

## Ralph Smith - *Memories*

The photo of the laboratory captioned 1940 was probably taken well before that date. There was no gas lighting or tiered seating in 1940, the school prospectus of that time showed electric lighting with white porcelain shades - in fact there was no lighting - the shades were hung from the beams by string and removed after the photo was taken.

In the forties the assistant matron was a Miss Pearl who received a chaste kiss from Brazier (a prefect) when he left to join the Fleet Air Arm never to return.

I seem to recall the headmasters secretary as a Miss Barratt who was in the habit of telling all parents that the young women employed to wait table in the dining room were all of a very good class! That did not stop us referring to them, as the skivvies!

One of the more attractive 'skivvies' was observed to be in great distress after the German attack on North Weald on the afternoon of 29th October 1940. Story was that she was engaged to a sergeant pilot who was killed by a bomb just as his Hurricane took off. Two other planes in his flight also crashed but the pilots escaped.

Headmaster Dames had a wounded pilot (an old boy?) staying with him about that time - we never heard his story.

In the autumn of 1940 we started to see RAF Havoc nightfighters every morning after breakfast as they returned from intruder raids on French aerodromes - they were Douglas aircraft converted to RAF use and fitted with 16 machine guns! I think they were based at Stansted.

The tower of St. John's Church was used as a look out for enemy parachutists. In the summer of that year, a master named Smith, reputedly a "conchie," and Robinson were there on most evenings at dusk.

In my previous messages I mentioned a senior boy in 1941 named Cox, he may even have been headboy for a time. About 1963 I met a man who was in the junior school during the war - think his name was Taplow or Taplin and he worked for Associated Lead Manufacturers. He told me

that Cox became a distinguished criminal even graduating from Dartmoor University - does anyone know about him.

Elphick who was in my class, a good fast bowler, taught at the school after the war.

1940 Photograph - centre

Row 2 -

Next to Dames #43 is 'Papa' Cairns from Clackmannanshire - teacher of French and English and an excellent man on Chaucer. Strange but worldly character who possessed one of the banned records of Edward VIII's abdication speech! Much of his teaching came by way of 'asides' which he cast out and from his recommended reading which was somewhat 'avant garde' for some parents! Caned a whole fifth form for slacking - prefects, sub-prefects - the lot! He died shortly after he returned to Scotland.

# 44 Rev. White, vicar of Potter Street. Reputed to be a former lumberjack in Canada with a contempt for Americans! Officially teacher of religious instruction and some history. Vigorous character who treated the church elders with derision - the Bishop of Barking especially. Certainly very "politically incorrect" by present day standards! Seems we need men like him today!

#45 New master named Smith reputed to be a 'conchie' but who's to know?

#46 Elphick - a prefect - a study in nonchalance and a friend of Brazier.

Row 3

#76 Rolstone I believe. His family were bakers at Woodford and his mother a lady of ample proportions a remarkable County tennis player.

Barham

who lives in Vancouver knows much more about him than I do.

#78 Sait son of a Romford dentist who professed an ambition to become an abortionist doctor (highly and rightly illegal in 1940) lived in Lake Rise Romford.

Row 4

#108 Graham Dodd, a dayboy from Bishops Stortford. Son of a dentist and later I heard a dentist himself. Once saw him fleetingly in a crowd of

shoppers sometime after the war. A quiet yet determined character who bore a slight likeness to the actor Ralph Richardson when young.

#110 Willmot I believe, another dayboy whose family I think owned a garage at Potter Street. Jovial and friendly source of daily war reports as I recall.

Regarding local plant life - there lived at the Green Man an attractive young lady - believe her surname was Kersey or Kelsey (summin' like that!) who used to meet Ansell, the head boy before Cox. Nearer to the school lived Peggy Lincoln a delectable young woman much discussed by the fifth form!

Strangely, their names emerged in a conversation I had with a Royal Marine shipwreck survivor some years later. He was a local boy and was very pleased to find someone who'd heard of Harlow!

Has anyone mentioned Davis, Kenneth Dames' butler who was I was told his batman from WW1?

Once when I was the sole recipient of an infectious ailment I was quarantined in the headmaster's house and had my meals served by the aforesaid Davis (may have been Davies!). He was always proper and polite and the perfect butler immaculately turned out in black coat and striped trousers. I was however told by some prefects that if he thought you were to be trusted Davis would show you "the photographs" - a collection which it seemed he had collected in France in the First War!

I know that the Dames's trusted him implicitly and it must have been a considerable shock when Mr. Davis died suddenly from a heart attack and they had to sort out his effects! Perhaps some kindly maid removed them before that happened.

I also have a very clear picture from an misty autumn morning in 1940 when I heard the sound of what seemed to be a noisy lawnmower - then just above the hedge at the bottom of the playing field there appeared a Hawker Hector army co-operation biplane which flew a leisurely course about 10 feet off the ground banking slightly to pass between the elm trees which lined the boundary.

Around that time morning prayers often revealed that soldiers had moved through the town the previous night - we never saw or heard them but only soldiers would have left empty cigarette packets and

biscuit wrappers in the pews. We did once meet a few Sherwood Foresters when we went swimming in the River Stort - where there were the remains of an old watermill and a waterfall. That was unusual - most troop movements were made at night during those dangerous months.

Others must remember similar happenings.

PS Anyone told you anything of the headmasters butler Davis?

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