**Founder’s Day**

My recollections of Founder’s Day during the 1950s are pure nostalgia and best enjoyed in retrospect. The first Founder’s Day was held in 1931 to do exactly that – celebrate the memory of the Founder, Sidney James Stern, 1st Baron Wandsworth. Similar events followed in1934 and 1936 but in 1944 it became the regular event that I recall. It was traditionally held on the last Friday of the Summer Term. On the following Tuesday boys were allowed to get up at 5.30 a.m. instead of the usual 7.00 a.m. and go home. School officially finished on the Monday afternoon, and from about 1958 all those living close to the School were allowed to go then. For those parents within reasonable travelling distance of the School, or for those who were prepared to stay at a hotel or similar in Odiham, then the prospect of attending Founder’s Day celebrations presented no problems, but if your folk lived a long way away then they had to prepare for a formidable journey.

**The Invitation**

My mother and stepfather lived in the small hamlet of Tremar Coombe, St. Cleer, in Cornwall in a two bedroom ex miner’s cottage. She had worked as a waitress in Webbs Hotel and as an Assistant Matron in the Eventide Home (a wishful euphemism for an old persons’ home) and as a home help, all in Liskeard. My mother was well travelled but my stepfather had only left Cornwall once before, and that was when he brought our family to London on a coach trip in 1953 to see the Coronation decorations. Unfortunately it was a week after the Coronation, and they had rather gone to seed, but that did not deter my mother, who as a ‘posh’ Cockney, was on home ground. My stepfather earned £6.50 a week as unskilled manual labourer for Cornwall County Council working the ‘stop and go’ boards at road works that so often irritate motorists just as much now as they did then. Imagine therefore their surprise when they received the invitation (see copy). This was the first that she received – note that my stepfather was not and never was in the future, included. He was not my guardian nor my father (in the biblical or biological sense) but took no offence in the omission. He assumed that it must have been a clerical error made by the Headmaster’s secretary, then Joan Carter. My mother kept every invitation and did attend on two occasions – namely 1956 and 1959. However, this one had to be declined. The journey would take too long and time off work without pay would be needed. But I remember this Founder’s Day well. It was my first and was so typical in that by just changing the visitor the occasion could be any year in the 1950s.

**The Programme**

On the great day we had lessons for the first two periods only and then we were dismissed. On the previous day we were excused the last two periods and instead we rehearsed the programme in the marquee and watched the CCF parade with Mr. Cattermull, the Bursar, acting out the role of visitor. But on this day we were free by 10.30a.m. in the morning and we all went back to Junior House. Those of us who were in the Boy Scouts changed into our uniforms, others into their Sunday best suits in readiness to greet their parents, otherwise there was nothing official to do. When I was in Sutton House the procedure was exactly the same except that I changed into my CCF uniform. We helped each other to spruce ourselves up; if necessary we shared a razor if we felt the urge to shave. We surprised ourselves on how well we scrubbed up – a transformation rarely witnessed. It was then that I learnt to wear my tie with a Windsor knot that I have practised ever since.

When we returned up the cinder track to the main block parents were beginning to arrive. Some would come by train to either Basingstoke and catch the 11.15 a.m. ancient Bedford OWB Odiham Motor Services motor coach for the 37 minute journey via Greywell to the Coach and Horses Public House at the Main Gates; or to Winchfield and take a taxi. Many arrived by car. Now cars of that era have always fascinated me. We had a 1937 Humber 16 Snipe that had been used for weddings and as a taxi in a previous life. Although second hand many times over and 18 years old, to me, it had lost none of its elegance and was a worthy stable mate to the School’s own more modern Humber Pullman which was kept for special occasions next to the School lorries in the garage block. Bert, who also drove the lorries, would don a dark suit and a black peak chauffeur’s cap and collect the distinguished visitor and guest in the School limousine. When my mother and stepfather came the following year, our car still looked good for its age but the illusion was lost when my stepfather climbed out wearing his dark brown pin striped suit of an equal vintage, open neck shirt and Fair Isle pullover. My mother, dressed like a Duchess, walked ahead of him as if they were not together. Again he wore exactly the same suit and Fair Isle pullover when he came for the second time in 1959, but on this occasion there was no illusion to shatter. His image matched his car perfectly – he had bought, in 1956, a new Ford Popular with a three speed gear box and a single vacuum controlled driver’s windscreen wiper which only worked when the engine was not labouring; i.e., running down hill. There used to be another Humber Pullman car that arrived on occasions and I was very impressed to think that someone of my year had parents wealthy enough to own one until I discovered that his father was an undertaker and it was the firm’s car – good job he did not borrow the hearse! But on this day I was one of the many other boys in the same position of having no family coming to the celebrations and prepared for the parade. 12.15 p.m. Inspection of Cadet and Scout Units by the Minister. The parade assembled on the playing field beyond the Acorn Gates. The road that ran through the middle up to Long Sutton House had been dug up and grassed over a few years before. It was called a playing field then and only in later years was the term upgraded to a sports field. Prior to 1953 the parade was held in the transport yard behind the Headmaster’s offices.

The Combined Cadet Force consisting of separate Army section of 24 cadets, Royal Air Force section of 32 cadets and a basic Army/RAF section of 61 cadets was lined up together with the two Boy Scout Troops of 19th Odiham Scout Group and 16th Odiham Scout Group. The 19th Group was for the two Senior Houses and the 16th for the Junior House. I was in the Junior House Troop who consisted of three patrols called ‘Owls’, ‘Eagles’ and ‘Otters’ each with Patrol Leader and 4 boys. The Patrol Leaders were Nelson Hankin (A32), Mike Sims (A41) and Peter Anderson (A29). Bill Fryer, Junior House Assistant Housemaster, was our Scout Leader. At 12.00 p.m. the parade was called to attention and marched through the Acorn Gates, passed the crowd of spectators, passed the front of the Dining Hall and ‘right wheeled’ onto the lawn in the front of the Dining Hall and came to a halt. In order of seniority the platoons faced the front with the Scouts at the rear against the beech hedge. Those masters who were in the CCF wore the same type of battle dress uniform as we did, except they had a commission, usually the lowest available – 2nd Lieutenant – which allowed them to have a peak cap. Others who had seen War Service or completed National Service, and had retained their own uniforms wore those; and I remember Lt. Charles Hallows wearing a rather splendid uniform of the Devonshire Regiment. Orders were barked, those in the CCF lucky enough to have a Lee-Enfield .303 rifle were ordered to stand easy with them, and then we waited for the Minister to inspect us.

The Minister was The Rt. Hon. D.Heathcote-Amory, Member of Parliament and Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He later became Chancellor of the Exchequer in Harold Macmillan’s Conservative Government. He was unavoidably detained – perhaps his train had not arrived at Basingstoke on time or more to the point perhaps Bert had not arrived at Basingstoke in time, for he did join us later. So the Inspection which commenced at 12.15 p.m. was undertaken by Sir Alan Hitchman, his Permanent Secretary. He, followed by Sir William Gavin, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and the Headmaster, was introduced to each platoon Officer and then proceeded to inspect that Unit. By the time he reached us, Bill Fryer’s knobbly knees protruding from his khaki Scout shorts looked distinctly goose pimpled. Then there were the awards; the Subaltern’s Bugle to C.S.M Rodney Giles (757) in the Army section, silver Aircrew Cup to F/Sgt. Gerald Smith (742), in the RAF section, and the Radcliffe Scout Cup to the best Scout. With the inspection over; more orders were barked, we stood to attention, ‘arms presented’ with rifles placed firmly back on shoulders; and we marched back tracing the same route that we arrived by. Sir Alan Hitchman was standing on a dais consisting of box and beside him at ground level stood Squadron Leader James Orr, Officer in Charge of the CCF. They were the only two people allowed to take the salute, except that as Sir Alan was not in uniform then he could not salute and stood with his hands by his side. As each Unit marched passed him a voice shouted ‘Eyes right’, we all looked right – he looked at us and James Orr saluted us.

The Scouts were the very last to leave the parade with the first Troop carrying the Union Jack flag. Our Junior House Troop, lead by Bill Fryer, carried the green Scout Flag with our Troop emblazoned on it. As we drew level Bill Fryer called out ‘Eyes right’ and gave the Scouts salute, Peter Anderson was right marker, so he looked straight ahead to see where we were going, and I followed up at the rear, also on the right. As the last one to leave the parade I caught his eye and had the satisfaction of keeping Sir Alan Hitchman standing to attention until the last possible moment. Once back on the playing field we were dismissed and that part of the programme was then over.

I was again in the Scouts’ parade in 1956 but I was in the CCF when my mother and stepfather came in 1959. My mother, not being sure of which part of the parade I was in, took photographs with her Kodak ‘Box’ Brownie camera of every unit that marched passed, just to be on the safe side. It was on this occasion that the newly formed Drill Squad, with their distinctive white blanco belt and gaiters, performed a demonstration drill that became a regular feature. My memory always recalls beautiful sunny summer days for the parades but in 1956 it rained and all those parents gathered either side of the Dining Hall, seated on wooden seats, held up umbrellas. My mother did not have an umbrella. She put on a clear ‘see through’ plastic mac and a small clear plastic cover for her hat – usually the type that came free with a packet of ‘Daz’ or ‘Omo’ washing machine soap powder.

**1pm Lunch**

This day I had lunch in the Dining Hall as usual. The normal arrangement was a top table for the Headmaster and staff, long wooden tables and benches for the boys, and from high on the far end wall the portrait of the Founder gazed down upon us. The library was also housed in the same building and the School museum was upstairs. When I had parents visiting, then I could join them in the large white marquee erected to the left of the Acorn Gates. Mrs Deely, the Catering Manageress and her team prepared a splendid spread with everything possible being provided from the School farms or gardens. The waitresses wearing black dresses and white aprons and white caps usually served us dressed like that, but today they impressed the visitors and parents. Little did they know that most of these waitresses were young girls who had fallen foul of the law and were under the care and supervision of Mrs Deely. At least that is what we earnestly believed and in one case we nicknamed a girl ‘Cyanide Sue’ in the belief that she had unsuccessfully attempted to poison her boyfriend. From her haggard muscular appearance, Mrs Deely made an ideal warder. Wooden chairs and tables were placed inside the marquee and depending on the temperature then some of the side awnings would be removed to increase ventilation. Sir William Gavin, together with the Headmaster, and all the distinguished guests had lunch in the School House common room, which was especially tidied up for the occasion so that it gave the appearance of a grand dining room. A large long table was placed in the centre and Sir William sat at the head of it. After lunch, whether it was in a marquee or the dining hall, I went back to Junior House to change out of my Scouts uniform, and others would do the same. As was the custom I put on my summer khaki shorts, open neck shirt, blazer and white plimsolls and then I went back up the cinder track for the third time today to prepare for the next part of the programme.

**2.30 pm Speeches**

The speeches were held in the second marquee that was erected to the right of the Acorn Gates. Up to 1949 the speeches were held in the assembly hall, but from 1950 J.M.Carter Ltd of Basingstoke provided three marquees and about 800 wooden collapsible chairs for the occasions. The largest marquee was reserved for the speeches and at one end a stage was erected for the Trustees, Visitor, Headmaster, and Masters. The stage was decorated with potted plants and flowers all carefully brought on in the greenhouses of the Gardens. The grand piano that was normally housed in School House was brought out and dusted for the event; no question of using the small upright piano that performed for daily assembly. Thus day we Junior House boys all sat in the front rows, but boys with their parents and other relations arrived quickly to get a good seat, as the marquee would soon fill to capacity. In the mid 1950s there used to be about 500 boys and guests but this had risen to 800 by the early 1960s. On a hot summer day the heat could be intolerable and very quickly the side awnings were removed to allow a gentle breeze to flow through and keep the elderly grandparents awake throughout the speech making.

Next came the Masters and staff. Those who had been in CCF uniform had changed, and although we were accustomed to seeing them wear their black academic gowns on a daily basis for classes, today we were in for a special surprise. On every Founder’s Day they made a solemn procession from the Dining Hall to the marquee, each wearing his best Sunday suit as well, black academic gown with hood bearing the colours of his University and a mortarboard affixed firmly to his head. Bill Fryer’s knobbly knees were thankfully covered up and his hood was black and white (B.A. Cambridge), but there were ones which were black with white fur, black with gold edging, dark cherry and white, middle green, green and prune, plus others I cannot recall. If the visitor was in uniform then that added to the splendour of the moment, but today the Minister, who by now had arrived, appeared in a sombre city suit with Sir William Gavin. When everyone was in place Sir William welcomed all those present, gave the nod to Headmaster who passed it on to the Chaplain and prayers were said in memory and thanks of our Founder. Everyone had loud voices in those days, and without the aid of any amplification and loudspeakers, the Chaplain, the Reverend Wright, had no difficulty in being heard at the back – but then he had had plenty of practise in Long Sutton Church. Next the Choir stood up on the cue of Browno, School Secretary; Choir Master and holder of numerous positions. The piano was played by the Music Master, Mr. Roberts and the Choir sang the School Hymn, ‘He who would valiant be’ – with the entire marquee singing the last verse as printed in the programme. Sir William then called upon the Headmaster to present his annual report, which he did in great detail covering the academic progress of the School throughout the last twelve months. In 1958 he had the added pride of telling the gathering that LWC had been admitted to the Headmasters’ Conference and henceforth we were now a Public School; something that we should all be very proud of. He finished followed by a polite round of applause, and then Sir William called upon our distinguished guest and visitor, The Rt. Hon. Heathcote-Amory, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to address the College. Any aged grandparent who had survived the previous speech struggling to stay awake often fell at this hurdle, as the speech was only as good as the Minister’s speechwriter had prepared. Another round of applause, and then Mr. Robert Stopford, Trustee, proposed a vote of thanks.

Then followed the presentation of awards. Lady Gavin, Lady Wedgwood and the Head Master each presented their selection of prizes, sports cups and trophies to a never ending stream of senior boys wildly applauded by their young admirers in the lower forms and aided by the recipients’ parents and relations. Finally, the School Captain, and today it was Gerald Smith, also a recipient of a prize, thanked Lady Gavin, Lady Wedgwood and the Head Master for having the graciousness to present the awards. A final round of applause was followed by the entire audience, rising to their feet with great difficulty after sitting still on a wooden seat for one hour, to sing the National Anthem, ‘God Save the Queen’. Although helped by the piano there was no need to print the words in the programme because in those days most people, including my mother, knew all the words.

**3.45 pm Opening of Sutton House Extensions by the Minister**

I remember this occasion clearly. With all the other boys, and parents and guests, we all left the marquee and ambled up the cycle track which ran along the edge of the playing field and passed behind the wooden cricket pavilion on our left. I recall that at that time of year the corn growing in the fields on our right was full of golden ears of wheat as it turned ripe ready for harvesting. Corn seemed much taller in those days and was at least waist high even to an adult. It was to be many years before agricultural scientists hybridised a shorter stalk variety of wheat producing less straw but easier to combine. We passed the gardens to arrive a Sutton House via the front lawn where the crowd quickly gathered around the newly built dormitory block. Important dignitaries stood in the front and I was dispelled to the back; the Minister made his short speech, declared the new dormitories officially open and unveiled the plaque commemorating the occasion. We then dispersed in all directions like ripples on a pond.

**4.00 pm Exhibition of Work**

Regardless of whether or not you had a parent in tow it was an occasion to go with the flow and see what was on show. In my Junior House years I contributed to the Handicraft displays that were set out in a science laboratory. The best of your work that may have been completed at any time during the previous two terms was arranged demonstrating class skills of making notebook covers, book marks, blotting pad holders, all in varying degrees of perfection. From the gardening project flowers and vegetables were shown in a team display because as a small group we cultivated a plot of soil in a joint effort. I seem to remember that my contribution was the giving and receiving of rides in the wheelbarrow. When in Sutton House I contributed to the Photography display with pictures of Princetown Prison on Dartmoor; the River Dart in flood conditions and a Cornish Holywell. Members of the Young Farmers Club set up a small compound near the main office block with a token cow, couple of pigs, sheep, and many chickens for the rural minded to look at. In later years the YFC display moved down to Summers Farm and a newly scrubbed trailer, decorated with bunting with a few benches for seats, was towed by the Y.F.C Jeep to form a land train back and forth to the farm. Boys dragged their parents to the boarding houses to proudly show them their dormitories and beds, and then onto the individual classrooms to show them which desk they sat at for French lessons. I remember showing my mother Junior House, my bed and then my individual locker in the Common Room and introducing her to my best friend and his mother. In all my time at LWC it was only on such an occasion as this, that I had the opportunity of exploring School House, as under normal circumstances there was a no fraternisation rule between the Houses.

**4.15 pm onwards – Tea**

This day I had tea back at Junior House as normal, and those in School and Sutton Houses had theirs in the dining hall, but if you were with your parents then it was back to the marquee where all the luncheon arrangements had been cleared and a tea was prepared. There were sandwiches, cakes and buns of all sizes and descriptions. On occasions the scene could have been reminiscent of Ascot with all the ladies in their fine hats and summer gloves perched on the edge of rickety wooden collapsible chairs holding a plate with a cake on it. The fun started when a decision had to be made whether to attempt to eat a sticky bun with gloves on or off. The men stood with their cups of tea and a cigarette. There was always a good supply of strawberries and cream as well. The strawberries were grown in the gardens next to Sutton House and I well recall that I could see them from my dormitory window. They were covered with a criss cross of fine string to prevent the birds from pecking at them and just before Founders’ Day when they were at their best. I regret to say that a few of us could not control the temptation any longer and after ‘Lights Out’ we crept stealthily out of our beds and sampled a few. They were delicious. The Band of the Royal Engineers, Aldershot will play during the day. A third but small marquee was set up outside School House on the front lawn. The side awnings were removed and the Band of the Royal Engineers, resplendent in their military dress uniform, installed themselves inside from about 11 a.m. They played continuously only stopping for their own lunch whilst the parade was in progress and for short breaks later until they disbanded about 5.00 p.m. The sound of the popular film titles from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals of ‘Oklahoma’, ‘Carousel’; Ketelbey’s ‘In a Monastery Garden’ and ‘Bells across the Meadow’ and the then current Drury Lane success of ‘My Fair Lady’ wafted on the breeze all around the main block and playing fields to the delight of everyone.

When the band stopped playing, packed up and climbed back into their motor coach then all the parents took the hint and gradually said their goodbyes and began to make their own ways home. We boys returned to our houses to relax away the rest of the evening and to think about the end of term and summer holidays. Soon our trunks would come out of store and we could pack them in readiness for the School lorry to take them to the railway station to be sent ‘Luggage in Advance’ in order to arrive home when we did. But the real end came in March 1967 when Alex Henderson, Headmaster from 1943 to 1968, wrote a letter to all parents saying: – ‘Over the past few years the organisation and varied activities of our annual Founder’s Day at the end of the Summer Term have become very unwieldy and expensive. Our Board of Governing Trustees have decided therefore, for reasons of greater economy and of affording parents a fuller opportunity to see the staff and activities of the School, to make a change. In future, beginning this year, there will be an Open Day, which will be called Founder’s Day, immediately before Half Term when parents and their friends will be invited to see exhibitions of work, and a variety of School activities. A very brief ceremony in front of the Gavin Hall will commemorate the Founder’s Memory. This is timed for 12 noon. It is suggested that parents should bring a packed lunch with them. The Day will end with tea at the various Houses at 4.00 p.m., and boys will thereafter be free to leave for their Half Term break.’ And that is what happened on 25th May 1967. It was the first of the new and current Founder’s Day format but the birth of it brought with it the death of a celebration steeped in tradition and ceremony, and one, for me, that enriched my perception of what Founder’s Day was all about. Whenever I hear ‘In a Monastery Garden’ or ‘Bells Across the Meadow’ I am transported back over the years to Founders’ Day of 1955, and I become a twelve year old boy again; full of awe and excitement.

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