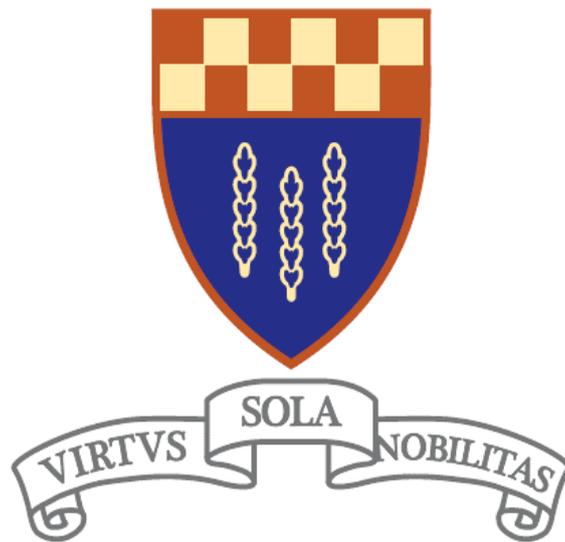


The Pavior



The Newsletter
of
The High Pavement Society
(founded 1989)

August 2021

Your Committee

The Committee Members listed below are always delighted to talk to you on any matter – particularly if you have a contribution to make to this publication!

President: Ken Kirk

Committee Chairman: Ken Kirk 07885 739981

Deputy Chairman: John Elliott 0115 9266475

Secretary: Colin Salsbury 01509 558764

Treasurer: Robin Taylor 0115 9609483

190 Kenrick Road, Mapperley, Nottingham NG3 6EX

(robinatnottm@aol.com)

Registrar: Alex Rae

Editor: Colin Salsbury 01509 558764

Archivist: Graham Wybrow 0115 9626249

Committee Members:

John Mason

Malcolm Pilkington 01623 491260

Noel Gubbins

Copy for *The Pavior* may be sent to:

Colin Salsbury: colin.salsbury@outlook.com

116 Leicester Road, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 2AQ

The HP Society website address is: www.highpavementsociety.org.uk



Faces to Remember

Jean Scott

Efficient Assistant School Secretary

1940s, 50s and 60s

COMMITTEE NOTICES



High Pavement Society prize awards 2021

As most members are aware, these annual awards are based on the academic performance of students at the High Pavement Sixth Form of Nottingham College (as it is now known). The cash awards are intended to assist the students in the next stage of their studies, usually at a Higher Education establishment.

This year due to Covid 19 there have been no A-level examinations on which this performance can be based. Instead A-level grades have, as last year's, been awarded according to the professional assessments of the tutorial staff. We learn that the following students are therefore eligible for our awards:

High Pavement Society Award for Excellence (best performing female student):

Emily-Grace Helliwell and Bryony Smith

Both of whom achieved the highest UCAS points score. Each will receive our award.

Bryony will study Communications and Media at University of Liverpool.

Emily-Grace will study English Literature and History, with a minor in Russian, at the University of Westminster. She also wishes to qualify as a *sign language* interpreter for legal work.

High Pavement Society Award for Excellence (best performing male student):

Thomas Menghini

Thomas will study Accounting and Finance at the University of Durham.

Stanley Middleton Literature Award (best achievement in English Literature):

Rachel Ollerenshaw

Rachel will study Biological Sciences at Nottingham Trent University

Ken Bateman Award for Engineering

(best student intending to pursue studies in Engineering or Associated Subjects):

Abdullah Al Kayal

Abdul is to study Computer Science at a British University yet to be selected.

In normal times the prizes would be presented by members of the Society Committee at a simple ceremony in the College but this year, as last, the cheques and certificates were forwarded by post. The Society offers its warm congratulations to all five award winners.

Education Fund –A New Appeal

The Awards to the students are made from the Society's *Education Fund* which is supported wholly by *donations* from members of the Society. The Prize Awards of the Society are among the activities of which we are most proud and their continuity is now under threat as the fund is becoming depleted and we are now missing the contributions of two of our previous most generous benefactors.

For this reason the Committee is opening an appeal to its members to offer donations to maintain the Fund and its work. Donations should be sent to the treasurer (details on page 2) and may be anonymous if preferred. A list will be compiled of named donors and I have offered to head the list with a suitable donation. I urge all Old Paviers to recall what the name High Pavement has meant in their lives and to act accordingly. Thank you.

Ken Kirk; President of the High Pavement Society

We need new blood on our Committee!

The Society's working Committee has now been reduced to eight members of whom two are unable to participate due to health problems. As a result we have been reduced to single figures at our only two committee meetings in 2021 with a mere *four* stalwarts present on August 4th. This means that proper discussion and ideas are not readily forthcoming as routine business puts heavy demands on those present.

We need new blood, especially from the now substantial number of members who attended the Gainsford Crescent establishment. The demands imposed are very reasonable. We meet for about 1½ hours at approximately monthly intervals, using dedicated accommodation in a board room at the offices of Page Kirk, 7 Gregory Boulevard Nottingham, thanks to the kind efforts of our President Ken Kirk. There is ample parking on site and in ordinary times coffee and biscuits sustain us during the meetings.

There must be someone out there able to help us in our work! Contact any of the existing Committee and we will welcome your help – *please!* **The Committee**

The Pub Lunch is back!

The institution we know as the pub-lunch, often at the centre of some of the Society's most enjoyable occasions, has been woefully absent from our lives for more than a year. The last one was held at the Harvester Inn in Wilford in March 2020. Even then the Covidian clouds were gathering and some regulars elected to stay away.

Now times have changed for the better and the Society is to hold its first gathering of the new era with our **Annual Reunion Luncheon** to be held at *The Poppy and Pint Inn*, West Bridgford, Nottingham (as it was in 2019) on **Wednesday September 29th 2021**.

The Luncheon will be preceded by the Society's **Annual General Meeting** for the membership. (Lounge accommodation will be provided for their guests while the meeting is in progress.) The proceedings are a legal requirement for all societies like ours and the formalities will be kept as brief as possible. A formal invitation will be sent to each member, allowing the necessary 21 days' notice. It will also include **full details of the Luncheon** which is to follow. Book the date in your diaries now!

Liaison with Paviers RFC

The Society has long maintained fraternal relations with this well-known local rugby club which is shortly to celebrate the centenary of its foundation. We have asked if the Society may provide an input to the celebrations and contact has been made to this end. Alex Rae and Graham Wybrow will represent the Society and Alex will negotiate with the Paviers RFC organisers over the nature of the Society's participation.

ooOoo

MICHAEL WORTH

We have been informed by Alan Clarke that our member **Michael Worth** died in Nottingham City Hospital on April 11th 2021, aged 78, while suffering from pneumonia with complications. Michael was a talented church organist at Keyworth Parish Church and had many interests including local history (as a member of the Thoroton Society), archaeology and railway lore.

We send our sincere condolences to his family on their sad loss.

FROM OUR READERS
FROM MIKE SPEAKE Part 2

[A second instalment of Mike Speake's fond memories of High Pavement and after.]

We now come to my Stan Middleton story. During the fifth year, I had become involved with The Co-operative Arts Theatre in Nottingham and having done some back-stage work, put myself forward to stage-manage the school play, 'Operation Lemnos', a re-working by Stan of a Greek play, *Philoctetes*. The title character was played by Bob Studholme, the school weight-lifter and shot-putter¹.

Anyway, during the dress rehearsal, Stan appeared in the wings, smoking a small cigar. There was of course much staff smoking in school in those days! (Remember how, if you knocked on the staff room door, when opened you could hardly see the other side of the room!) Well, in my capacity as Stage Manager I pointed out to Stan that smoking was not allowed back-stage, for safety. He left like a lamb! And I felt *very* important!

Stan also shared the school double-bass with me (Oh dear! perhaps it was *his*?). It lived on top of a cupboard in the music room store. (We *all* remember the Music Room that had to be vacated half-an-hour before lunch for tables to be set out and then smelt of food all afternoon?) Anyway, when you lifted down the bass, it would rattle because of all the cigarette packets and other detritus inside.

Now, at that period in my school career, folk-music was on the scene and three of us, Mel Cresswell, Craig Thorpe and I, formed *The Pavement Folk Three*. (Later to become Four when Geoff Ellis joined us on mandolin.) We performed in several school concerts and even one Speech Day when we played and sang in The Albert Hall (Nottingham, not London!) although, strangely, on that occasion I didn't play bass but strummed a banjo!

After we left school Mel and I had a period of performing in Social Clubs and Miners' Welfares (not very enjoyable), then Mel joined up with a couple of guys to become *The Rambling Boys*, which I joined in 1970 and we played in folk clubs all over the Midlands. Mel and I have remained close friends ever since and in fact, The Rambling Boys had their last paid gig just three years ago, 50 years since forming!

I mentioned my involvement with theatre and in fact I now realise that I took part in all three of the 'Junior Plays' that the English Department put on for second, third and fourth years. In the second year I was Peter Quince in the Tradesmen's play from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Come the time for Geoff Gay to enter as Bottom, he managed to kick part of the set, which began slowly to fall down. There I stood with my carpenter's hammer in my hand holding it up, while the producer, our English teacher whose name I forget, ran forward from the back of the hall, to save the day!

After Operation Lemnos, when I was in the sixth form, I was asked to construct a set for Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, which two of the staff members (Bill Gray was one) decided to put on as an 'extra'. I remember building a working dumb waiter from a large orange box and some rope. It might also have been for this production that I remember going

¹ I remember we once played a trick on him by inviting him to lift our 'heavy' tool-box at the side of the stage. He struggled and after giving up was not pleased when we pointed out that it was bolted to the floor for security!

into school in the Whitsun holiday, with Rowena, my girlfriend, to paint a set. I'm pretty sure I was entrusted with a key to the side door of the stage! Can't see that happening now!

Talking of girlfriends, in my last year, Bill Gray produced 'The Applecart' by Bernard Shaw, and I was cast as King Magnus. As usual there were to be girls from Manning for the female parts. However, in 'The Applecart' there is an interlude scene between Magnus and his mistress, which ends with them rolling around on the floor together, I felt it would be less embarrassing if I could persuade Bill to let Rowena (not a Manning girl) play the part. He agreed and it all worked out well. An added bonus was the excuse we had for disappearing up to my room to rehearse! The sad thing is, I never had any pictures from the production, although Graham Wybrow did manage to find a review of it from the 1966 School Magazine.

I haven't said much about learning at HP, but obviously it did me some good, especially the Physics teaching of Sam² Thrasher. After graduating in Electro-mechanical Engineering, I decided to teach physics and spent thirty-one years doing just that in Bristol.

Mike

[Mike also appears on p. 14 –Ed.]

ooOoo

FROM ALEX RAE

A Rugby (re) Union



On Monday 7th June 2021, several members of the HPGS First XV that won the **Notts Under-19 County Cup** in 1973 by beating Manor School, Mansfield 10-3, met for a relaxed catch-up in Nottingham. The venue was the stylish Watson Fothergill designed buildings, opposite the Castle Gateway, housing the *Castle Pub and Kitchen*.

(L to R we were):

Alan Franks,
Alex Rae,
Ian Reynolds,
Clive Swinn
Chris Eggleshaw.

(NB Chris has just published his first novel: '*Chance Meetings*'³. Will *another* Old Pavior now win the Booker Prize?)

Alex

ooOoo

² Actually Stan(ley, but even in the 1940s he was always referred to as Sam. -Ed

³ Available from the **Book Case bookshop, Lowdham**

FROM DAVID TAYLOR AND BRIAN WEST

[The photo of Kathleen Chawner in the 'Faces to Remember' of the May Edition prompted member David G Taylor to send in a few personal recollections, - checked by Brian West.]

Remembering Kathleen Chawner

Kathleen Chawner was the School Secretary for all the time I was at HPGS, from 1958 to 1965. I remember that she usually travelled from home to school each day in her own car. This was unusual at a time when fewer people had cars and very few women even considered driving. However, it was probably necessary because Kathleen lived in an isolated house on the sparsely populated B6386 between Oxton and Southwell. This house was a detached property of the type found in many city suburban roads and not a farmhouse. That area was only served by the 2-hourly Mansfield District 215 Bus service linking Southwell with Nottingham and this service would not have got her to school on time.

Kathleen had been a pupil at Stanley Road, later becoming the School Secretary there before moving with the school to Bestwood in 1955. As Form Monitor in Class 1A in 1958/9, I encountered her regularly. Each day the Form Master would take the Register before Assembly and fill in a small sheet of paper from a 'duplicate book' with the names of absentees etc. As Form Monitor I had to hand this slip in on my way to the School Hall and place it in a wire 'In-Tray' in the outer Office. Occasionally, I also had to report to the Office (responding to 'three bells') if there was an important message to be distributed, such as an announcement that the school had to close early due to bad weather (fog or snow).

David Taylor with Brian West.

Further notes by Graham Wybrow, Society Archivist

Kathleen Chawner was born in Nottingham in 1914 and sadly died in 1969 at the age of only 55. She was a student at HP and is listed in the Prize Distribution Programme of 25th November 1928 as a member of Wollaton House.

Also mentioned in the same Programme was an F S Tomlinson also of Wollaton House and two years her senior. This would have been Frank Stanley Tomlinson who was later to become Sir Stanley (Tommy) Tomlinson (1912-94), British High Commissioner to Ceylon (1966-69) and Deputy Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office in the early 1970s.

One of Kathleen's jobs as School Secretary would have been to maintain the Scrapbook of Press Cuttings relating to former pupils etc. This included, in June 1968, the notice of his Knighthood, which news she would have read with great interest, I'm sure.

G M Wybrow
(also Wollaton House, like David Taylor & Brian West)

ooOoo

FROM JOHN MASON

Keeping occupied during the Pandemic, my story.

At the time when the problems with Covid-19 first became serious I was one of the 'inmates' of Arnold Smith House, a residential home for independent living in Shepshed, near Loughborough, run by the local council. The council were pretty draconian in their interpretation of the government guidelines and the majority of the residents, me included, were inclined to baulk at the restrictions. However common sense prevailed and we decided to get on with life whatever the problems.

However, during this time, the council had taken the necessary step to conform with the new fire and safety regulations, introduced as a result of the Grenfell disaster, and we were to be fitted with new fire doors throughout the complex.

A side effect of this was a mountain of offcuts of new wood from the carpentry work carried out and I cajoled the site manager to let me have this, together with a considerable amount of wood that in long lengths was unusable by them but perfect for me in short lengths. I invested in a small electric saw table and converted this wood into a mountain of pieces of varying lengths, 2 inches wide and 1 inch thick.

In our communal garden, there are a number of mature trees, and with no previous experience I decided to make a seat around the trunk of one of these trees, for the use of all residents. [It was also intended as a memorial to a recently deceased resident.]



fitting it around the tree, and adjustment was necessary to bring all sections together.

However the finished article has been sprayed with wood preserver, and has met with the unanimous approval of my fellow residents whose average age is 76 or thereabouts. The youngest is 70 the oldest 91.

Statistically, it has taken approximately 150 metres of 2 x 1 inch wood (apparently mixing measurement systems is common in the building and woodworking trades) which necessitated some 1100 saw cuts, over 550 screws and about 200 man hours.

We will all enjoy many more hours using my assembled 'pile of sticks', which just proves what some of us 'wrinklies' can do when we set our minds to it.

John

ooOoo

FROM ROGER LOWE

Having received the February edition of *The Pavior* I was pleased to read an article from Mike Speake who was at HP in the same year as myself, starting in 1958. I have the same photo taken outside the Whitby YHA, next to the abbey.

The hostel there is still in operation and during a staycation in Yorkshire last year I took great delight in showing my partner the very spot where this photo was taken all those years ago. She obviously didn't recognise me as the 11-year-old, second from the left in the front row with white 'plimmos' and knee-length socks pulled up. I can recall some of the names:

Standing L-R: John (Bert) Dodd (teacher); Wayne Thorpe; Alan Sears; Roger Amos; Dave Allcock; (?); Tony Peach; Mike Speake; Trevor Henshaw; J P Smith (teacher); A C Smith; Alan Blyth; (?); Jack Barrett (teacher).

Second row: Melvy Cresswell; A B Smith; Phil Dickens; Peter King; (?); Graeme Stockdale; (?); Phil Carroll; Ian 'Ando' Anderson; Brian Stemberg.

Front row (seated): (?); (?); Myself (HP socks rolled up); (?); (?); (?); (?); Johnson; Andrew Dodd (son of Bert); (?); (?); Peter Jarvis. (John Kerslake was also on that trip but I can't recognise him on the photo. Apologies for any identity errors!)

Mike Speake probably won't recall but when we were in the third (or fourth?) forms he, another guy called Craig Thorpe, together with myself, took a couple of bike excursions, one to the Peak District and the other to Lymington on the South Coast, staying in Youth Hostels for several days. Life was so much safer all round in those days. I often wondered what became of Craig? I still have photos of the trips.

In later years Mike and I both played for a very strong school hockey XI, coached by Chris Joseph, with Mike in goal and myself at right back. I'm compiling a separate collection of my times and reminiscences at Bestwood and hope this article has interested Bestwoodites, with some of whom I retain contact to this day.

Regards Roger

ooOoo

FROM GRAHAM WYBROW

The Playing-Field Steps - Another Bestwood Memory

The terracing of the playing-fields at Gainsford Crescent gave rise to two embankments running across the playing-fields. There were two sets of concrete steps on each embankment (photo shows eastern steps on top embankment). The upper embankment was generally less steep than the lower embankment and was regularly mown along with the rest of the fields by Mr Collin's tractor-drawn mowing machine.

The steeper lower embankment was not so accessible and was left to wild grass and flowers. This dense wild vegetation had one practical use of providing a green 'safety net' for any visiting cricketers playing on the first-team pitch who tried too hard to save a boundary and went 'over the top'!

Graham



FROM TREVOR JONES

[Our globe-trotter continues with his colourful travels as he visits the great continent of the southern hemisphere. This took place prior to the visit to New Zealand reported in the February 2021 Pavior (all that 'bungy-jumping'?) but it is just as quirky and interesting.]

Three Months in Australia

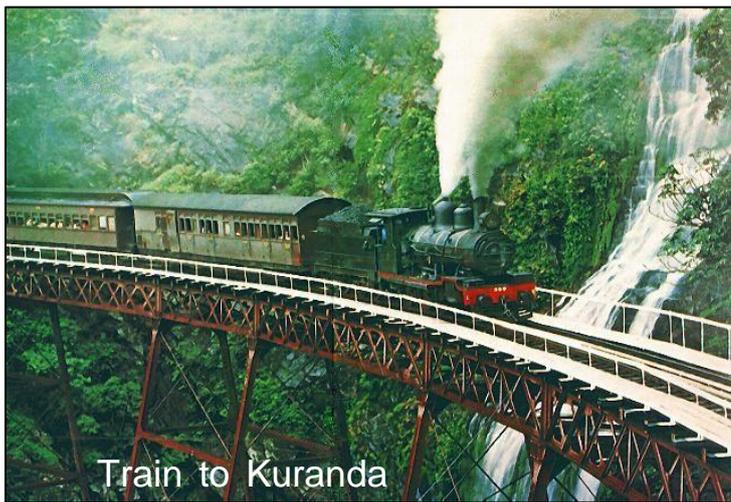
We flew into Perth and were met by one of my second cousins and his family (who I'd never previously met) with whom we had arranged to stay for a few days.

From there we headed into the nearby seaport of Fremantle which had been given a multi-million dollar makeover in honour of Australia's hosting of the Americas Cup yacht race (having beaten the USA in the previous series). The makeover had worked very well with the effect of going back in time because much of the town was specially restored to resemble its appearance a century or so earlier.

Fremantle was also my one and only time of being part of a *juggling* act! One evening we were watching a man tie a loose tightrope between two lampposts and then give an amazing performance of acrobatics. When he'd finished on the rope, he asked for a volunteer from the crowd - and my girlfriend, pushing me forward, said that I'd be happy to help! I finished up balancing on his shoulders whilst he was riding a unicycle and juggling with three machetes! I definitely needed a drink after that experience and sat down in a bar for an hour with the juggler—a very interesting young man.

From Perth, we flew to Sydney (we had no desire to take the 4/5 *day* bus trip across country) and then flew northwards up to Cairns in Queensland.

Whilst in sub-tropical Queensland we took a trip on a steam train from the humid coast, up the mountains into the rainforests, to a small town called Kuranda.



It was there, in Kuranda during a tropical rainstorm, that I saw the *ultimate* example of the Japanese tourists' craze for taking thousands of photographs when one would have done. We were sitting having a coffee when a bus full of Japanese tourists pulled up. Undaunted by the weather, they all streamed off the bus and spread out in all directions, taking photos, before all scrambling back on the bus wet through!

All, that is, *except* one young couple who were obviously on a mission. They both wore very long rain coats and the young man was arranging the girl to stand by a flowering bush. When he was satisfied, he walked back about 10 yards and looked at her. He then said something in Japanese and, as if it was rehearsed, she threw off her raincoat and stood there in a very flimsy dress. Meanwhile he undid *his* coat and produced a camera on a tripod.

As she posed in different ways, he took lots of photos but after each click of his camera she and her dress, were getting more and more dishevelled to the point where her underwear was distinctly on show! The young man, realising at this point that he now had an audience of many people, decided it was perhaps time for them to get back on the bus.

One great way to get around Australia is to buy a prepaid Greyhound bus pass, whereby you ring up and book seats from where you are to where you want to go next. This we did from Cairns southwards back to Sydney stopping off at various ports of call on the way.

We called at the resort of Mission Beach, then Townsville, and for Xmas we stopped at Airlie Beach. Airlie Beach was the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and the offshore

Whitsunday Islands. We first made a day trip to the Barrier Reef (which definitely had to be seen to be believed) and then for 5 days and 4 nights, starting out on Xmas Eve, we had a trip around the Whitsundays (islands) on a 60ft yacht, the *Thekla*.

For this we were based on Hook Island, one of the Whitsundays, where we camped on the beach every night and visited a different island every day. The highlight for me was Whitehaven Beach, which is reputedly one of the most beautiful, pristine

beaches in the world and certainly the best beach I've ever visited. The sand was incredibly white lapped by turquoise blue water, with hundreds of small coloured fish swimming between your legs as you stood there - it was a stunning experience.

From there we travelled much further south, beyond Brisbane, to Byron Bay. Here we spent New Year's Eve with a couple we'd met earlier when we were in Bali. (They lived on a farm next door to one of Paul 'Crocodile Dundee' Hogan's places). We then moved on to various other towns and resorts until we ended up in Newcastle NSW.

From Newcastle we were able to visit the Hunter Valley wine country and enjoyed a wine tasting tour. To say we were the worse for wear at the end of it is an understatement! For example, we went into their gift shop and saw two fantastic T-shirts for sale. We couldn't decide which one to buy - so we bought both. Huh! It was only when we had sobered up the next day that we realised that the two T shirts were exactly the same - one design was the front - and one was the back!



Darling Harbour – a borrowed photo

We finished our Greyhound coach trip back in Sydney, just in time for Australia Day, which we spent in and around the city's delightful Darling Harbour with its entertainments and waterside dining. The highlight of that evening was listening to an Aborigine gentleman playing a *didgeridoo* whilst sitting on a barge floating in the middle of the harbour. The sound was quite

haunting. It echoed all around us—a moment to treasure.

A week later, having tasted many delights of Australia, our visa expired. You can be fined if you stayed a day over, so onwards we went. Next stop was New Zealand! **Trevor**

FROM GRAHAM WYBROW

Book by Harry Davies

Despite his nickname, Harry ‘Taff’ Davies was born in Todmorden, Yorkshire. He left his post as Head of High Pavement School in 1963 after 16 years to take up the post of Director of the Institute of Education at Nottingham University, where (as Professor Davies) he stayed until his retirement in 1972. He died in 1983.

In 1965 while at Nottingham University, he published a book entitled *Culture and the Grammar School*. I have just learned that this book has recently (2018) been reprinted. I think it is significant that the book should be reprinted in paperback form after so many years and I take this as an indication of the general high standing and enduring academic value of this work. I don’t know if the book explicitly mentions High Pavement but I hope to obtain a copy soon and investigate further. Regrettably the price is fearsome, but a reminder to us ‘oldies’ of the current price of ‘university level’ books.

The publishers describe the book as follows:

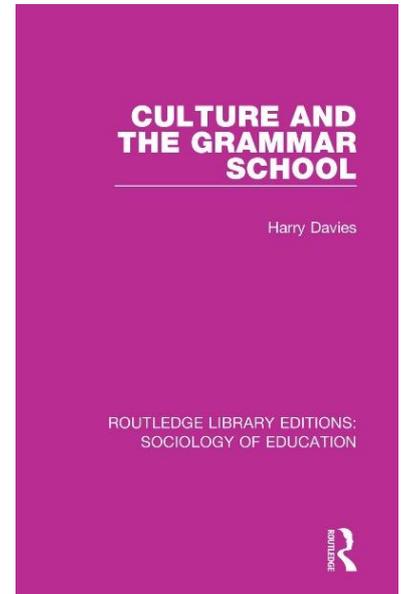
‘Culture and the Grammar School’, by Harry Davies, 1 ed, Copyright Year 1965, ISBN 9781138221154, 192 Pages, Published 25 Sep 2018 by Routledge. Paperback £29.99, Hardback £89.99, eBook £26.99 (6-months e-rental £15).

This book, first published in 1965, discusses the nature of the grammar school, its curriculum and teaching methods, comparisons with sixth form education, and the change in its organisation and attitudes during a time of rapid social change in 1960s Britain. This title will be of interest to students of history, sociology and education.

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Graham Wybrow

Railway Ramblings FROM JOHN BARLOW

In 1996 I was undergoing a mid-life crisis, with a combination of personal and professional problems threatening my mental health. I was working in a small *tannery* in Somerset, job title *Technical Manager* but in effect acting as the ‘filling in a sandwich’ between the workforce and the rather difficult owners. My refuge was to spend evenings in the wonderful signal box at Yeovil Pen Mill, courtesy of my good friend Alan, one of the three resident signallers. He too had serious concerns and was happy to have company in his work.

Let me digress to tell you a little about Pen Mill signal box. It was, and still is, a time-capsule isolated from the modern world, with manually operated semaphore signals and points and wonderful machines to issue brass tokens for safe onward passage of trains (along single tracks with traffic in both directions). It is on the ex-GWR line from Castle Cary to Weymouth, with a pretty infrequent service and hence not too much pressure on the signaller. (The line had escaped closure due to its availability as an alternative route when the Western main line, between Exeter and Taunton, is closed by flooding.)

I began to help out by setting the points and clearing the signals, under close supervision of course. Over the course of a few weeks, my subconscious mind must have told me that this lifestyle was infinitely superior to my present one and that I had better do something about it.

When Alan mentioned that there was a vacancy for a signaller at Chard Junction, slightly further west and on the Waterloo-Exeter line, without thinking I asked him to recommend me to his manager. Fortunately for me, the two applicants already working for Railtrack had failed the aptitude test so the position was still open. I attended an interview with the signalling manager, having told a little white lie to get time off at the tannery, and was ‘over the moon’ to be given a chance to take the aptitude test (and the job, if I passed).

At the end of the interview, I was asked if I had any further questions and, on my saying ‘No’, the manager asked if I would like to find out what the wage would be! I really didn’t care, I just wanted the job. Remuneration was slightly less than half of my tannery salary, even allowing for overtime and Sunday working, but it was slightly more than the absolute minimum I needed to survive. After a couple of weeks I was invited to take the aptitude test in London, being given a travel warrant (and again telling a fib to get time off from the tannery). The test turned out to be a keyboard simulation, involving shunting ‘trains’ into sidings, followed by counting red and green lights over quite a long period. Fortunately I got through and hence all was set for the start of my Railtrack career.

May 31st 1997 was the date I joined Railtrack. My six week training course was held at Waterloo station, in a suite of rooms containing a miniature signal frame and all the associated bells. The supervisor would set the situation, with a normal procession of trains being offered, but, as the course progressed, he would introduce emergency situations and assess our reactions. We would suddenly get a bell code indicating a runaway train, or trespassers on the line, or a train passing a signal at danger. We would have to show our ability in dealing with these emergencies in real time – very stressful even though everything was make believe.

Eventually the course finished, all six students passed and went to take up their signalling positions. In my case, I went to Chard Junction and was placed under the tutelage of John, a veteran signaller of over 30 years’ experience. He showed me the ropes and I was soon confident in running the ‘box’. After about 3 weeks, I informed my manager that I

considered myself ready to be assessed and he came round to check me out. The other John left and I had to run the box by myself for two to three hours, with my manager present to see how I coped. He asked many questions (for example: *What would you do if the level crossing gates failed, both when open and when closed to the railway?*) and then announced that he was confident and left me on my own! Although the signal box was small and the service was quite infrequent, it was a daunting prospect to be suddenly in control. Trains would thunder past at 85 mph and it was my responsibility to give them safe passage.

On my first or second shift, a serious problem arose. It was harvest time and I was receiving frequent requests from the local farmer to use his gated crossing over the lines. Provided that no trains were in the neighbourhood, my reply was always ‘ Yes, farmer, it is safe for you to cross the line, but phone back when you have crossed and secured the gates’.

This went on for most of the morning, until eventually I *didn't* receive his assurance that he was safely over. I had a train approaching, so what to do? My mentor had said that this particular farmer occasionally forgot to ring back, but I decided that the risk was too high. I therefore used my signals to bring the train to a halt outside the box and saw the driver. I instructed him to proceed at 5 mph to the crossing, being aware that the tractor and trailer may be appearing. Off he went at 5 mph. Within a minute I heard the train blast its horn. The tractor was about to cross right in front of it, and this warning saved the day. A train hitting the vehicle at 85 mph, which could have happened without my actions, would have been disastrous.

Chard Junction was a lovely place to work, but it was 30 miles from home and after 6 months, a vacancy was advertised at Templecombe. For me, this had several advantages: much closer to home, a grade higher on the pay scale, and working on a station instead of a remote signal box with no-one to see.

At Templecombe the signaller also sold tickets, via an arrangement with South West Trains, ensuring yet more social contact and therefore was a more interesting post. I thought that the Templecombe job would attract many applicants and that my chances, as a new entrant, would be small. Imagine my delight on finding that nobody else had applied and that the position was mine! I therefore transferred to Templecombe in May 1998.



John

(To be continued)

ooOoo

FROM MIKE SPEAKE

My interest in railways was not apparent during my time at H.P. According to an earlier article I was more into buses, although I don't remember that. However, my friend Mel Cresswell's enthusiasm led me to attempt several different model railway projects and then, in 2002, after retiring, I decided I would like to be a *Travelling Ticket Inspector* on the West

Somerset Railway. When I went to the ‘New Volunteers Recruitment Day’, my wife Sue came with me for company and ended up being recruited into the on-train buffet staff so, after we ‘passed out’ we would travel down to Bishop’s Lydeard together and I would spend the day checking tickets, while she served tea and sandwiches!

The job of TTI involves more than checking tickets. On the WSR there are several stations without booking offices, so I also had to sell tickets, using an ex-bus conductor’s Wayfarer Ticket Machine. (David Taylor would have been proud of me!)

In addition to revenue protection, at the beginning of the day, I would be checking the toilets, unlocking doors, making sure the train was clean, filling up the water tanks for toilets and buffet, then once we were running I assisted the guard, checking doors were shut properly before we left the stations, and assisting passengers with pushchairs, wheelchairs etc. Of course, in the event of an emergency, I would have been even more important as guard’s



helper. At the end of the day there was cash to pay in, windows to close (a lot of them!) and doors to lock. It was great fun, chatting to passengers, having a joke with them and generally adding to their enjoyment. It was tiring work—it was generally accepted that one walked about five miles in the course of the day. At each station I would watch to see where folk were getting on — invariably the opposite end of the train to where I was—taking note of what they were wearing, so I could find them and check, or sell, their tickets.

The WSR runs to Minehead, where there is a Butlin’s Holiday Camp and in the past most of the ‘campers’ would arrive by train. One year, after the Railway had regained a main-line connection, one of the Main-Line TOCs (train operating companies) ran the ‘Butlins Express’ from Minehead to Bristol Temple Meads and back. I worked this

train once and will always remember standing on Temple Meads platform in my uniform, feeling very important!

Mike

(To be continued)

ooOoo

OUR END PIECE
FROM TOMMY GEE

[When Tommy and Anne retired they went to live in Abbey Cottage on a smallholding near Wingfield in Suffolk. Later, after Anne died, Tommy arranged for her remains to be interred in the grove of Abbey Wood which he had planted nearby. Later in life Tommy moved away from Abbey Cottage and it passed into the ownership of his offspring so Tommy decided to have Anne’s remains removed from the site and for her to be cremated. The article overleaf is his warm and affectionate record of a most unusual sequence of events.]

Our Moving Farewell

Anne died 10 years ago at midnight in Norwich and Norfolk University Hospital, when life support was removed in accordance with the Liverpool protocol and after family prayers round her bedside conducted by the duty volunteer hospital chaplain. Afterwards I asked that good lady whether we might bury her in Abbey Wood, near my home at Abbey Cottage.

Off the cuff she did not know but went off to consult her office computer. She returned, to say that it *was* possible, subject to one condition—that the grave should not be within 50 metres of a water course (which was not a problem). I also asked if she might be willing to conduct a committal service, which she kindly agreed to do, though she lived fifty miles away.

Now, the NNUH will only hand over the body to an *undertaker*, so Mr Booty of Laxfield brought her home. On arrival she was so deep frozen that when I kissed her a final good bye, my lips stuck to hers! Mr B lent us an undertaker's trolley, boards, and ropes for our family DIY funeral. (I thought brass handles were unnecessary but they *would* have been useful in moving Anne on to the planks over her grave.)

The Wingfield church team agreed to ring their tenor bell at 1.00 pm. The grandchildren lowered her perilously on three ropes, as one by one the supporting planks were taken away, down into the 6 foot deep grave dug by my neighbour Allen Pretty, in the middle of Abbey Wood. (My grandson aged 7, from Beijing, told me he had never done anything like this before.) I was relying on my Third World experience where such family burials are normal and keep the spirits of the dead in the family compound rather than a communal graveyard. In the event our curate attended, rather than the hospital chaplain, and said prayers for Anne.

Abbey Cottage then passed to my three children but before they sold it we agreed that Anne should be exhumed and buried elsewhere. In the event we elected for a cremation.

Allen Pretty was willing to do the excavating but I discovered that under Victorian legislation, this required an exhumation certificate from the Ministry of Justice and would take 30 days and require completion of a very lengthy form, supported by appropriate consents. The form mentioned that there were some 1000 exhumations annually, mostly by the police, I believe, and are unusual on private land, where an undertaker competent in exhumations is required. No list of such persons was available, but Mr Booty located someone who had done an exhumation 3½ years ago and was willing to help out with the digger. It was a two day operation, removing the tons of wet blue clay over the plywood coffin 6 feet down. After a full day's digging a thin line of wood was detected. Nothing but a few bones were anticipated.

Next morning, with the Public Health Inspector present, the team proceeded, like so many Egyptian archaeologists, cautiously to remove the clay from around the intact plywood, and there was dear Anne, still dressed in her Harleston Choral Society dress, with her conductor's copy of Handel's Messiah, her baton, and a small bouquet of rosemary for remembrance. Mr Booty placed her coffin whole into the next sized plywood coffin, rather like a Russian doll, and she was taken away to be cooked to ashes at the Crematorium in Ipswich, whence she came home in three green cardboard boxes rather than the more usual one (because of the extra coffin's wood ash). This allowed us one box for each sibling. So, in due course, the Rev Eleanor Goodison, at short notice, committed her ashes to a small grave in Wingfield churchyard.

All concerned co-operated and helped in this very unusual sequence of events but I do often wonder what Anne made of it all.

Tommy