

OLD MAIDSTONIAN SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 1977

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OLIM MEMINISSE JUVABIT

On an evening in July last year a large number of "exceedingly intellectual" ladies and gentlemen, past and present members of the Staff and their wives, gathered at the School to hear S.W. Johnson, a self-confessed "unregenerate, divisive, reactionary influence on all educational affairs", pay tribute to Bob Rylands. "Bob", said SWJ, "closely resembles my photofit picture of the school master, a real school master as opposed to the parka-jacketed, hairy monsters who sometimes masquerade as such. I mean a man who values scholarship and is dedicated to the liquidation of ignorance... unfashionably pedantic... extremely unlikely to condone four letter word graffiti if they are incorrectly spelt... a man who regards parents as at best a necessary evil and, normally, the very last people who ought to have children... unique... a man who stamps his image on the scene". SWJ went on to recall the golden time of the 50's... "when boys actually wore school caps... when the key words of today, involvement, relevance, participation and dialogue, either meant something different or were mercifully locked away in American education journals... a time when guitars were musical instruments and not fertility symbols... an age when fairies were something you had at the bottom of your garden and queer was an adjective neutral in tone..." Even in those blessed days, said SWJ, "Bob had been here an age".

With the Age of RRR now formally at an end, at least as far as the School is concerned, the most appropriate time for us Old Maidstonians to pay our tribute to him will be the occasion of our Annual Supper on 25th March, when he takes over as President of the Society. But now is the moment to place some few thoughts about Bob on the Society's official record. Though I write as President of the Society I can, on such a subject, speak only for myself. And I want to say my 'thank you' to Bob by acknowledging my debt to him. What Bob gave to me was the most precious gift that any human being can give to another - the encouragement to think for myself. Thus, and though it was maybe not apparent while I was serving my time at M.G.S., Bob opened in me doors that would otherwise have remained unopened, probably forever.

Yes, Bob was a "real" schoolmaster. And he succeeded where some others failed because he is not and never was an intellectual snob. Yes; he does value scholarship. But he was always more concerned with the task of trying to liberate the whole man trapped within the boy. In my travels I have met and talked with and come to know quite well many of the powerful people whose decisions influence world events. But I have not met another who has given as much of himself as Bob Rylands to the job of helping others to realise at least some of their potential as human beings.

To have known Bob is to enjoy a very special advantage in life. And if they tax that I for one will not be able to pay the bill! I do not know for sure but I suspect that some part of Bob is disillusioned because the standards he set, and the values he tried to implant, are almost everywhere being rejected. But he should be comforted, too. His influence on the lives of many of us has been more profound than he and perhaps even we ourselves will ever know.

I could not hope and would not dare to compete with Bob's unfailing ability to find the appropriate quotation for each and every occasion. But in the name of all Old Maidstonians who have enjoyed the privilege of having Bob as a mentor and friend I offer to him the words of Desdemonia: "My life and education both do learn me how to respect you".

So far as our ANNUAL SUPPER is concerned - the Committee is planning to make it a very special occasion in Bob's honour. There will, of course, be a presentation to Bob but we think he will value a big turn out by Old Boys as much and perhaps more than a cheque or gift. Please do your best to come - for Bob. At the end of this Newsletter there is an order form for tickets and a slip for those wishing to send a contribution, as soon as possible please, towards the presentation. The Committee suggests that if you are really unable to come you 'fine' yourself by doubling the contribution you would have sent if you were coming!

After some agonies Bob and Jennifer are now happily settled into their new home. Their address is: FORD COTTAGE, KEMPTON, LYDBURY NORTH, SALOP, SY7 0JG. Telephone: LITTLE BRAMPTON (058 - 87) 440. Bob has asked us to let you all know that "any O.M. who cares to drop in will be very welcome". He adds that O.M.'s who announce themselves will be particularly welcome since, he says, he grows "rustically forgetful".

COMING EVENTS

- January 28th: AGM, 7.45p.m. at the usual hostelry - The Market House.
- March 12th: Parents' Association Dance. (Please note the change of date).
- March 18-19th: Spring Play, "Tom Sawyer", 7.30p.m.
- March 25th: O.M. Supper - including presentation to Bob Rylands.
- March 30th: Annual rugby and soccer matches against the School.
Mr. D. Diamond at the school will be pleased to hear from anyone who wants to play in either match. He hopes to raise a 2nd rugby XV this year - so please do get in touch if you can play.
As in previous years recently there will be an informal evening get-together at Maidstone R.F.C. after the matches.
- May 18th: Thanksgiving Service in All Saints' Church. (This is the usual end-of-year service brought forward to make it a Royal Jubilee Service and to involve 'A' Level candidates).
- May 25th: Sports Day.
- June 2nd: Cricket Match: Parents v Staff.
- June 14th: " " Parents v School.
- July 10th: School Fete.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Unless the Government decides to extend the Christmas and New Year holiday period by bringing it forward to August, a ploy it is rumoured in some quarters that might be used to cover the probability that Great Britain Limited will have two million unemployed by the end of the year, we assume there will be some Autumn and Winter dates of interest to O.M.s - but as yet we are not aware of them.

On the general subject of material (or rather the lack of it) for inclusion in the Newsletter we have the following S.O.S. from our new Chief Correspondent and scrap paper collector, Mr. Newcombe:

"I know well how much of the information Bob Rylands acquired from letters he received from the many O.M.s who regarded him as a friend, and I can't hope, as yet, to have such a wide circle of correspondents. But it would be a shame if the Newsletter foundered for lack of material - so please let me know anything which happens to you, or to any other O.M.s you may know about, so that we can keep up the high standards Bob set. I'd like a big flood of letters now so that the next issue can make up for the inevitable thinness of this one".

The newsletter can only be as interesting - or as dull - as O.M.s make it by their contributions - so please do let us have a flow of worthy and witty tit-bits.

RECENT NEWS OF SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

Way back in July there was an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Society at which it was proposed and agreed that on behalf of the Society the President should address a note to the Divisional Education Officer on the subject of "the proposals for reorganising secondary education along fully comprehensive lines"; the official euphemism for killing off the remaining Grammar Schools.

The President opened his note with three general observations:

The first voiced the Society's concern at what was already happening - "the progressive lowering of education standards across the board". And it was pointed out that evidence to support this contention was accumulating on four fronts: from official and semi-official reports and investigations, or those of them which local and national authorities had 'cleared' for publication; from headmasters, headmistresses and teachers; from employers; and from the direct experience of parents with children of their own. On the last point the President's note suggested it was ridiculous for 'experts' of the stature of Cyril Poster to claim there was "no yardstick" for measuring standards. "Are we not supposed to recognise that the language many of our 15 and 16 year-olds speak is not English? Are we to ignore the evidence we see and hear for ourselves, at shop counters and elsewhere, that many 15 and 16 year-olds cannot cope with simple arithmetic?"

The second observation noted "our" belief that there was already "too much experimentation to satisfy political and ideological whims - and not enough education".

The third observation stated "our" opinion that education authorities, local and national, would be "unwise, even foolish" to ignore the public mood and the growing resentment to change by imposition from above. Without meaning to imply a threat, (well, not too much of one, anyway), the President's note later pointed to what the Society saw as the two options: change through evolution by consent and participation, or, change by imposition and confrontation.

Under the heading of "Comments on the specific proposals" the President's note went on to say: "We are aware that for reasons of political expediency some other interested and caring groups in this debate have taken the view that they should indicate to you their willingness to settle, if they must, for what appears to them to be the least harmful of the present proposals. While such an approach has the dubious merit of being pragmatic, we do not believe that anything of real value will be achieved by blurring and fudging the issue in this way. Yes, of course, we share the general hope that this government or any future government can be prevailed upon, in time, to adopt a less rigid, less dogmatic and less dictatorial approach to this problem. But we do not believe we should play politics with the future of our children".

It was the Society's view, the President's note stated, that the search for an alternative approach to reorganisation should begin with a fundamental question: "what is, or what should be, the objective of reorganisation or change?" The objective of change, the President said, "must be improvement, which we define as moving as far and as fast as possible in the direction of providing increased and equal opportunity for all children. We are thus refusing to impale ourselves on the hook marked 'fully comprehensive' because we think the label is a cliché phrase with no great depth of meaning as far as education and its real objectives are concerned. In summary: we do not favour and would not support the adoption of any of the specific proposals now under discussion because we do not believe they are the best suited to the stated, and hopefully agreed, objective of change".

In his speech in praise of Bob Rylands, S.W. Johnson offered the opinion, in all truth and honesty, he said, "that this elegant fiction of guided parental choice strikes me as something rather short of the approved orthodoxy and I rather fear that Uncle Fred (Mulley) will be after you before very long..." Well Uncle Fred has been moved on. And we are hoping for more understanding from Auntie Shirley.

NEWS OF OLD MAIDSTONIANS

It is with deep regret that we report the deaths of CHRISTOPHER LODGE (1966) and SIMON ENGLISH (1968).

JOHN CHISLETT (1939) has been appointed Assistant General Manager, for the East Anglia Region of Initial Services. He is based on Cambridge.

GARY CLEGG (late 60's and/or early 70's) is enjoying life as a milkman on the Madginford Estate delivery area. (How about a milkman's tale for the next Newsletter, Gary?)

CHRISTOPHER DAVIES (1973) gained a Class II in his finals at Oxford and is now doing a D.Phil. in Vertebrate Palaeontology.

ROGER DEPLEDGE (1963) is teaching Modern Languages at St. Peter's School, York.

PETER GIBBONS (1973) has left Queen Mary College with an upper second class and is now joining the Metropolitan Police. (We read recently they needed some replacements).

PETER GOW (1973) very narrowly missed a "first" at Oxford. On his results he was offered a Major State Studentship but he declined the offer because he had already accepted a post in London with Guinness. At present he's handling trade-mark correspondence. He speaks warmly of the social life the firm can offer. He's taken up squash (the ball game we presume) badminton and shooting. He swears it is good for you.

IAN HALE (1976) has started a course at Jesus College, Oxford, after four months Community Service - "running a doss-house", he says. He hopes to carry on doing similar voluntary work but next time with children.

RICHARD HONNER (1967) left Covent Garden in 1972 where he had been in charge of opera planning to join the staff of the Australian Opera in Sydney as Co-ordinator of Opera Planning. He was subsequently transferred to the Music Staff and is returning to the U.K. in March, this year. He has recently been in contact with a contemporary, Dr. Alex Bartle who is in practise, we understand, in Melbourne.

ANDREW KNIGHT (1971) played in the final of the U.A.U. Rugby Tournament at Twickenham. His team, U.W.I.S.T. beat Swansea University.

ANDREW LARMAN (1971) has enrolled with the Law Society with a view to qualifying as a solicitor.

MALCOLM MacCALLUM (1963) has left King's College Cambridge to take up a Lecturership at Queen Mary College, London.

BRADLEY MANUELL (1953) is Deputy Legal Officer and Prosecutor to the City of Canterbury. His brother, TONY, (1958) works as a Chemical Engineer in Broadstairs.

MICHAEL MAYNARD (1951) is a Sales Manager for the Granada Group.

BERNARD MEE (1960) is living in Westerham. He is an Accountant with the British Gas Corporation, has been married for 6½ years and has two children, a boy and a girl.

JEFFREY PRATT (1966) was recently appointed Lecturer in Social Anthropology at Sussex University. In August he was married to Assuntina Angeli.

CHRIS QUIRK (1964) is still teaching English at Oldborough Manor School. He recently married Miss Maggie Degan, another member of the Department. JEREMY SMITH (1968) and TREVOR HAYES (1968) also teach English at the school.

DAVID SAYER (who, when he was bowling a yard faster than Fred Ridgeway, once made it impossible for the present President to sit down for a couple of hours) is an Insurance Broker and has set up his own business in Lenham.

PETER SMITH (1972) took First Class Honours at Oxford and is now working with the Royal Insurance at Cheltenham.

PETER WADDELL (1962) has left Bristol Grammar School and is now Head of Modern Languages at Hove Grammar School, a place of 600 boys which is due to "evolve" into a co-educational Comprehensive of 1200. At Bristol Peter commanded the CCF and ran a most successful Swimming Club which produced the ASA National Junior Champions in 1974 and a number of regional champions. In March last year he married Margaret, a physiotherapist. Peter's younger brother, ROGER, (1960) is the manager of a garage in Broadstairs. He is married with two boys and a girl - the first girl to be born in the family for three generations.

S.J. WAKEFIELD (1972) is now based at the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Leeds. In May he took part in an Oceanographic Research Cruise from Peru to Panama collecting samples on the way for his Ph.D thesis.

GORDON WESTON (1945) who is Head of the Chemistry Department at Bradford University visited the School in November to talk to Sixth-formers about Sandwich Courses.

..... more news of more O.M.s would be much appreciated!

UNIVERSITY RESULTS

The following list is incomplete and we apologise for the omissions. It seems that somebody did not realise that Mr. Newcombe had taken over the job from Bob Rylands of gathering or receiving the appropriate information.

J.E. ORRIN : First Class in Fuel and Combustion Science, Leeds University.
 P. HERBERT : II.1 in Combined English/Philosophy course, Birmingham University.
 P.G. CATER : Class II in English Language and Literature, New Coll., Oxford.
 M.J. CROUCHER : B.Sc degree in Science, University College, London.
 C.A. BAUGHAN : II.1, Medical Sciences Tripos Part Ia, Downing Coll. Cambridge.
 D.J. BENSON : Class II, Mathematical Tripos Part Ib, Trinity Coll., Cambridge.
 S.A. BROATCH : Class II.1, Natural Sci. Tripos Part II (Physics) Churchill Coll, C.
 J.G. BROWNLESS : II.2, Medical Sciences Tripos Part Ia, Fitzwilliam Coll, C.
 A.M. CRIPPS : II.2, Natural Sci. Tripos Part Ib, Pembroke Coll. Cambridge.
 J.H. DUNCAN : II.1, English Part I, King's College, Cambridge.
 P.J. FREUNDLICH : II.2, Engineering Tripos Part I, Downing College, Cambridge.
 S.S. FURNISS : II.1, Natural Sci. Tripos Part II (Pathology) Downing Coll. C.
 A.G. HARVEY : II.1, Natural Sci. Tripos Part Ib, Magdalene College, Cambridge.
 S.C. KING : II.2, Natural Sci. Tripos Part Ib, Selwyn College, Cambridge.
 N.P. MENDES : II.1, Modern & Medieval Lang. Tripos Part II, Selwyn Coll. C.
 M.C. RUGMAN : II.2 (French) and II.1 (German) Mod. Lang. Tripos Part I, Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

STAFF NOTES

Mr. S.R.B. YATES is now living in the Principality of Andorra. His address is LA MASSENA, ANDORRA, FRANCE. He recommends the addition of "France" to the address as there is also a Spanish Post Office in Andorra. However, the postman appears to be illiterate, (probably went to a comprehensive school), which makes delivery of letters a bit chancy.

Mr. and Mrs D.T. GIBBS have an addition to their family - a son. Dr. and Mrs A.W. WEBB produced a daughter last summer. Our congratulations to both.

ARCHIVES

Mr. B. Langston has been asked to look after the School's archives. If any O.M. has any interesting material, old photographs, documents etc. connected with the School and which he no longer wishes to keep for himself, will you please be kind enough to send them on to Mr. Langston at the School. Even your old school cap may be of historic value by this time.

Finally and in conclusion, as they say, the Committee expresses its best wishes to NORMAN NEWCOMBE. Taking over from Bob Rylands is no easy task. Sincerely we wish him good luck!