# ****A Fourth Former in the mid-1950’s****

**Guy Consterdine (A31, 1953-1960)**

 “Newbigin, a Sixth Former, flew over the Sports Field in a Tiger Moth, from Andover where he is a member of their flying club.” My Letts Schoolboys Diaries are effective reminders of life as a Fourth Former in School House during September 1956 to July 1957, and enabled me to write this article for the 1994 issue of The Sternian – just as my earlier pocket diaries had prompted memories of Junior House (for an article in the 1980 Sternian) and of being a Third Former (1981 Sternian).

The day to day diary entries give a firm impression of hard work being done in lessons, much of it evidently enjoyable. “Fumf produced some home-made cider in Bugs, and most of it we drunk – it was pretty good.” “Latin seems to be getting more and more interesting – learned about participles and deponent verbs.” “In Bugs we went down to the beehives [near the main drive] and opened some of them up. We saw a Queen bee on one of them.” On a later visit “nobody got stung this time.” Sometimes the fun was to avoid formal work. “Kept Bill Fryer talking on guns in History.” “Did little in Latin except copy down the words of a few pop songs.” “Larked around with Maffer.”

**Sport**
The diaries reflect the large role of sport in our lives, with many mentions of incidents and results at rugger, hockey, cross-country, athletics and cricket. There were four games houses; I was in Hyde and the other houses were Hesters, Handcroft and Sheephouse. In one rugger match “Hyde Colts beat Hesters 17-3. Oke was hurt in the first 10 minutes and was taken up the san. I played badly at 2nd centre again, but did make an opening for a try for Jaggs.” I also played for the school Colts team, and at one away match “I banged into Mike Birkett and cut my lip, then continued the game – Birkett was K.O’d. Bus broke down as we were about to leave. Driver took an hour to mend it.” A week later the Colts “travelled to Bisley School with the Junior XV. It was a hole. The Juniors won about 11-0 but Colts lost 11-0. Had a bit of fun tackling. The ref was on Bisley’s side, even telling them what to do during play!”

O.T.S. (games master Oliver Tweedie-Stoddart) had a steeplechase course built in the far south-east corner of the sports field, complete with water jump. The first race on it was run on 5 June 1957: “In P.T. all we did was mess around by the new water-jump. Had a free night and went out to watch the Seniors and Intermediates steeplechases, the first time the event has been done here.”

In the summer term we played a lot of informal cricket, in which a small gate which led from the side of School House onto the sports field served as a wicket with the hedge as wicket-keeper. My fellow players often included Keith Wood, Ridgway, Wardle, Robin Pope, Mike Sims, Curry, Jemson, Watkins and Laz (Richard Lacey-Johnson, who died within ten years of leaving school).

**The daily routine**
The routine duties demanded by communal life included milk and supper duty, and a day of ringing the bell at the Crystal Palace block to announce the start of meals and lessons. The day before bell-ringing duty we had to listen out of the School House common room window for the second bell, to start everyone walking to the dining room. In the dining room a regular duty was table waiting. Everyone had a particular table at which to sit, with a prefect at the head of the table, and each day every boy except the prefect moved one place to the left, and the two at the end of the table opposite the prefect did the waiting. Another bell duty was to ring the prep bells for the start and finish of School House prep time; we went across to the classroom block for our session of ‘homework’.

We also had a variety of routine inspections, including medical, foot (checking for tinia), and clothes inspections. Every Friday morning we changed the sheets on our beds, except that towards the end of term “No change of sheets since we go home on Monday”!

I received my share of punishments – usually lines to write out a hundred times or more. “Got my first raking of the term” – on the very first day of term! “Several Scouts went to camp, so plenty of room in Prep – a very hilarious one, at the expense of a raking off Williams A.R.” Occasionally I received a caning on the bottom. “In Physics I got 6 for slinging a swab which happened to knock over an acid bottle!” Clifford Ashby had temporarily left the lab and when he returned I was frantically trying to mop up the acid and pick up the pieces of glass. He took me out onto the stairway landing and administered six stinging lashes on the bottom with a cane while the rest of the class listened and counted. A few weeks later “after breakfast I went with Lawrence and Lacey-Johnson to see Bax [senior housemaster] for talking after ‘Silence’. I got 2 – rotten shots as well.”

**CCF**
Each Friday the Combined Cadet Force was the compulsory activity after lessons, and it meant spit and polish beforehand. “Blanco’d my kit and polished my shoes in time with Lacey-Johnson’s banjo.” “Went to Y.F.C. films after tea. Polished my brasses while in there!” Roger Smith was a CCF officer as well as our Latin master, and once “in Latin all we did was talk about tomorrow’s CCF Cert A Part 1.” This was a whole-day test of drilling, map-reading, fieldcraft theory, and practical work. Everyone had to join the Army section to start with, but after passing the Certificate A, Part 1 test a boy could choose to move into the RAF section, which I did on 26 April.

There was a rifle range in a deep chalk pit in the field behind the Headmaster’s house. “In the snap shooting I got all 5 in the target and that gave me 63 points – 1st Class!” Occasionally there were night exercises or a Field Day: “CCF Field Day. Started off straight away to assault three ‘enemy’ posts – one near Sutton Common, another at Hesters Copse, then the 3rd near the Well-Froyle road. I led an assault party of 6 twice. Squad 2 got 20/30 for that exercise. After that we had a Bren gun demonstration, then 3 hours’ films.”

**Films**
Many of us were very keen on films, cycling to the Waldorf or Savoy cinemas in Wote Street, Basingstoke, or the Regal at Odiham (there’s now a BMW showroom on the site). One boiling summer afternoon “I cycled to Odiham. Long Lane was melted by the sun, and the tar stuck to the wheels and stopped the bike. Had to scrape it off. Took 3/4 hour to get to Odiham, and missed the beginning of the film I went to see – ‘Hollywood or Bust’. Patricia Crowley was in it too (red-headed).” Before the big film the cinemas still showed newsreels – Movietone News or Pathe News.

Once a fortnight in the two winter terms the school showed Saturday evening flicks, where we’d squat on the floor of the school hall-cum-gym. There was a high content of war films among the multi-reelers that the school hired: in 1956-57 we saw films such as ‘Above Us The Waves’, ‘The Colditz Story’, ‘The Wooden Horse’ and ‘Odette’. Any film in colour called for special comment. I eagerly read Picturegoer, ABC Film Review and Picture Show when I could get hold of copies.

**Music: listening and performing**
We could also watch a bit of television but we had to go into the hall/gym for this, and I was more interested in listening to the pop music on Radio Luxembourg, the only radio station to carry extensive pop. The most memorable advertisement on Radio Lux was for Horace Batchelor’s unique pools system, which impressed on me where Keynsham was.

We played records in the Games Room in School House. Many of the records were the large, easily breakable 78 revs per minute discs, but the small flexible 45s were starting to come in. There were a few LPs too. I don’t remember who provided the gramophone, but the diaries often mention when I “listened to the gram” and when one of my favourite discs was played. These included Blueberry Hill (Fats Domino), Garden of Eden (Frankie Vaughan), Don’t Forbid Me (Pat Boone), Young Love (Tab Hunter), Banana Boat Song (Shirley Bassey), Don’t Be Cruel and Blue Moon (Elvis Presley), any Bill Haley record, skiffle, and the songs from Oklahoma.

The school did not organise the playing of music (the nearest to it was a singing lesson once a week) but throughout my school life I was a member of an informal group led by Laz. The group went through a variety of names, members and types of music, and by the Fourth Form we were mainly playing skiffle. In 1956-57 we called ourselves The Planets, though after Russia’s thrilling launch of the first Sputnik on October 5th 1957 we were later to change our name to The Satellites. We all sang, and in addition Laz played the guitar and banjo, while I played the washboard with metal thimbles on each finger, and sometimes played my harmonica. Other members of the group in 1956-1957 included Adams and Watkins. We were chiefly playing for our own amusement but occasionally gave concerts for other boys. The housemasters did not really approve of us.

**Societies and visits**
One of the leisure time societies I joined was the Handicrafts Society which met in the rather damp semi-underground air raid shelter near the school hall/gym. Other entertainments could be celestial: “Saw the new mystery comet, which appeared about a month ago.” We watched a total eclipse of a full moon which “completely disappeared and not a ray of light was to be seen”.

We went on a number of visits, including a Biology outing to the Courage brewery in Alton, travelling under canvas in the big Dodge lorry with bench seats placed along the sides. We had a Chemistry outing to the gasworks at Aldershot; watching the emptying of the furnaces was particularly interesting. We went to Twickenham to watch England beat Scotland 16-3, and to the Chelsea Flower Show. The main Fourth Form visit that year was a trip to Belgium in the Easter holiday, the first ever journey abroad for most of us including me.