

Sqn Ldr George 'Johnny' Johnson MBE DFM

1921 – 2022, Age 101

LWC 1933 – 1939

0287 Sheepphouse, School House

It is with great sadness that we hear of the death of Sternian George 'Johnny' Johnson.

Johnny was born in Lincolnshire on 25 November 1921, the sixth and youngest child of a farm worker, his mother had passed away when Johnny was a toddler. With the help of his local schoolteacher and the Squire's wife, Johnny joined Lord Wandsworth College in 1933.

Johnny wrote of his first journey to LWC, 'In the September, I left Langford, Lena (my sister) travelling with me on the bus to Newark and waving me off as I boarded the train bound for London. It was a daunting journey – exciting, but a little nerve-racking as well for a youngster who had never travelled more than about 20 miles on a bus before. The tickets, of course, had all been paid for by the college and I was met at Kings Cross Station by a man from Lord Wandsworth, Mr Brown, who took me on the London Underground to Waterloo Station. It's tempting to think that, as an 11-year-old country bumpkin, I was totally overawed by the great metropolis and the railway that ran under the streets, but my whole upbringing to that time had made me a very pragmatic youngster. I didn't feel that I had been transported to another world, just that this was how the rest of the world lived. I think I was probably too concerned about what was happening to me to enjoy my first trip to London. At Waterloo, we met up with a group of boys who were also bound for the college and together we boarded another train for the journey out to Winchfield. School transport then ferried us all to the college at Long Sutton'.

During his years at LWC, Johnny was a good cross-country and middle-distance runner and in his final two years he played for the school first eleven at both football and cricket. He says 'I thought I was pretty good at both, although an entry in the 1939 school magazine – *The Sower* – gives an entirely different impression. 'Unquestionably the defence was not the rock-like structure we should have wished to see. The full-backs, Johnson, Searle and Davies (when he recovered from his accident) were not certain to clear the ball in an emergency and positional defence sometimes made dangerous gaps. In the circumstances, our goalkeepers were sometimes overworked and likely to produce a jumpy state of nerves.' I think that may be a little harsh, but the same issue of the magazine records me being second in the batting averages (23.2) and 'an outstanding fielder at point.'

Johnny also recalled a conversation between himself and his English Master Mr James (Jimmy) 'You know, Johnson, they say you can tell a person's character from his handwriting. Yours must be pretty awful.' I think Mr James would be discounting that theory now!

Johnny was Head Prefect and left LWC in 1939. He wrote of his reflection on his time at LWC, 'Perhaps I took the efforts that they (LWC) made on my behalf a little for granted. Certainly, it wasn't until I was older and wiser that I understood how much Lord Wandsworth College had done for me and how good they had been to me. The military men who ran the school gave me a glimpse of life in an institution that certainly stood me in good stead when it came to serving in the RAF. Yet 'institution' seems too cold and harsh a word to describe Lord Wandsworth College. They cared for me and cared about me, which is something that, aside from my lovely sister, Lena, I had not experienced before. They had taken a shy and nervous little boy and helped him take the first steps towards becoming an increasingly confident young man. For that I will be forever grateful'.

After leaving LWC, Johnny took up a post as an Assistant Park Keeper in Basingstoke and later joining the RAF a few months after war had been declared. Johnny was the last surviving member of the legendary 'Dambusters' of 617 Squadron. He flew 50 missions during his 22 years' service in the RAF and was the bomb aimer on the night of 16 May 1943, as part of Operation Chastise. The operation set out to destroy three dams deep within Germany's Ruhr valley in order to set back the country's war effort, a task that was thought near impossible. It delayed production in the Ruhr quite considerably and contributed hugely to the war effort. Tragically 53 of the original 132 service men who went out on that mission lost their lives. Johnny was awarded a raft of medals including the Distinguished Flying Medal for his part in this daring 617 Squadron raid.



In 2017, Johnny was awarded an MBE for services to World War Two. When collecting his award at Buckingham Palace the Queen told him she was "glad to see the Dambusters are still here".

Johnny visited LWC on a number of occasions, and was always very warmly welcomed, with pupils eager to hear his stories and meet a real-life hero. He always had a glint in his eye and a grace and gentleness about him. One of the more recent occasions was when Johnny kindly agreed to unveil the new LWC War Memorial at our Remembrance Service in November 2017. The BBC came to film this poignant event and the well-known BBC journalist Steve Humphrey interviewed Johnny in School House, which was aired on BBC South later that day. We were delighted that he was also able to attend Foundation Day the following year, as we know that the Lord Wandsworth Foundation was close to his heart.



RIP George 'Johnny' Johnson, you will be missed by the whole LWC Community.