously, during the War Crompton spent time in Iceland in the RAF where a fellow officer, Air Commander Cecil George Wigglesworth was also posted. I say curiously because

Wigglesworth had known W E Johns in the First World War and the man Biggles had been modeled on him. Thus, if the War Office had only realised it, were two heroes, Biggles and William, ready and together to do their bit for the conflict. What a fine pair they would have made, clearly shortening the war thereby.

Did we read comics? Well actually I don't know. Certainly I didn't much though I did manage to see two from time to time at home. Film Fun and Radio Fun were magazines with cartoons of the actors and comics of the week. In my case this didn't work all that well because we went to the cinema once a holidays and the radio was turned on in the household at 9pm for the news and then switched off at 9.10pm. The characters were endearing and often very funny but were not akin to reality. The Beano, now in its early prime, was available to us and so Desperate Dan, Lord Snooty and his Pals, Ping the Elastic Man and Pansy Potter the Strongman's daughter were nicely familiar. Today we have to go to Viz to see anything like it though the Two Fat Slags and other disgraceful persons would have deeply shocked not only the grown ups but also the children of that time.

So that's what we read at Durlston in the early forties. Not a very firm foundation for our future lives and requiring an awful lot of catching up in later years. I must leave it to my fellow schoolboys to improve on this meagre catalogue. For my part I am content that we were not force-fed with high literature and could, in our own time, absorb freely what is probably the finest literary output of any country in this world.

Rowland Whitehead

3.10.03

Sir Rowland Whitehead's Earnshill



Football Team in 1943

“We are in a new situation here”, said Cox “and we’ll begin our time at Earnshill with no school rules at all”- The news was greeted enthusiastically by all the boys. After all we were living in a vast private house, gardens spread in all directions and fields with elms and stately oak trees stretching beyond the ha-ha down to the slender river Parret and tiny villages with names like Isle Abbotts, Muchelny, and on to larger towns like Curry Rival or Langport. War and our remote situation meant that there was no traffic on the roads and we could bicycle anywhere and everywhere in safety.

There was no question of trespass and we could wander the fields at will.

Earnshill, and we were told that the local pronunciation was more like 'Erns'll', was a Palladian style house, built by an Italian architect probably a hundred years earlier, reached by a long drive sloping down from the village of Hambridge, and surrounded by lawns- The house had two wings to form the shape of a 'U' and was built of rust brown brick with pale stone quoins and a grand double curved staircase up to the main entrance. Grape vines curled around the metal rails up the steps and four magnificent creamy flowering magnolias, *Grandiflora*, lined the walls at the sides of the building. Yew trees at the side of the house led through a copse to a neatly cut topiary in a lower garden.

The house, we were told, was 'facing the wrong way' since the large important windows to the main reception rooms were on the north side. That is because the architect was an Italian, they said, and in Italy the windows faced away from the hot sun. We scarcely dared reply that we were, after all, fighting this fiendish Italian enemy and crimes like this must be accounted for. The high entrance doors led to a main reception room with a broad staircase on each side leading to other rooms for entertainment. We were only allowed to use the stairs on the right, which had been strengthened by huge pale oak beams against the ceaseless tramp of young feet. "See I can go up the stairs quietly — and I'm over 14 stone", said Ellis. So this was, in effect, Rule No1 in the new school. The reception led to a very large room, facing north, which must have been the Grand Drawing Room before the war. It had pale green panelling to waist level and above hung, on each side wall, two vast and gloomy allegorical paintings. With foresight the owners had covered them with fine mesh chicken wire and they survived, as far as I remember, any damage other than a few indentations as pillows flew across the dormitory. Indeed this was the main sleeping room for us Durlstonians. To the left of this room was a narrower but equally long room which formed another dormitory. It must have been the original dining room. To the right the equivalent room had been divided in two. Upstairs the smaller rooms were split between class rooms and dormitories. A bathroom there was but the day-to-day ablutions were performed mainly in tin or enamelled basins from water brought in by a Matron each morning. Slop pails prevailed though none were ever swung again. The era of the Turret Toughs was over.

Mr Harman, 'Haymo' to the boys, had come with us from Swanage to Earnshill. A huge man of about forty he had been in charge of the equipment of the school and keeping the place tidy. He was easy going and good humoured and spent a great deal of his time cleaning the stone floors of the long corridors of the servant's quarters. For this he scattered sand from a bucket to lay the dust and then wielded a four foot brush, then taking the heaps of sand and dust into a dustpan.. The final stage, when Only a very thin line of dust remained on the floor by the edge of the pan, was to turn the pan at right angles and, with a flourish, sweep the remaining bits away. We boys were fascinated — there was a simple craftsmanship in this.

Indeed we learnt much in these early days of the war. Cox had told us that we must be really helpful to our mothers now that our fathers had gone to fight and there would be few if no servants in our homes to do the work. We must make our own beds. He didn't speci' any other helpfulnesses, and may not have been quite sure what they might be, but being 'helpful' was the main thing. We called the maids of at Earnshill 'Skivvies' but that was we feit that they had always been called. They

showed us how to wash up and particularly the trick of drying two plates, on top and one bottom, and then reversing the position so that the top and bottom of each was also dried. The Still Room, windowless in the depths of the house, had a smell of singeing hot cotton that will never be forgotten.

The remaining room of our new school was the Sick Room, the Sanitorium, the 'Sani' where we spent perhaps a day or two of our time at Earnshill. It was cream painted, with six iron beds also cream painted and an incredible warmth about the rooms which, combined with its remoteness from the bustle and noise of downstairs, gave an atmosphere of complete peace. During darkness a flickering nightlight cast reassuring shadows to the corners of the room. One felt very safe. Recovery was always rapid though the desire to leave this haven was never strong. The remainder of the building will be described later. The west wing was occupied by Mrs Coombe the wife of the owner, her six year old son Richard and her sister Mrs Hamilton Young wives of brave men; that's all we knew.

Now there was time for us to examine, as schoolboys will, their teachers with a critical eye. Some had not transferred from Swanage and others had joined us in Somerset. Inevitably we would attract those too old or those too young to fight in the war with a few unable for some reason to join the conflict. Oldest of all, though his age was uncertain to us, was Mr Stanley a rather gaunt and stooping figure with gnarled, strong hands and greying wisps of hair around the sides of his shiny head. A pipe was seldom out of his mouth. He was a gentle, quiet man and taught, I think, geography. What he did best, however, and did superbly, was carpentry where lessons were given in a loose-box in the stable wing. It seems that he brought all his own tools with him; huge Box planes, crisp Jack-planes, amazingly small and neat finishing planes, spoke shaves, saws of every size from tenon and hacksaw to bow-saw, steel rules, set squares and an endless selection of spirit levels. Chisels and gouges had boxwood handles and we were encouraged to use a wooden mallet rather than a hammer to drive the chisel home. He kept all these tools immaculate and razor sharp spending hours after the class repairing the careless damage of little boys. He never remonstrated with us though perhaps hinting that we held the plane this way or used the saw that way. His claim to our admiration was the fact that he had fought in the Boer War. This really was like Waterloo. All our fathers had fought in the Great War so we knew that it had happened, but the Boer War was exotic. Better still he could show us the wounds on his bronzed but emaciated torso when we went swimming in the Parrett. Here indeed was a hero.

Youngest was Mr Warlow who was probably about seventeen, fit and athletic, good looking with a mop of flaxen hair over his eyes. He prowled the grounds of the house with a .22 rifle looking for squirrels with a trail of admiring little boys behind him. We all felt that we would like to grow up to be that sort of man. By far the most extraordinary teacher was Miss Howard. She must have been in her late twenties and had suffered some kind of malfunction in her metabolic system so that she was inordinately fat. This for a woman well below average height made, one would have thought, for a figure of fun for the boys of Durlston Court. Never a thought of that. She had one of the most commanding personalities I have ever encountered and her quiet firm voice brooked no hint of disobedience — ever. She taught Latin as we had never been taught before and English to a superior standard that left us able to spell for the rest of our lives. Dorothy Sayers was one of her favourites and *The Man born to be King*, just recently published, was read to us. There was always a faint air of

mystery about Miss Howard, or as we nicknamed her 'Vale' (pronounced 'waal-ai' after the greetings that she insisted we give her at the start and finish of Latin lessons; Salve upon entering the classroom and Vale on leaving), and we realised that we knew nothing of her background or past. She was good friends with Mr Warlow and they went for long walks together; she, we were told, being taught German by Mr Warlow who spoke it fluently. When he let slip that she had learned German fantastically rapidly we came to only one conclusion. She knew the language already. She was in fact an extremely dangerous German spy and had to cover for an occasional slip of the tongue. The matter never progressed further but we kept a watchful eye on the situation.

Singing and music lessons were given by Miss de St Croix. She would have been in her twenties, dark with curly hair and a splendid bosom under a light cotton blouse. 'Singing', she told us, 'must come from here, the diaphragm, not the throat or the tummy. Stand behind me and put your arms round my chest' she commanded me. I held on for dear life, my cheeks crimson, as her ribcage swelled and fell beneath my clammy little hands. The first time is always the best.

We learned to sing many songs of a patriotic nature; 'Fight for freedom everyone — join the line and man the gun', Jerusalem and Rule Britannia. We learned what Negro Spirituals were about when we sang 'Darkies lead a happy life — playing on the old banjo — ya-e-aha, ya-e-oho — playing on the old banjo'. Sounded idyllic. Cox and Ellis took it further with a catchy tune to the words 'never seen the like since I was born as a big black Nigger with a blue dress on — when Johnny comes down to Hilo — poor, old, man'. A song consigned to history's choral dustbin long ago.

Miss de St Croix also taught piano and put together a school band which played Mozart's Toy Symphony. This was a splendid opportunity for the lesser musical mortals to blow into a miniature water-whistle to produce real 'nightingale' noises, to rattle bells and tambourines and, if judged to have a better sense of timing, to strike a triangle after so many bars. She played the piano with gusto and more or less kept the whole thing in recognisable shape.

Central to the management of the school was Miss Dawson. Tall with a mass of dark hair and an energetic manner, she formed the third point of the Cox/Ellis triumverate that made Durlston what it was. Whilst the two men got on with the teaching and sporting side of the school Miss Dawson was working at the 'coal face' to make sure that the organisation really ran smoothly. She brought a happy optimism to the place, difficult in wartime, and coped with many near disasters. Her huge yellow bicycle, with net at the back wheel to protect the skirt, was called The Yellow Peril. Miss Dawson, mounted high and pedalling furiously down the drive to Hambridge, was a formidable sight to us.



Plane Spotting

A master, seemingly in retrospect to have come out of the pages of Evelyn Waugh, was Mr Hawke-Genn. He was 'an RAF type' of a man with crinkly fair hair, moustache with points and a beak-like nose who taught, I think rather unlikely, history. At all events he knew a great deal about fighting planes and became the Local Representative of the Spotters Club, a nationwide organisation to ensure that as many people as possible could recognise friend and foe in the air over their towns and villages. We took up the challenge and were given packs of cards with black and white illustrations of the Focke-Wulf FW 200k Kurrier, Messerschmitt ME 109G, Heinkel HE 177 and others as seen from below, the side and, Heaven forbid coming straight at us. In no time the school was totally proficient—we passed all the tests. Hawke-Genn was given to a prowling every evening up the drive to the Hambridge pub, the Lion and Lamb. We all giggled the next day and decided that he had gone in like a 'lamb' and emerged as a 'lion'.

At variance with the other teachers as Mr Shelley. Not for him the macho image or the intellectual mien. He was an artist. Dressed in baggy maroon corduroys, open necked checked shirt, sandals and a mane of hair flopping over his face he ran the Art Room at the back of the school. We painted as freely as he, himself, painted. Big sheets of paper, plenty of bright poster paints and huge brushes. We had to do it bold. After a year or so he got his call-up and said that he would not be returning the next term. As a farewell he painted a beautiful signboard saying 'Art School' and nailed it up over the door. It was elegant and carefully painted. 'This will be here when I return from the war' he said with pride. Schoolboys are cruel creatures. It survived a week before being torn down

He was replaced by a stern lady of unmemorable name who had us painting posters for a 'Dig for Victory' campaign. Carrots and garden forks were never more boring. She also taught us English and made us try our hands at writing a poem. Hancock, a Navy enthusiast, came out with 'Forty days and forty nights the winking Stars saw battle lights' which we thought was rather good. Douglas, a dour little Scot, entitled his poem, The Factory. 'The wheels go round and they make such a sound, and just then I saw a man on a mound, and just then he said, I'm making a bed, out of old lead, which is found in that shed ..' Whilst we giggled the teacher praised it for its descriptive powers. She was right.

There were two matrons. A senior and trained ex-hospital Matron called Miss Latimer, or in our terms 'Lattie', who was small and neat and very strict. After lights Out we were sure to be in our beds if she was on duty. Being ill was a serious business and one didn't go lightly to Miss Latimer without good cause. Miss Price, 'Pricky', was of a softer nature and we relaxed when she was on duty. She was slim, perhaps a little gangling, with glasses and a runaway chin below an uncertain mouth. We didn't think anyone had ever kissed her.

Both matrons had all the school queuing each evening before bedtime for a spoonful of 'malt' to supplement our fairly meagre diet. We had our favourites which we were allowed to bring from home. Radio Malt was a top number whilst Virol was deemed the lowest; partly because the advertisements stated that Virol was good for 'anaemic girls'. We didn't want that. Mumps, Measles and Chicken Pox were fairly standard epidemics and struck once a year. No one had colds or 'flu. The 'Sani', pleasantly warm and cosy, was empty most of the time.

Were there other teachers and staff at the school? It is hard to recollect. A Mister Hacker came and went. A lady from Lithuania, presumably a refugee, with fair wavy hair tied in a bun at the back, came and acted as an under matron for a term. She called iodine 'Joadine' which mystified us and seemed to live in the airless Still Room where she ironed away at our pajamas and hankies. Cooks there must have been but who they were and what names they went by we never knew.

Durlston Court was a close community, a country within a country, with its own rules and laws, its traditions and a landscape surrounding it that, we felt, belonged to us. Sundays we went to church at Curry Rival, a distance of about eight miles, and this was the limit of the territory. The Reverend Maude Roxby presented a service in the best Anglican tradition, Hymns Ancient and Modern, Cranmers Prayer Book with prayers and collects therein and the Authorised Version of the Bible. We each put a penny in the collection bag as it passed down the pew and listened to sermons about winning the war or the plight of our soldiers, sailors and airmen. Daily prayers at Earnshill took place in a stone flagged room on the ground floor which served as a class room and a library at other times. By then we knew all the favourite hymns by heart and sang them with gusto. 'For all the Saints' was a great hit and when we came to the verse 'the golden evening brightens in the West' I used to peer Out of the window at the setting sun and the clouds like molten lead against the elms with the rooks returning and feel that Heaven was very close.

Butterflies and moths occupied much of our free time, or at least the free time of many of us. We had nets, collecting boxes, setting boards of several sizes, entomological pins in black or silver (depending on the colour of the thorax of the specimen — we were particular about that), home-made glass fronted cages for our caterpillars with holes in the floor for the feeding plant to sit in a small glass jar and keep fresh, and, most important of all, we each had a Killing Jar. This latter was a wide mouthed glass jar with a broad cork bung and a mixture of Plaster of Paris and Cyanide poured and fixed at the bottom. Above was cotton wool so that the creature could not damage its delicate wings in its death struggles. This was all taken in a matter of fact sort of way. Little fingers were inserted to pull the specimen Out from the cotton wool and there is but no doubt that much cyanide was ingested in the course of a summer. We survived and are probably immune to cyanide poisoning to this day.

In the 1940's lepidoptera were plentiful. One stood in the hot hayfields, the grass reaching to the shoulders and peered at a miasma, a myriad of playful brown and white butterflies fluttering above the grasses and flowers. There seemed no end. We selected only the most perfect specimens with no damage to their wings from birds or the wear and tear of the summer season. Better we bred and hatched them from the caterpillars we found on the leaves and grasses. With amazement we watched as a Peacock butterfly burst out of its chrysalis, wings small and ill-formed as yet, to become minutes later a miracle of brightness and colour. We spent hours examining the hawthorn branches for the 'stick caterpillars' which we knew to be there but were so realistic that, as often as not, we overlooked them for a twig.

Butterfly expeditions took us to the edge of the Kings Sedgemoor and a view over that broad expanse of lowland with the Isle of Athelny, a pimple on the horizon. We lay in the grass looking up at the blue sky and watching the Six Spot Burnets hatching from their pale cocoons along the stalks — green-black wings with carmine spots. So neat, so perfect. None of us must have given a thought to the war that was waging in North Africa and in the Atlantic.

Other expeditions took us along the lanes and fields to pick blackberries in the autumn. There were mushrooms, too. Wherever we went there was peace and quiet. Indeed we used to slip out of the dormitory window on warm, dusky September evenings and wander the lawn in front of the house, jump the haha and walk amongst the great oaks of the park, barefoot and excited at our daring. Cox probably knew about this but in his wise way realised that there was no point in making rules about harmless pursuits that would, anyway, be broken. After bicycling our favourite wheeled sport was roller skating. In the stable yard had been erected a huge wooden house, a low roofed, smooth floored, space of about fifteen feet wide and more than thirty feet long. Down the one side were windows with chicken wire. It was, in fact, an enormous hen house which in its day had contained a thousand or so fowls and now found use as the perfect roller skating rink. Summer and winter, wet and cold, dry and hot, we charged in a circle round and round the hen house practicing turns and stops, elegant loops and backward figures of eight. The wooden floor made for considerable noise but soft landings. There was once a winter of ice and our prowess at roller skating came in handy.



The huts and 'foliage' of Swanage days developed a new sophistication at Earnshill. The huge and stately elms in the park were climbed and houses or just look-outs built high up amongst the branches. Groups of boys secured a special tree for themselves. No one was afraid of the height or danger of slipping. In the front of the house, beyond the haha we discovered that many of the oaks, through age, were, in fact, hollow. Trees began to be appropriated here also. The finest was a very large girthed oak with a very small entrance and an even smaller 'window' at the side. A small boy of eleven could squeeze halfway through with his chest taking up the curve of the hole before turning about so that his backside could be accommodated by the same curving line, It required great courage to drop three feet into the dark, shaggy space in the bowels of the tree for the first time. My brother and I, together with Cooke-Hurle, whom we called 'Coke', finally established the Hollow Tree House, HTH, as a retreat from the cares of life and spent happy afternoons in the cramped interior brewing cocoa and heating baked beans over a candle. We found some glass for the tiny window and felt very snug. Smoking was not an essential feature of school life but we felt it imperative to try Out the dry, dun coloured coatings of the walls of our house. Wood that had rotted to tinder over a hundred generations. We choked mightily and our eyes smarted but it seemed infinitely worth the while.

On one such afternoon the heavy atmosphere drove a very large spider to lower itself in the middle of us. We exited the Hollow Tree House in seconds. The Cadet Corps continued as did Cox's patriotic speeches. His 'jingoism' was infectious. We were convinced that a German Parachutist had landed and reports were made of uniformed men with badges and buttons of a suspiciously alien genre. The old Local Defence Volunteers hut was now named the ARP Hut and the masters would discuss 'tactics' though one suspects that a glass of beer was also at hand. A full blown General came down to inspect the corps, judge our marching and our skills at arms drill. He made a Montgomery type speech and gave us a half holiday which was standard practice. Walking down the line during his inspection as we stood at 'open order' he questioned the boys on their interests and ambitions. "What, young man, do you want to be when you grow up?" he barked to a sallow youth. "I want to be a solicitor" replied Cheyne. We groaned. What a prig "and you, Trefry?" he asked. We groaned again. Trefry was Comish and would have pronounced his name 'Tre-frye' and here was this idiot saying 'Treffry' — was there no end to the ignorance of this man with gold braid all over him?

The end of the winter term brought much excitement. We cut strips of coloured paper and made chains to hang in the classrooms. We sang carols, we hoped for snow. The final envoi was an evening of songs and the fine baritone voices of Cox and Ellis were giving us, yet again, the favourites of the first world war. The school song began with the verse 'In nineteen hundred nought and three Edward was King oe'r land and sea' and at some stage we all sang the refrain 'Erectus non Elatus-O'. Cox was insistent that we knew the meaning of the Latin which ran something like 'upright but not too proud'. Fixing us with his pale blue eyes he said "it is Chest not Tummy" — and that's as good as one can get. The finale of the concert was a song called Vive La Compagnie. A line of verses in couplets bringing in the names and amusing attributes of each boy in the school. The song began with the youngest and most junior boy and ended with the Head Boy. We were all agog for weeks wondering what might be said about us. The text was printed each year in the Durlstonian magazine.

Looking back one could see an extraordinary amount of psychology, or at least very careful thought behind the running of the school. We learned to take responsibility, help manage the school and

each, in his own way, to recognise that, while different from each other, we had attributes that were valuable. As an example an elaborate 'Court' was set up each year where a series of responsibilities were given amusing names. The Keeper of the Green Cloth made sure that the billiard table was kept clean and the balls and cues in place. The Town Crier would call out the birthday of a boy at breakfast in a sing-song voice and we would all chant back 'Many happy returns Cadoux-Hudson' or whoever. A Keeper of the King's Books acted as Librarian and tried to maintain order along the bookshelves. The Keeper of the Queen's Music had the obvious task of packing away the sheets and books of music and making sure that the piano was not used for continuous 'chopsticks'. There were many more. The boys felt flattered and appreciated by this.

Cox seldom beat boys. If he did, he did it fairly softly and it was the shame of the event that remained. I believe that Ellis also beat and that his beatings were rather more severe. There was a prefectorial system with a head boy but punishments were minimal. Mostly the school ran its course smoothly. There was a time when minor misdemeanours were automatically put down to 'Cooke-Hurle and the Whiteheads' but we weathered the storm quite well. The topiary beyond the spinney was one day found to contain a yew looking remarkably like Cooke-Hurle's grandmother, so he said. We three hurled ourselves into it, bouncing back from the springy branches. We left the topiary looking bedraggled and the phrase 'Grandma bashing' came into popularity.

Soon the years were up. We were going to public school. We promised to keep up with each other wherever we might be, rather like passengers of an ocean liner. Some, like Cheyne, were destined to be what we could patently see they would be. Dunne was a cipher. Kipping would go into the Navy, he talked little else all day. Smithwick was deaf in one ear and could not be accepted for Pangbourne — he was crestfallen. Alas, we heard that he had died shortly afterwards. Goodison chaired the London Stock Exchange. Cooper would go into his father's business and go on to financial fame and fortune. But many shadowy figures remain.

Whatever happened to Jolly? During the war we spent our time playing with gunpowder, cordite and live ammunition which we found in abundance around us. At the start of one term Cox called us all together to announce that Jolly would be coming back two weeks late because he had met with an accident at home. He had been scraping out the cordite from a shell with a kitchen knife and the thing had exploded in his face. He had lost a thumb and part of two fingers of his left hand. Needless to say, when Jolly appeared with bandaged stumps, he was the most popular boy in the school. Cox's admonition was mild and he left us to draw our own conclusions, which we readily did. Poor Jolly, we learnt many years later, had died climbing a cliff face when he had slipped and fallen several hundred feet. Sad ending. He was only 18 years old.

Rowland Whitehead

24th June 2003