

Recollections of Huyton Hill School 1955-1961

By John West

I'm sure that Mum's death must have been Dad's reason for sending us to boarding school. He just didn't know what to do with us. I found some old letters many years later, one from Hubert Butler commiserating with Dad, saying that he was sure he'd done the right thing sending us, saying we'd be well looked after and wishing him well with his business. There were some of our letters to him as well. Very boring, we did this on Monday, then on Tuesday we did that. I would like to see them again now though, just the same. I remember once dad wrote to me 'for a little boy who talks so much you don't write a lot.'

Either just before or just after Mum died, Dad asked us if we wanted to go to boarding school. I was lying on the morning room floor (we lived in a big house) reading a comic and Andy was sitting at the table reading a book. I gave a noncommittal shrug. Andy said 'no'. Dad didn't say anything else.

Soon after that he took us on a trip up the lakes. He told us we must be on our best behaviour, and call anybody we met 'sir'. We visited Huyton Hill. Major Butler showed us round and took us for a walk in the grounds. We went up past Red India and up the back drive, then back down to the lake. Jeep and Rusty the golden Labradors came with us. Jeep was born on June 6th 1944, hence the name. He died in about 1957 I think. Was he there when you were?

It may be a false memory, but I'm sure the old pier was still there. I think it must have been, because I can remember being very disappointed with the new one - flat and boring!

Major B was fabulous, flashing eyes behind National Health wiry specs, playing with the dogs, entertaining us. When we got back to the car, Dad asked if we'd called him Sir. No, we hadn't called him anything, we'd been too shy.

On the way home Dad asked us if we'd like to go there on holiday. It was the most beautiful house I'd ever seen (and still is). We were suckered straight in! I adored and respected Major Butler ever after.

We visited Kendal Milne's for our uniforms and I played on the escalators. We had our feet x-rayed for shoe size. I thought it was the most wonderful store in the world. When we packed our trunks, I learnt to tie a bow with the cord of my new dressing gown. I remember packing the white shorts, which we wore for best, as well as the grey. Dad's Mother, who lived with us, looked after us. We always called her Nanny. My Grandfather had died a couple of years before.

I was still six when we started, spring term 1955. I was put into the 'playroom'. Andy started in Set 3 I think. I don't remember him being in the playroom. I stayed in set 1 at the start of the new school year in September. Most unfair I thought. Peter Webber joined then, among others. He started in set 2, but he was exactly a year older than me. His birthday was April 4, 1947, mine April 4, 1948. I remember John Moor and Barry Austin in the Playroom. I think Barry left early, maybe even before you arrived.

Mrs McCracken wasn't there then. The class teacher for the playroom was a blonde young woman. I can't remember her name. She taught us French. I liked her. We did a translation thing which included a family called the Desgranges. I asked what the name meant - she ummed for a moment & then said 'the Barnes's, I suppose'. Odd what you remember. I can't think of her name, but I remember that.

I slept in Catbells with the nightlight, and the adjoining door. Andrew Calvert? Used to play Annie Lawrie on the harp in Mr B's apartment and you could hear it through the door.

Peter Lord was there, easily baited. Aren't boys horrible (though I have discovered since having my gorgeous daughter, boys are simpler than girls, girls are deeper thinking!) The poor boy was often reduced to standing and tutting, with tears rolling down his face. I seem to remember Edward Bunting being there. I once hid his sports clothes under his pillow before games as a joke - then forgot, until he came out late, not

having found them, to explain to the teacher. I suddenly remembered my joke. In my defence, I confessed immediately. I think I got -20. The teacher had a better sense of humour than me.

My first term, I developed chronic blisters. The treatment for this was methylated spirits. It didn't seem to work on me. I couldn't go on the long walks which seemed to be the main exercise for the younger classes. Two by two, holding hands. There was a cook called Connie and she would pick me up and cuddle me and carry me out for miles after the others had gone. In hindsight she obviously knew about my Mum and was giving me some love. Fifty years on, I could cry for those two little boys who were us, but at the time we didn't know.

I remember John Giles's first arrival, by taxi, bossing the taxi driver about, telling him what to do with the trunk. A bunch of us were watching from Langdale or Catbells. You may have been there, David Heppenstall (Heppinstall?) was I think.

I once woke in Catbells having had a nightmare. Dad and Andy and I were driving by a lake and I felt apprehensive. I asked Dad what the lake was called. He replied 'Hell water'. I awoke petrified. At least the night light was on. I didn't think to go for anybody, I just lay there trembling.

I moved on to Langdale. We told stories at night. I always liked 'peaceful' stories. They often revolved around films or TV (do you still call it TV? I'm awfully old fashioned, I hate the expression 'Telly'). I can remember inventing one story around a film we'd seen where some kids parachuted out of a plane. We'd all been disgusted by the fact that they'd used the same parachute shot for each kid jumping. I think I may have been Patrick Morgan's shadow, but again, maybe a false memory. What a lovely boy.

At breakfast you could have butter or marmalade, but not both. Ah the austerity. Weren't we skinny. The only even slightly overweight boy I can remember was Harvey Graves. Before he arrived, Michael Graves and Alan Ferguson spent a term where Alan kept asking Michael questions, and vice-versa, with Michael pretending to be Harvey, and appalled at what was expected of him. I guess Harvey had had a good home life!

Actually the food was pretty good, (although we always complained about it). I was always hungry, give me your fat Roydsy, I'll finish it. You were obviously spoilt at home boy! There was a 'bread and cheese' plant up the steep path from the lake. I always picked the leaves and ate them.

I think I only spent about one term in Dollywagon, but I remember an epidemic where they put us there. God, that Yoicks, Tally Ho got boring after a while. We did some under over weaving on little cardboard templates with wool to keep us occupied. Mrs Winnarick was Matron when I first arrived. Her son Michael was at the school. I don't remember a Mr Winnarick. For some reason, I think he was Canadian and he'd gone back to Canada. Mrs Winnarick took my temperature and said I couldn't have anything to eat that day. They really starved a fever in those days. I burst into tears. I was hungry! By the evening, I was desperate. I persuaded Peter Lord to come with me down to the Kitchen while staff supper was on. We found some oatcakes and rushed back up with them. I wolfed them down.

There was a loose piece of parquet in the Pantry. Andy hid a lock of Stuart Harrison's sister's hair there that she'd given him. It may still be there for all I know.

I was once ill with something and isolated in Wray. Alone for many hours I used to wish my Dad was rich enough to have the doctors bring my Mum back to life. I thought it was possible. I guess he probably wished something similar himself.

I think the morning routine began at 7.30 in Catbells. I remember saying to the prefect who was getting us up that he was lucky, getting to stay in his dressing gown until the end. He explained that if he hadn't been on that duty he'd have had an extra half hour in bed. Not so lucky after all! The evening routine was a bit similar in that Catbells started first, at a difficult to believe time of 6.00pm! 'Stop talking time' at 7.00 I think. We were all impressed with the top dorms stop talking time of 10.00pm.

The bathroom wall was decorated with a Claude Harrison Mural of a paddle steamer and a smiling sun with rays. I used to steal Peter Webber's Punch and Judy toothpaste. I didn't mind the morning baths. It was a point adding chore to fill the cold baths at night. If you added hot to speed the process, everybody said that made them colder in the morning. Illogical, but that was the received wisdom. Occasionally, tadpoles would come out of the taps.

I was in Catbells holding forth about something and swore. 'Bloody estate work' or some such. Mrs B heard me through the connecting door and knew my voice. She had Major B investigate. Luckily for me she hadn't heard exactly what I'd said except for the bloody. I lied straight faced to her and Major B. I got away with it too! That's a part of what makes me think she had Alzheimer's. Major B was prepared to take my word against hers. As I said, she often seemed vague.

There was once a rash of graffiti in the outside lavatory opposite the steps by the kitchen. Nobody would own up and the teacher wouldn't give up. Brett Harris (he was probably the main culprit!) suggested we each own up to a bit to it. We all agreed, just to get closure. I hadn't done any of it, and we then found out that we had to go and show which bit we had done. I was now worried that I'd get into trouble for lying about something I hadn't done. The punishment was loss of so many days' tuck. Peter Webber wouldn't own up to something he hadn't done. He ate his tuck while we didn't.

Peter Fletcher came from Hoylake in the Wirral. He spoke nicely, but there was a bit of Liverpool in the way he pronounced 'were' as 'ware'. His parents owned a TV business - Derwent Television. His maternal Grandfather owned a toffee factory. I think the youngest Fletcher was David, but I might be wrong.

You mentioned bonfire night. There was a bonfire every year. Major B constructed a 3 legged horse and boom, and the guy was lowered into the fire on the end of a string, and raised up again, burning brightly. They sometimes put bangers in his pockets, which would go off at intervals. The Estate work in October and November was collecting brush wood to build it, then seeing how many days it could be kept going. Major B. kept a chart, with comparisons with previous years. While I was there, Peter's Grandfather provided treacle toffees every year.

Peter Webber was from Sheffield. He was good at everything he did. Like Jeremy Paton, he had loose fingers on the piano. His mother had shown him how to 'vamp' any tune. He could bowl and bat and was good at rugby. Clever too.

When I was 15, I cycled up to Huyton Hill in the holidays. Major B was there, and Miss Blake. They gave me tea in the little kitchen in the private apartments. I asked Major B why we had never played against other schools. He said the only time they'd tried it was swimming. Huyton Hill had beaten the other school so comprehensively that they weren't even invited for a rematch. Of course we spent the summers in the lake didn't we. However, the real reason was that Major B didn't like the way that sport made heroes of people. His example was Peter Webber. 'Remember how everybody hero-worshipped him!'. He said that he felt there was enough of that when you got to public school.

Andy and I had a massive model railway. I received 'The Duchess of Montrose' for my seventh birthday. I later sold it to Stuart Ellison when we changed to 2 rail instead of 3. Our 2 rail layout was never as magnificent as the 3 rail.

Peter Webber had a bigger layout than Andy and me. I was desperate to see it and play with it. Somehow the suggestion came up that I spend half term with him. I liked that idea, and in my weekly letter asked Dad's permission to go. How casually hurtful a seven year old can be! The mistress whose name I can't remember called me out to the front when she read all our letters and gently pointed out that Dad hadn't seen me for 6 weeks. I never did get to see Peter's railway.

In what must have been 1958, Manchester United failed to win the cup after crashing at Munich in the winter - you'll remember better than me, being from the capital of Lancashire! I think it was Stuart Fisher

and Timothy Bradshaw and some other boys, maybe you were there, rugby tackled miss ? in the field between the gamekeeper's cottage & Wray church, where we used to build dens with bracken and mess with frogspawn in the pools near the stream.

Major Butler dealt with this severely. I was there, but not involved. The poem going around afterwards was 'Fee fee fi fi fo fo fum, Maggie's whacks don't half hurt your bum!' I didn't get the whacks.

I don't remember any other corporal punishment, except to say that somehow Peter Lord once drove Mr Newby into a furious temper and he beat him severely up on the old tennis court where we used to play cricket. He chased him with a thorny rose bush. I'm sure he beat his bare back until it bled. Difficult to imagine now.

I didn't realise Mr Newby had been a captain, I thought he'd been a sergeant. Major Butler seemed occasionally quite sniffy about rank. Called him 'Newby' when talking about him. Treated as NCO rather than commissioned!

I later learnt that Mr Newby's father had been a 'boots' or similar in many of the local big houses, and Mr Newby was rather taken with their ways and emulated them in speech and manners.

His pipe was cracked at the front, where it faced the wind when he rode to school. I tried to copy the style of his signature, and my cheque signing is now a caricature of his beautifully written WHN. My writing is almost illegible, hence the typing.

I remember asking if anyone had seen Maggie B. I was on the landing outside the bathroom. Major B had been on the landing above. He came down apoplectic. 'What did you call me?' I stuttered 'MMMajor BBBButler, Sir.'

'You did not!' He said. But his anger had dissolved, perhaps seeing how frightened I was. He just turned and walked away.

My first Hercules, I went round diligently, balancing the brush on my hand, so it poked above the Crossley windows for everyone to see in assembly. After what seemed an age I returned to the boiler room. Harry Hinch looked at me suspiciously. 'You didn't take very long.' (I thought I'd been ages). 'You sure you cleaned the steps properly?'

Timothy Bradshaw always seemed to have money to buy Smasher bars and Palm toffee from Mr Hinch. Tim's father smoked endless cigars. (I think he owned Loxhams, the Jaguar and Rolls Royce dealer in Preston.) I've loved the smell of cigar smoke ever since, though I've never smoked.

Harry Hinchcliffe got the sack after some money disappeared from Miss Curtis's room to the right on the top floor. Where the coloured glass skylight let light into the private apartment.

A year or so later we were in Ambleside and he was working on a road gang. We all politely said hello, then sniggered behind his back.

Peter Lord and I discovered a wooden boat in the woodwork shop up at the Kitchen Garden. We christened it the Hinchcliften, (we pronounced it with the i's like y's) and sailed it in an old bath up there.

In the Autumn there was an endless supply of good apples (forbidden of course) from the trees near the woodwork shop.

Miss Curtis and miss ? appeared about the same time. Perhaps while I was in Helvellyn. 9 or 10. We showed them our models and they went into Ambleside and bought some. Theirs were London to Brighton style cars, not our Spitfires and Hurricanes. They made a perfect job, and came into Helvellyn after lights out to show us.

Miss ? insisted you keep a straight back at the table. Woe betide (that was a WHN expression) any boy slouching. I knew her parents were abroad, I didn't know Turkey. I think her father was a diplomat. Major B told us she was one of the most entertaining members of staff they'd ever had at the staff suppers.

They went round together. 'We think so-and-so, don't we Miss Curtis.' 'Yes we do miss ?.'

The member of staff at the end of one table was Miss Swindales. LS. Linda Swindales. She howled when we said we thought it stood for Lady Snail.

Mr Huttner's marriage was the talk of the neighbourhood around Newby Bridge where they'd got married. My Mother's family was from Haverthwaite and we often used to stay with my aunty in the holidays. Exactly what was peculiar about their marriage I can't remember, but news of how odd it was had filtered around all the villages.

We asked Mrs Huttner for translations of the German songs, Like Polka Mein Chatz, but she just laughed and said they were silly.

Another of the staff - I think she helped Miss Walker, was Miss Lascelles. Major Butler used to despise Miss Walker's lipstick. He hated the way it would be left on the cups.

There was another female teacher who lived at Elterwater. She used to cycle in. She once carefully explained to us in set 4 that space travel was impossible because rockets needed the air to push against. We were terribly disappointed. I remembered her in the summer of '69, 'when a man named Armstrong, walked upon the moon'.

A popular birthday record request was 'Chinese record number one' or two or whatever – they weren't musical to our ears, but they were good for a laugh. In Summer we had the test match all lunch. That meant no talking. I can't remember many 'phrases' either, but the one the day before the end of term was always *Ibimus Domum Cras*.

The first couple of lines of the second verse of the school song were:

Danes over wold and fen, Britain encumber,
Scarcely a thousand men , Alfred can number,
Can't remember. Can't remember.

The song was written by Mr Butler and a student from before our time. Mr B said the boy had been very talented musically, sorry, don't remember the name.

Talking about musically talented, I also went out for a day in the holidays with John Nevin, he was good on the piano wasn't he. They lived in Brazil, and rented a caravan at the bottom of the lake. He also said he'd been on a bus in Rio de Janeiro once and Neil Sedaka had got on. I liked John very much.

What happened to John Proctor? He's not in the photos, but he was there a long time.

One evening we were taken out on the lake by Major Butler's friend Mr Pattinson, a builder in Windermere. He had restored 'The Esperance' and we ran down to Windermere and back.

The boat was built for Henry William Schneider, who found the iron ore that made the town of Barrow. He also built the iron and steel works – all gone now, but in Schneider's day, the biggest in the world.

Schneider was preceded every morning by his butler, who carried a large, silver domed tray, from the back door of his house Belsfield, to where the steamer piers are today. He ate his breakfast as he cruised down the

lake on the Esperance. His private train took him from lakeside straight to his office in Barrow Steelworks. This would be about 1880.

My Dad was 43 when I was born, and Nanny was born in 1880, so she must have been 75 when she started looking after us again. Dad was well off but careful. He would buy us expensive toys, but we didn't get anything new until the old was well worn out. Among other things, he had a lady repair the worn out elbows of my pullover by reknitting the sleeves. The wool was a slightly different shade of grey. I learnt the hard way that you should make sure your child's things are the same as any other's. If Penny wants Reeboks because everyone else wears Reeboks, she gets them. But then, her Mum knows that, as would have mine I suppose.

There was an epidemic of glandular fever in the hot Summer of '56. We were isolated in Helvellyn. In bed day and night for weeks. Anthony Stansfield ruled the dorm. He insisted that we younger kids gave him food. Mainly toast I think. He managed to persuade Peter Lord to wee on my flannel. I was terribly upset. Everyone else thought it hilarious. Peter and I were quite good friends anyway. He and I were going to buy the miniature railway at Blackpool pleasure beach. I think we had £15.00 between us & wondered if it would be enough.

Miss Walker once took me in her bubble car to Windermere to the dentists. I must have had toothache, it wasn't a normal outing.

When there was a floodlit review, the younger dorms were sent to bed for the afternoon. Music was played through the loudspeaker system. 'The triumphant march into Aida' was one of the tunes played.

In set 3 we started Latin, with Major B. My 'Eating Briber' was a particularly moth eaten copy. The page with the declension (is that the right word?) of Amo, Amas, Amat, was missing, but I didn't realise and thought I was just thick, until Major B became particularly tired of telling me where to look and grabbed the book off me and realised what was wrong.

Dams on the dam stream were bequeathed. The best was the big one in the middle, which Richard Heppenstall bequeathed to David. It had good clay pipes and could mount a massive 'rush'. Robert Ashton and I started a new dam further up. Were you involved, or were you with Heppy's dam? I can't remember. It was too near a tree to be as big as David's but we could start quite a good rush, which would then be held and released by each dam in turn.

One day when we were damming, in wellies, T shirts and blue bags, Andy came running up to tell me that our aunt Nell (my mother's sister) and uncle Jack had come to visit and we could go out with them for an hour. Mr B was with them when I got down there. He obviously didn't approve of unannounced visitors. I asked if I could go and change. He said no, you can go as you are. So we went off into Ambleside. We went into a café, but I wasn't very comfortable in my wellies. Years later I realised how daunting it must have been for my uncle, who lived in a council house, to go up that drive and knock on that door. He was a truck driver for Geo. C. Croasdale at Haverthwaite, driving a huge log wagon. We used to go with him to Wigan and Keighley on day trips in the Summer holidays. My dad had had a removals firm, and as a 5 year old I can remember going out in the big vans as well. You can start to see where I got this love of trucks from.

After Jeep died, Major B got a new dog that you mentioned, Trigger. He was young and lively. Unfortunately Trigger liked chasing sheep. Major Butler told us that a farmer had become fed up with it and shot him. We were indignant and devastated in equal measure, but of course he had been entitled to shoot him. Soon after this it snowed. Someone 'walked' the name Trigger in huge letters in the snow on the front lawn that could be seen from the upstairs dorms. How upset we all were.

That may have been the term John Hargreaves's dad came in his lorry to pick him up the day before the end of term. I think they had a fruit and veg merchants in Lancaster. We were all jealous of him going home early. I seem to remember snow falling.

Talking of snow, in about 1958, Sir Vivian Fuchs took an expedition to the Antarctic. The school was very interested in it and the sixth form did some sort of project on it. I can remember the pictures on the dais in the corner of the library. I think Martin Scriven was involved in it in some way, but why I connect his name to it I've no idea. There were large caterpillar tracked snowmobiles among the equipment. The highlight for me was a headline in the Times – 'Sir Vivian Fuchs off to the Antarctic'.

I remember Miss Blake's teaching of tables in set 3. Alan Read arrived about then and was able to recite them so quickly that we all burst out laughing. Blakey wasn't amused at our reaction and became all the more determined that we all learnt our tables as well as Alan.

She taught maths in set 4, but had a bad habit of going through things and asking if everyone understood. Everybody stayed silent even if they hadn't. We'd seen her demolish Brett Harris when he'd put his hand up once. 'Well which bit don't you understand?' Since he didn't understand it he didn't know which bit. After she'd thoroughly humiliated him, nobody else would raise their head above the parapet.

Miss Blake and Miss Nash walking around together used to prompt the rhyme 'Fatty and skinny went walking one day, Fatty blew up and blew Skinny away'.

From St. Bees, Colin Entwistle took me on our bikes to Miss Nash's little house in Seascale. He seemed very familiar with it – presumably this was after you and he had met her. She made us tea and told us all the Huyton Hill gossip, none of which I can remember now. You and I seem to have led parallel lives, I also stayed with Colin at his house in Whalley in the Summer of '61. I neglected to send his parents a letter of thanks afterwards, and could have crawled under a stone when I met them at St. Bees. Colin and I did a lot of cycling together at St. Bees, going as far as Grange one 3Q day, and Gretna Green another.

Colin was much less shy than me. We cycled to Keswick one Sunday, He invited himself and me to Bryson's house where we had tea, then cadged a lift, bikes and all back to school. I squirmed with embarrassment. Colin didn't.

I also stayed with Roger Whittaker in the Summer of '61. His Dad had a hotel at Carnforth. We went into Morecambe among other things, and they had two lovely little kittens. Both Andy and I stayed in irregular touch with Roger. He is now retired, after working for Bells whisky for many years.

In 1964 I went through to see him on my scooter. Robert Ashton lived nearby at Bentham, so we went to visit him. His parents invited us to stop for dinner. Roger made no secret of the fact that he found Robert's sister very attractive, so his mum put us one either side of her for dinner. Time for me to squirm again!

Robert came from Canada. His parents immediately put in central heating because it was so cold. They of course won the sackful of logs at the Unicef garden fete you mentioned. I remember standing under a cut out elephant in swimming trunks for a photo. Water was pumped up and sprayed from its trunk. There was a circular sign which said 'We made £666 pounds last time, lets make it £999.' I can't remember how it worked, but you somehow turned it upside down to complete the message.

At one rehearsal for the floodlit review (renamed the rainbow review for a couple of years, with a big wooden rainbow, L'arc en ciel, in front of the Crossley) I was fooling about with my spade, for the estate work parade, balancing it on my hand. It suddenly fell forward and split Edward Coulson's head open. Another -20. Not very pleasant for Edward either!

Mr Newby said knowingly to Brig oz one time when they started the bridge over the river Kwai march, 'We used to sing different words to this'. I think we did as well.

I'm not much into classical music, but I've always liked Elgar since the Changing houses ceremonies. The 1st & 4th movements of Pomp and Circumstance transport me back instantly, as I'm sure they do to you.

At another floodlit review, Heppy, I think Ian Kraunsoe, and I, recited Lewis Carroll's 'The walrus and the carpenter'. Where they start to eat the crabs, we started eating bread. It went very well as I remember, all the parents laughed.

When you wanted to progress from the boating pool to swimming off the pier, you had to do a supervised swim to the boom. John Quiggin went with me. Around the pier it was clear to the stony bottom. As you got nearer to the boom, you could see the weed waving about and the water getting deeper. I swam to the boom alright, but then realised I was well out of my depth, and oh God, that weed frightened me. I panicked, let go of the boom and grabbed John Quiggin. He went under, but then calmed me and got me to the boating pool. Of course I could soon touch bottom and was alright again. About half the school witnessed this. I wasn't allowed to swim from the pier until the next year. So when Philip Walker and others were swimming out to The Whistle, the thought of the weed in that bay made it impossible for me.

Phil Walker's parents were in Bahrain. I remember him coming back to school with odd smatterings of Arabic. Maffi Benzino. No petrol.

As well as the bugle I also learned the trumpet. Mr Thornborough took us. He used to love to talk about his army days, and we could quickly get him to get out an Atlas and show us where they had marched across the Egyptian western desert.

He gave us rides, in turn, on the pillion of his motorcycle, along the causeway and up the hill to next to the garage.

My last term, I was very homesick, which I had never been before. Dad had got married again and I suppose I liked having a mum again. I took being a prefect far too seriously and made myself thoroughly unpopular. I could sometimes be rather sarcastic. If I remember rightly, you had quite a sharp wit yourself. Because I was house captain I was also captain of the house cricket team. In the house match, I kept bowling at Michael Cheetham and he kept hitting me for runs. I kept thinking I'd get him out next ball. I didn't. Alfred won easily. There was silence around me for a week.

Mr B was absent a lot that last term, and Major B too sometimes. Colin and I seemed to be out in the school boat a lot, unsupervised. We once rowed very hard, right round the island. Nobody saw us. We also cycled out of bounds, up the drive and to what was then a little shop on the left towards Hawkshead, in between the front and back drive. We bought chewing gum. The lady just served us and didn't comment on what we were doing at all.

One time we went for a secret swim, almost directly in front of the Crossley. There were a few of us. We were hidden from the school by the bushes. It shelved away steeply there, very dangerous. Peter Lord suddenly disappeared from view and was gone. Someone, I think it may have been Malcolm Houghton, dove down, grabbed his hair and pulled him back before he was gone for ever. He came back coughing and spluttering.

St. Bees was a new start for me and I liked the comparative freedom of 'Meadow'. I made lots of friends there. I liked Rugby, which as you say, may have helped.

Stirling Priestley moved to St. Bees with me. I worried a bit about that, but 'Jack' was a friend. He mentioned to Jonathan Roberts that I had become unpopular at Huyton Hill. We were talking about it, he just shrugged and said 'that's all gone, isn't it'. It was too.

When I was on school house I finished up in one dorm in the bed nearest the door. This put me nominally in charge of the dorm. One evening I was taken out by a prefect and given a dressing down for not keeping order in the dorm. I just said, sorry, I'll swap beds if you like, but I'm not being in charge. I wasn't going there again.

The only thing I hated about St. Bees was the 'corps'. I thoroughly detested Tuesdays. It seemed to me that only the weirdos and the creeps actually liked it (you're going to tell me it was the only bit you liked now, aren't you!) I left St. Bees when I was sixteen, and that got me out of camp. I couldn't have been more glad. I would have done anything to get out of that!

I was going to be articled to an accountant's, but didn't want to. I made the mistake of saying I wouldn't mind going back into the fifth form at the local grammar, to get physics and chemi, then go into the sixth form there. I didn't do a thing all year. I'd discovered girls, I had my scooter, I was home every night. At the end of the year I decided to get a job in the tax office with Andy. He liked it. Ironically I passed physics & chemi!

I've only actually visited Huyton Hill once since that day on my bike, although as I said I always look over the lake at it. It was about 1979. I was home from Saudi. I was out in the car with my first wife, Lynda. We just called in. Miss Shuttleworth was there and showed us round. There was a lovely picture of Mr. B on top of a mountain (Loughrigg?) by Claude Harrison in Mr B's bedroom above the Crossley.

When I got divorced I wrote and asked about renting Major B's cottage down at Pull Wyke, but it had already gone for the period I wanted. I realised it would be too far from my social life in Barrow anyway, so I didn't pursue it.

As with your caveat, apologies for any false memories or repetitions either of my own or your words. My recollections, as before, are personal, done basically for my own and, I hope, your enjoyment. If I start to bore you, you can always bin it!

I'm looking forward to the pictures of the fete. You must have been delighted to find the one of your mother. I remember that it was, unusually, a hot sunny day. I was amazed at the amount of visitors.

That was interesting about Bill Newby, if I'd ever known any of it I'd forgotten. I knew he always did the Scottish country dancing, The dashing white sergeant, Strip the willow etc. I can still do the 'setting step'. He had a fine singing voice and often sang when we were building the cricket pitch. I can hear him now 'Some day I'm going to write the story of my life'.

An older boy with a happy smiling face called David Jackson brought cigarette papers back to school and crushed dried Rhododendron leaves to make cigarettes which he then sold for tuck. Revolting!

For one floodlight review M. Huttner taught us La Marseillaise. I can still sing it now.

I've been thinking about the chicken pox outbreak. When it had been underway for a week or two, I was in the bathroom with Philip Walker and I think, Miss Byron. Philip was diagnosed. Miss Byron went out of the room. Philip said 'shall I give it to you, it'll get you off loads of school' (exactly how he was going to pass it on I don't know). I said no thanks. Although we still had lessons, the regime was much relaxed and quite enjoyable compared to the normal strictness. Oddly enough I didn't catch the German measles either.

We used to like Ted Pares woodwork, didn't we. He used to go to the pictures and tell us the movie plots. He saw 'Dorian Gray' one week and delighted in giving us the gory details of how, at the end, as the light swung between the painting and the body, the face changed from one to the other. By the end of term only about half the class would have finished their table or cigar box or whatever without Ted's expert 'finishing'! I can't remember what the basis of the classes were for woodwork, but I only remember a few students with him at a time.

I remember John Holden. When Andy was in his last year, the day the older boys were going to 'do' Scaffell, Mr B found out there had been some stealing from the kitchens. He immediately stopped the trip and everyone was quizzed about what they'd taken or 'received'. Only 2 boys, John Holden and I think David Cade or Stuart Harrison, professed their complete innocence. They were allowed to go fishing for the day. Even my brother Andy, who is as honest as the day is long, confessed to receiving one sugar lump. The

guilty spent the day writing lines about stealing. The irony was that the person from whom Andy had received the sugar lump was John Holden!

Major B's morality is illustrated by the following. Someone received a parcel. A discussion took place at Major B's table in the dining room about parcel rates and letter rates, and Major B said that if you sent a parcel, you mustn't include a letter, or you would have to send it at letter rate instead of parcel rate. I naively asked him 'But how would anybody know?'

'You would know.' He replied.

I can't honestly say I've lived up to his standards. At St Bees, it was common for people to steal minor pieces of equipment from the changing rooms. Andy was complaining to me that he'd had to buy three sets of laces for his gym shoes in a month. He was horrified when I said "Andy, if somebody steals your laces, you steal someone else's". I would never have stolen someone else's if mine had broken, but if they disappeared as Andy's had done, I would. Odd in retrospect.

I don't remember whether we actually marched to Wray Church, my memory of it is similar to yours. We definitely went every alternate week. If it was dry we went up the back drive, turn left down that little path and through the narrow brown gate in the wall. Across what I've suddenly remembered we called Wray field. Past where we used to build dens and over the little stream near the farm (Low Wray Farm I suppose). If it was wet we had to stay on the road all the way. What a drag. When you got there the choir sat in the cross benches at the front, but your memory of how we sat in the pews is better than mine. The House Captain was given 1 shilling, Vice-Captain sixpence and Prefect a threepenny bit for the collection. After the service, the senior boys and Major B stood around at the back of the Church and talked to Rev. Lindsay. It was traditional for someone to ask him what SPQR on the Roman Soldier's flag on the stained glass window at the front meant, and just as traditional for him to laugh and say that we should be whipped for not knowing. I remember the rose hips and finding blackberries on the way back.

Andy has said that Rev. Lindsay's typewriter obviously needed cleaning and one of his Roneo'd order of services read 'Lot us go honco.....' which he found amusing, but Major B not so amused when Andy pointed it out.

I hated going. One week I feigned stomach ache and convinced Mrs Winnarick. I had a lovely time in the Riley reading comics. When they came back, Mrs Winnarick asked how my tummy ache was. I nearly said 'what tummy ache?' She knew I'd been faking, and I knew that she knew. I didn't try it again.

Rev. Lindsay always invigilated the Common Entrance exam. His desk went in the corner by the 'museum' rather than in Mr B's usual place. He smoked a pipe.

Stewart Sutcliffe was a great photographer. I'm sure Andrew Seddon's Dad was a photographer as well. He always seemed to have lots of out of date film.

I thought Nigel had gone on to St. Bees. I can remember meeting you two when I was there and you were still at Huyton Hill, it must have been half term at HH and you must have been visiting? We met on the drive that ran from the road down to school house and the new block. If St Bees was dire for you what was Rannoch like for Nigel. Just looking at the map they can never have seen the sun up there!

I don't think I was quite as into railways as much as Peter Lord, but I loved our layout. We went camping in a caravan when I was about twelve. We parked up next to the main London/Glasgow line near Biggar, The real Duchess of Montrose went by pulling about 12 coaches. I felt an incredible sense of possession!

I cannot tell you how jealous I am of your wonderful description of being in the 'Back Squad'. By Sunday night a little cloud formed over my head at the thought of the coming Tuesday. I would go down to the changing rooms to clean my kit, then say 'oh bummer it, I'll do it tomorrow', then not do it on Monday either. I used to get into awful trouble (from Hedley of Hostel I think) for not doing my kit. Someone suggested you

could 'oil' your toecaps to make them shine. Like a fool I tried it. What a mess! Jonathan Roberts would stand next to me, immaculate, with perfectly shined boots – what a contrast! Luckily my bugle playing helped, I was in one of those teams that did a display on speech day. That got me out of some things.

Tim DeGruyther on Grindal was hot on the army. He was from Ulverston. His Dad was the vicar. I stood next to him in 'shed'. He used to chew gum. As with Harry Hinch I expected him to be struck down! I met him again in Saudi. Unlike me he kept his beautiful accent.

I was very lucky at St. Bees. My second term Robert Astin arrived. I was the St. Bees equivalent of his shadow. We were immediate best friends and stayed that way. Though I've only ever seen him once since. Robert was a wonderful cricketer. He was in the first team opening the batting when we were sixteen. I always expected him to play for Yorkshire (he was from Mytholmroyd). By then I'd accepted that my hand/eye coordination was never going to make a batsman of me. I kept score in the pavilion.

The other thing I was lucky about, although you may disagree, following your comment on choral evensong, was being told by Andy to avoid the choir at all costs. He said that it took up your every spare minute. I had quite a decent voice until it broke, but I sang way out of tune at the audition we all had to take, where Don explained that he only got one or two terms out of the younger students so it was obligatory. I liked the Priory services as well.

Wasn't Radio Caroline a joy! Before that, radios were only allowed on at certain times and it was quite strictly policed. When Caroline started I think they gave up trying – we were all just going to listen to it anyway, and we did! I always felt we were the first generation that stopped doing as we were told without question. (But perhaps not at HH).

Roger Seward was from Barrow. Blind as a bat without his glasses. He was hitch hiking back to Barrow in about '74 and I gave him a lift in my truck from Leven's bridge. He was working at the BBC doing the mixing desks for radio 2 DJ's Apparently Sam Costa was nervous before every programme and they had to gee him up like a new starter each day. Never seen Roger since. I noticed his name in BBC TV credits for a few years, but not recently.

Sorry, I'll stop going on about St. Bees. God I'm a boring old fart aren't I.

Red India was the huge tree and the area round it where you go up the back drive from the front drive and another path which starts I cannot remember where, meets it from the left – maybe that was the proper back drive? In my mind's eye I can see the path going down through the rhododendrons, but can't think it any further than that. Anyway this tree was either a massive oak or a copper beech. It must have been big in Cromwell's time. I think you mention it in your book, but not by name.

I think John Nevin probably went back to South America.

I remember a possibly apocryphal tale about Mrs B. She had attempted to beat a boy who had done something, but used the only thing to hand, a feather duster. Major B found out and sternly asked the boy what had gone on. He'd replied 'She tickled my arse with a feather duster, sir'. Major B reportedly burst out laughing.

Smasher bars, Palm Toffee, Banana split was a favourite of mine, a bit like palm toffee, but with a yellow, banana tasting, side or filling (probably full of e numbers, delicious!). We also used to get rolls of Mackintosh's toffees. Chocolate filled sticks of twisted hard toffee, can't remember what they were called. (Chocstix?) Barley sugar twists the same size. Pastilles and fruit gums. Chocolate not so popular, it went too quickly! God help anyone who used to try and eat their tuck in Major B's lessons. One sugar lump with the tea, could be eaten or put in your tea.

I'm sorry, my only real memory of Miss Swindales is the little snapshot of the Lady Snail business. That was in the dining room. She had her back to the main dining room entrance. What her position in the school was – no idea.

The introduction to the French phrase at lunch was always 'La phrase Francaise d'aujourd'hui veut dire'. If your voice took on a sing song as you said it, and quite a few did, it seems to lend itself to it, Major B would stop you and make you say it again. Public Humiliation.

I can't remember the Latin introduction.

Major B once interrupted someone announcing a record as composed or conducted – I can't remember which, by Mark Webber. 'Oh no!' rang out Major B's voice, 'Marek Weber' (with the W pronounced as a V).

My recollection of the games kit inspection is similar to yours. Each day before lunch, a senior boy would inspect the 'boot rooms' down in the basement. He made a list of people whose kit was untidy. He then rang the bell at lunch. It always seemed to be announced in French. Something like 'Les garcons suivant sont prier d'aller ranger les affaires'. They had to get up and go and tidy their kit. They also lost points.

We had a George Formby film 'It's in the air'. Alan Read adjusted the words to the song, 'It's in the air, sont prier d'aller ranger les affaires'

Other Films. The Titfield Thunderbolt. Chain Lightning, with Humphrey Bogart. The Lavender Hill Mob. All the Ealing comedies probably, certainly Passport to Pimlico. The Magnet. The Iron Duke (about Wellington, The actor who played him looked rather like Major B). The Dam Busters.

Major B was very sarcastic about Ken Dodd, a fellow Liverpudlian. Said he wasn't funny at all. Then one week he sang. Suddenly Major B's opinion changed. At first he grudgingly confessed that he had a lovely singing voice. Eventually he was laughing at Ken Dodd's jokes as much as we did, as we sat cross legged on the Crossley floor behind that very advanced for its time projector TV.

I think the choir was Mr B's baby. Nicholas Morris had a particularly good voice and I seem to remember Mr B teaching us all 'oh for the wings of a dove', but really enjoying Nicholas doing it as a solo.

I just remember Malcolm Houghton's older brother, Martin, he was there for my first few terms. Malcolm as a farm boy knew all about sex. He started to explain it to us aged about eight. David Heppenstall asked him loudly in the middle of lunch whether you were able to get new balls if you lost one.

Anthony Robinson, who gloried in the nickname 'turdy', lived at the Sun hotel at Coniston (I think he still does). At the time his mother ran it. Donald Campbell used to stay there when he was attempting his speed records. Lucky you, seeing him there. If you ever get the chance to see a TV movie 'across the lake'. Tony and his Mum (played by actors) feature throughout.

John Cade taught at HH in the late sixties, I met him once. He said that when Major B died, the discipline died with him and the place just didn't run any more. Write and nag him, he must be full of tales towards the end. My Dad died from a heart attack following an operation to remove his leg after a thrombosis. David Cade performed the op. He was at the local hospital in Barrow. 1976.

The most envied boats in the boating pool were electrically powered 'Vospers'. Plastic copies of the famous MTB. If one of these got over the boom it could get across to Waterhead. No radio control then of course. I think Major B would reluctantly get the boat out and go after them. I had a wooden yacht which I called 'the gleaner' after a boat in one of Percy F Westerman's novels.

I think you're right about the top dorms. The first you went into was Loughrigg, first right and first left at the top of the stairs. Maybe 4 beds, three along the right wall and one facing you from the door. Next was Skiddaw, opposite (nicknamed skid over the door – maybe that was only me!). Maybe one bed against the

far wall and three beds with ends against the door wall. Memories of Friday night is music night and SNOL Saturday night on the Light played over the loudspeaker system. I also remember listening to Round the Horne.

Next I think was Bowfell, first door on the left at the top of the stairs. Four beds facing you and one on the left inside the door. Wansfell around the corner on the right. My last year I think you, Ian Tyson, Colin Entwhistle and Nigel Turner may have shared it. I can remember being called through to a very poor quality Radio Luxembourg programme about Buddy Holly, whom I idolised then, on the transistor which you say was Ian Tyson's. His parents were from Millom (as well as Thailand) if I remember rightly.

Wetherlam on the right just after the honky tonk piano under the bell tower. Divided into two. I shared the right division with David Heppenstall and Ian Kraunsoe. I think Michael Cheetham, Robert Ashton and Stirling Priestley were in the other half. Roger Whittaker was certainly in Scaffell with I think Peter Lord. It went on age, not seniority, so I might be mixing Peter Lord and Michael Cheetham. Where was Peter Fletcher? He must have been in there somewhere. Maybe there were 3 beds in Scaffell?

JFK was elected while I was in Wetherlam. We all thought how young he and his pretty wife seemed. Everyone knows where they were when they heard of his death. I was in Big dayroom on school house at St. Bees.

The beds all had a 'jigsaw' fitting for the base to the head and the foot.

Edward Bunting introduced us to the expression Cave (pronounced KV) while I was in Catbells, as a warning for when staff were approaching. This was from his dad I think. Obviously a Latin scholar.

We had clean shirts and I think underpants and socks, weekly. If it seems unhygienic now, it didn't at the time. Good job the shirts were grey!

Philip Walker and I found a little hut in the trees between the cricket pitch and the wall. There was quite a bit of model railway kit in it, mostly railway lines and a couple of railway trucks, Marklin I think. As you can imagine I got quite excited. Difficult to steer the conversation round to it with Major B, as we really shouldn't have gone in there, but it turned out that the school had had a model railway a few years before. Most of the stuff had disappeared. Maybe it had been at Huyton and it had got lost in the move. Unfortunately, Major B clearly had no interest in reviving it.

Paper darts were very popular. I seem to remember going up to Wray and flying them from there to see how far we could get them to go over the cricket pitch.

Flicking towels, particularly older boys to younger, in the towel room, out of sight of Miss Walker was a sport indulged by all. Maybe this was part of your intriguing 'torture' of the Spencer twins?

Miss McClements or Mrs McCracken stuck little notes on everything with the French name for them. The only one I can actually remember was 'LA CAVE' at the top of the basement stairs.

It's odd isn't it. I can't remember Mr. Green at all. Hamish hardly at all.

The school was part of the 'national garden scheme' to raise money for charity. The gardens were usually open late spring, early June, when the rhodys and azalea were at their peak. In my last term my Aunty and Uncle (mentioned earlier) visited on one of these days. My Aunty said. 'Well John, you're moving on to St. Bees, which may be a bigger and better school, but you'll never in your life stay anywhere as beautiful as here'.

The drive had a single newly tarmaced bit, they called it an experiment. Around the first right hand bend away from the school. Donald Wilson's bike had a speedo and everyone liked to borrow it and see how fast they could go on that smooth stretch. About 15mph was the best I could do.

The Butlers had a brother who was one of the directors of the Rootes group. I think that was why Mr B always drove a Singer. Major B's loyalty didn't stretch that far. His earlier black car might have been Rootes group, but in about 1960 he bought an Austin A40.

There were definitely House matches in Rugby, Cricket and Soccer. When you consider the size of the school, the teams would stretch down to include Set 4 for Rugby, with half the school playing. Younger and older pupils mixed and made friends quite easily, much more I'm sure than at other schools.

I don't know whether they had one every year, but I can remember one Christmas, a massive Christmas tree in the Butlers' hall, next to the staircase. Mr B held a party one evening just before the end of term. I was still quite young, I'm sure it wasn't a yearly event. We played games and were allowed to choose a present from beneath the tree. Some parents attended. My present was a tube of toothpaste with a new threepenny bit attached. I was quite happy with it.

My memory of the use of the 'Riley' is the same as yours, a sort of main school holding room for sets 3 & 4. We definitely had some lessons there, I can remember composing the anagram *tslab fof*, (blast off) in one of Mr Ellis's lessons and putting it on the board. Nobody got it either. When that was – not a clue. We also read comics on the big table. Philip Walker swapped 2 days tuck for the words to Lonnie Donnegan's hit record of the time 'Putting on the Style'. He sat at that big table and sang away.

The best result I ever had in the end of term tests was 99/100 in the spelling test. The word I got wrong was thief. (i before e except after c). Remember the smell of the exam papers roneo'd on Major B's 'banda' machine.

In about set 4 we were told that the curriculum should include Science. How often the school inspectors came, I can't remember, but they definitely came once when I was in set 4 and once in set 5, maybe this was after one of their inspections. Mr Kingdon was elected to teach science, but I don't think it was wholeheartedly embraced. The Butlers believed in a classical education.

There was no lavatory in the boathouse. It was a good time wasting excuse to say you needed to go. Of course if there were no staff about we just had a wee in the lake.

The path from the boathouse to the bottom of the steep path up to the terrace was called the causeway. I think originally the weedy wet area encroached way onto what was to become Mr Newby's cricket pitch, but someone built a wall (I think the Butlers) and the causeway was built from ashes behind it. I forgot to mention that trumpet and bugle lessons were in set 4's classroom. The causeway doesn't seem to be there in the photo.

Major B despised the word toilet. Non U. I still call it the lavatory. Another of his pronunciations 'musts' like one/won was perfect, which should be pronounced perfect – don't miss the t off the end though! Someone once said garage as *gararj* during a meal. Major B almost silenced the dining hall to tell us that the correct pronunciation was *garidge*. All very snobby!

The picture in the dining room which can be seen on your illustration was, I think, Constable's Hay Wain, once described to Major B (he told us) by a pupil as 'the rag and bone man in the duck pond'. The one above the gramophone was Constable's Dedham Mill. The one above Major B's table was of the Devil's bridge at Kirkby Lonsdale. I don't know who the artist was.

The conservatory in the dining room used to leak. One wet day the vegetable for the day was leeks (I'll bet you didn't like them!). Major B was not amused by Robert Ashton's pun that it was a great day for leeks.

Bugles were kept in the Crossley, on the mantelpiece, with Aurora in the middle. There were silver bugles on the windowsill of Mr B's Hall on the big window facing North. Blue Hymn books and red Psalmalters

were kept in the shelves behind Major B's desk. Every Hymn book had the words to the school song pasted inside the front cover. We all knew them anyway – I just can't bring them to mind now!

At the end of winter term we had a school concert in the Crossley. Mr B had a tape recorder and one year (58?) asked us all to be quiet during the performances as he wished to record it for Mrs B who was too ill to come down. That must have been soon before she died. Wouldn't that be a find!

Everyone did something. At the end of every act the next act but one would go out into the Library to prepare for their turn, then go back to their seats after their performance. Piano recitals, trumpet playing, Singing, Poetry. Some older boys recited Widdecombe Fair. Each doing different verses, then a different voice for each name at the end. They had us in stitches with their pronunciation of Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davey, Dan'l Widden, 'Arry 'Awke, Old uncle Tom Cobbley and all. There was always a play. One was a long winded thing set in a pub about who caught a prize trout, stuffed and mounted on the wall. The punch line was that somebody knocked it off the wall accidentally and it was actually made of pot. The library door was opened and broken crockery swept in along the floor. We could see it wasn't the fish. It was pieces of broken school crockery. White with a green band and gold line. Another play was 'A Christmas Carol' with Tim Bradshaw as a very funny Mrs Cratchitt and of course John Giles as Tiny Tim.

Under the small South facing window in the Library was a 'museum'. A glass case where items of curiosity were kept. The Heppenstall brothers were given a brand new 'new style' pound note each on the day before term one year. These were displayed back and front in the 'museum'.

The desks in the library were, as you say, taken in order of seniority. An exception was my brother. His first desk there was one of the tables, with his books kept in the cupboard at the bottom of the book cases. He refused to move from there, because that meant you had to hold the books on your desk when you raised the lid. I took every move I could get.

Percy F Westerman was my favourite Author from the books there. Adventure stories at sea for boys. Major B once caught me reading during one of his lessons. He was furious. Percy F's death was announced on the news one evening when we were at school.

The Diary was, I think, kept in the cupboard that replaced the fireplace in the library. There must have been a rota, but senior boys got points for completing it every day. Cohort one did estate work. Cohorts 2 and 3 went for a walk. Stuff like that. I had a habit of using the expression 'seeing as' instead of 'since'. Major B didn't like it.

Every month or so HDB had an evening meeting for the sixth form - held in dressing gowns as I remember. This was where new rules or ideas were mooted. HDB chaired the meeting. The subjects on the agenda were discussed then voted on. We hardly dared argue with him. In fact on one rule we decided we were going to vote against it before the meeting (I can't remember what). The subject was discussed, but only sketchily. Then we voted. Everyone closed their eyes so that they couldn't see how everyone else voted. HDB counted. Surprisingly it was voted down (we basically normally rubber stamped whatever Hubert proposed). HDB was not pleased. 'If you don't like something, we need to discuss the points of objection'.

At the end of every term, either set 5 or set 6 helped Major B (that man did everything didn't he!) polish the parquet floors downstairs. We cleared aside the desks. Put down 'dusmo', and swept up thoroughly before putting wax on the floors. Either Major B or Bill Black wielded the electric polisher. Major B used to put coloured mint imperials in a dish and let us help ourselves as a treat for doing it. (Too late in the term for points I guess).

John West
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