A Third Former in the mid-1950s

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

“25 September 1955: Had two lots of lines given to me. 26 Sept: Wrote my lines, and handed in Brittain’s. Listened to ‘Journey Into Space’ on the radio. 6 Oct: Got 2 sides from Janes for being late for something. 25 Jan 1956: Had a raking, and had to see Ashby. 28 March: Had 100 lines off Boozer. 1 April: Had 3 off Bax after lights out.” Not that I was always wrong-doing – or is it that my Letts Schoolboys diary, with its 3- or 4-line entries, reflected the little day-to-day events in the life of a Third Former rather too accurately!

Using my pocket diaries from September 1955 to July 1956 to prompt my memory, here are some impressions of what it was like in the Third Form. (This is the text of an article which appeared in the 1981 Sternian.)

**The daily timetable**

I entered School House on 22 September 1955, the day ITV started and Grace Archer of ‘The Archers’ was killed in a stable fire. Hugh Ironside Bax was the senior housemaster, and Miss Wilmott was Matron.

The working day began with Assembly for the whole school in what was then the school Hall and gym (now the Library). There were eight 40-minute periods of lessons, which I see from the timetable at the back of the diary started at 8.40, then 9.20; a 15-minute break at 10.00; lessons at 10.15, 10.55, 11.35; a dinner break of an hour (‘dinner’ in those days meant the meal in the middle of the day, not the evening meal); 1.15, 1.55 and 2.35, finishing at 3.15. Next was a sports activity unless one had a ‘free night’ or was ‘off games’.

After tea came the evening’s academic ‘homework’, or prep. For the inmates of School House this was held in the classrooms in the main classroom block, with a prefect supervising each form. “25 Oct: Did very little in Prep. Forgot Maths prep. 6 Oct: The lights fused all day. We had half an hour’s singsong, as we couldn’t have prep without lights.”

The day ended with roll-call for the whole House, the boys ranged round the sides of the Commonroom (which is now divided into two), followed by a light supper in the dining room under the faded portrait of the Founder.

The masters taking my form, 3A, were Clifford Ashby (Physics and Chemistry), Ducky James (English), Olly Tweedie-Stoddart (PT), Chas Irvine (Maths), Goofy Ward (French), Boozer Smith (History and Latin), Rev. Wright (Scripture), Mrs Wright (singing), Les Bacon (Geography) and David ‘Fumf’ Wolstenholme (Biology).

**Gardening, spuds and bells**

“26 Nov: Went to Gardening Prodjects (sic). Put up some seed frames.” On Saturday mornings we had to do a non-academic activity, ‘Projects’. I chose Gardening. The main sheds where we potted and grafted were at the top of the sports field where the indoor sports hall now stands. “24 May: Went to the Chelsea Flower Show by coach.”

For two weekdays Third Form classes were abandoned. “Friday 7 Oct: Went spud-bashing. Earned 5/- in the morning and 5/- in the afternoon. We worked the field beside the upper part of the cinder path. 8 Oct: Went potato-picking again after dinner. We worked in the field near the pavilion [where the astro-turf sports pitches are now]. Mon 10 Oct: Continued potato-picking. Finished the fields, and went on and combed afterwards. 11 Oct: Back to school. 12 Oct: Collected our spud-bashing money.” Spud-bashing entailed us boys being lined up across the field in one of the furrows, while a tractor with plough trundled by in front of us, churning up the ridge of potato plants so the potatoes themselves were brought to the surface. We had to pull all the potatoes off the plants and put them into containers, and complete this operation before the tractor came past again and ploughed the next ridge. When the whole field had been picked, the final stage was ‘combing’, wandering across the field to gather any potatoes that had been missed.

“30 Sept: I was on bell duty and had to ring the bell 6 times.” This was the big bell atop the Crystal Palace block, which sounded out across the entire estate to announce meals, the start of afternoon lessons, and so on. “16 Dec: I was bell-ringing. I forgot the breakfast bell. 17 Dec: Bell-ringing again, as I rung the bells wrong yesterday. On Supper Duty too.”

Under the Crystal Palace bell were the changing rooms and showers for the visiting sports teams. This is where we had haircuts, during prep. The barber came in from Odiham.

**Sport**

“29 Sept: Activity was a cross-country race. I was in the middle, as I walked much of the way.” But usually I was one of the keener ones. “24 Nov: Went on a run. I was 3rd. It went to Quercus, and we went too far, up to Well – we should have missed out Well altogether!” Even without unnecessary additions, the courses were a good deal lengthier than we had been used to Junior House. “15 Dec: Had a cross-country run. We ran up Bumpers, nearly to the Grove, past Cricketers, and Frog Lane, and then home.”

“5 March: Sat’s c-c team was up. I was in it! 7 March: Went on a voluntary practice run. 10 March: A really gorgeous day. Went to Portsmouth for c-c run! I was 10=.” This was the time when our team was defeated by the unexpected cliff-like hill at the very end of the course, to get up onto Portsdown. As the runners approached the foot of the hill, the LWC team was in a winning position. But we toiled up the hill while the Portsmouth boys sailed past, having paced themselves for this daunting obstacle. “24 March: Ran at Park House. I was 9th. We won, as did the u/13s.”

“31 March: Big c-c’s were run. I was 2nd.” I think it was Terry who won. For me, it was my third annual ‘big cross-country’, the third time I’d felt I had a chance of winning, and the third time I’d come second.

In rugby however it needed absentees to get me into the school team. I played in the three-quarter line, usually on the wing. “21 Oct: The u/14 rugger team was put up, and owing to 4 absentees I was playing. 22 Oct: Played rugger for the u/14s! We lost, 15-14. The 1st lost 16-8, 2nd lost 68-0, but u/13 won 14-3. 12 Dec: Played rugger, Colts v u/14s. It was the coldest I’ve played in! I was freezing. We lost 11-0.”

The games houses were Handcroft, Hesters, Hyde (my house) and Sheephouse. (There were only two senior boarding houses, School and Sutton.) “16 Jan: There was a Hyde house meeting, to elect Captains. 6 May: Played cricket for Hyde 1st XI. I got 5 n.o. 8 May: Finished the Hyde v Handcroft match. Hyde won, with 1 wicket, 1 run and 3 mins to spare. I got 4 runs.”

“3 May: Athletics: walk and shot. Got a ‘Low’ in both. 17 May: Athletics were 100 yards and Jav. I got 12.9 secs in the 100 yards, but a ‘Fail’ in the javelin. 4 May: Ran the mile in 5 m. 55 secs in PT. 24 June: Ran the mile in 5 m. 32 secs! Played cricket (McDonald’s XI v Maitland’s XI). I scored 30 not out!”

**Spare-time activities**

Cycling was a favourite spare-time activity. “24 Sept: Cycled to Odiham with Pope, Wood and Webber. Had a good view of planes at Odiham. 28 Sept: Had Scripture period free, and so had double free. Rode round to Lower Froyle and Well. 5 Oct: Rode round by the Golden Pot and S. Warnborough in the free period. 23 Oct: Went for a bike ride with Wood, to Bentley. Cycled along the A31 road.” My school number was A31 and even today, 46 years later, whenever I drive along the A31 I feel it is ‘my’ road, as my wife is tired of hearing.

It was a treat to see television (in black and white), which very few homes possessed in 1955. A reverse-projection set which threw the TV pictures onto a large screen was occasionally fixed up in the school hall. Yet we were much more likely to be seen playing chess. “1 Oct: Played chess with Raffles and Handley. Beat R, and lost to H. 9 Oct: Entered my name for a chess tournament. 26 Oct: Played chess with Burdett for the Championship, and I won! 22 Nov: Played my chess tournament game with Terry. It lasted 2 hours! And I won!! Will now have to play Janes or Bax. 9 Dec: Played Mr Bax at chess, for the Tournament. I played for one and a half hours, then he checkmated me.”

Here’s a sample of the varied other spare-time activities. “14 Oct: Had a lecture from H. Evetts again, about Swaziland. It was good. 22 Oct: Went to dancing lessons in the hall after tea. I went with Webber. 29 Nov: Did some stamp ‘trading’ with C. L. Winter. 14 Dec: Went and saw the school play, Macbeth. It was very good. 16 Dec: Saw the play a second time. It was better acted than on Wednesday. 1 April: April-fooled Wilmott. 12 May: Went for a long walk through the copse and Froyle. Very warm and sunny. 10 July: Had a free night, and played cricket with Wood and Wardle till we lost the ball. Had a bit of wrestling.”

“15 Oct: Saw the school flicks. It was ‘The Titfield Thunderbolt’ and two other short films.” Some of the other pictures we saw, squatting on the wooden floor of the school hall-cum-gym on alternate Saturday evenings in the two winter terms, were ‘Doctor In The House’ (“in colour!”), ‘A Day To Remember’ and ‘West of Zanzibar’. We saw stars like Anthony Steel, Victor Mature, Jack Hawkins, and a young Dirk Bogard.

“19 May: Went to Basingstoke with Johnson, and saw Richard III. It was v good.” Basingstoke boasted two cinemas, the Waldorf and the ABC Savoy, which stood opposite each other at the bottom of Wote Street. Next to the Savoy was a fish and chip shop, whose sixpenn’oth of chips was an ideal preparation for the cycle ride back to Long Sutton. Now it’s all obliterated by the modern shopping centre. If we weren’t cycling to ‘Stoke, we were travelling by the ‘lackey-band’, Odiham Motor Services’ groaning single-deck Bedford bus.

Greywell Mill and Upton Grey became a film set for the picture ‘Charley Moon’. I cycled to Basingstoke to see the finished film – and the delectable Shirley Eaton. Before the summer of 1956 was out, I was similarly entranced by Rosanna Podesta (in the film ‘Helen of Troy’), Belinda Lee (‘The Feminine Touch’), Cyd Charisse (‘Viva Las Vegas’), Mitzi Gaynor (‘Anything Goes’), Gina Lollobrigida (‘Trapeze’) and Ava Gardner (‘Bhowani Junction’). After these, the school flicks were never quite the same.

**‘Sent to the San’**

A sure sign of winter – “13 Oct: Had halibut oil pills dished out to us again. 18 Oct: Had the usual gargle and pills.”

I chose the half-term weekend to get swollen glands around the jaws. “29 Oct: After breakfast I went to surgery, and was sent to the san. I had to go in the single-bed room (in case it was mumps). Had a hot bath. Read Picture Post etc. 30 Oct: Heard ‘Journey Into Space’, episode 5. The Martians landed on the moon in their spheres! Invented a new code. 1 Nov: The doctor came and said I could ‘mix’ so I was moved to the inner ward with Collyer, Johnson and Davies. The Head (Sandy Henderson) came to see those in the san.”

“5 Nov: Saw some of the fireworks from the san windows. Had a very bad storm. All the lights fused. Used candles. 8 Nov: Glands no better. Doctor came and messed about with my ear and jaw. Had an injection. 9 Nov: Went for a walk to Hesters copse. 11 Nov: The doctor came. He saw my broken tooth and sent me to the dentist! Had that tooth out. Went by LWC’s van. 15 Nov: Got up for breakfast. Sister looked at my glands and sent me back to school!” I had been incarcerated for a long 18 days.

**End of term**

The dreaded end-of-term exams! “2 Dec: The second day of the exams. The exams were Maths, Physics and History. Physics and History were easy, but Maths wasn’t.” Physics easy? “6 Dec: We had our Physics results. I was 23rd!” – though I did get 58%. I did better in other subjects: “23 Nov: Had a vocab test in Latin. I got 19/20! 29 Nov: Had our term’s marks in French. I had 143 out of 168, and was 4th!”

How marvellous it was to be getting ready for home after three months! “17 Dec: Finished packing my luggage-in-advance. Cycled to Winchfield, and left my bike there. Came back in the LWC lorry. 18 Dec: Went to the Carol Service. Had our Christmas tea. It was super! The Old Boys sang a very well made-up song. 19 Dec: Had two periods of school work. Then we were free for the rest of the day. Packed my hand-case. Left for Winchfield after dinner. Went through the Underground, and on to Haywards Heath, with Coppen. Arrived home [at Durrington, near Worthing] just before 6 o’clock.”