

# Meandering Memories from the old cardboard box

Dennis Fowle (1945-51)



WHEN the President suggested an article for the *Maroon* I turned to my old cardboard box of memories for inspiration. Eight hours of happy nostalgia later not a single word had been set down on paper but perhaps a random sampling of my research will also bring back pleasant memories for my contemporaries.

When I first entered the School in 1945 the war was just at an end, although I certainly did not feel in any way deprived, I realise now that times were pretty hard.

Take just one example. The only School trip was to the railway workshops at Ashford. How I envied the party of Borden pupils who went on a cricket tour to Barbados last year. How times have changed!

In my earliest days the School was welcoming back teachers after war service — Mr. A. R. Macmillan (physical training) from the R.A.F. and Mr. T. Snelling (French) from the Army. In the playing fields, near the sports pavilion, were two air-raid dug-outs with the entrances well fenced off. You went near those under peril of

caning from the Headmaster (George Hardy) — but there were daredevils prepared still to take the risk (and pay the penalty).

My love of sport was already well developed by then (my apologies if this becomes too evident in the article)! I was a devoted member of the under-13 teams but my schoolboy heroes were starring in the 1st XIs. How easy it is to remember the senior boys ahead of you — and how difficult to recall the juniors who followed!

In 1946 the cricket team played its first peace-time season for seven years. Captain was Jim Bedelle and his star performers were Roy Weller (top of both batting and bowling averages with 49 wickets at 7.24 runs each) and Alan Priston (second in batting and fourth in bowling with 34 wickets).

How I would have loved to play on that top pitch for the 1st XI. From the sidelines then it all looked so adult and magnificent. When my turn came, and I was the proud captain of that XI, it all seemed so much more natural and less glamorous.

Cricket tradition at Borden was very strong — thanks largely to the enthusiasm of two masters both closely linked to successful clubs in the area — Mr. G. J. Dawkins and Mr. A. Highton. The cricket square also had a reputation for good wickets due to the meticulous devotion of Mr. Holness, the groundsmen.

John Barry was captain of the soccer team — and I still have exciting memories of watching a forward line made up of a very fast and hard-shooting centre-forward in Alan Doucy, with Alan Priston and Brian Tyler on his left and Roy Weller, and Alan's brother Bob Doucy on the right.

I was a member of Swale House and in those early days we always seemed to be the underdogs. It all seemed so unfair at the time. Final house points in 1945/46 were: Borden 252.14, School 246.17, Barrow 226.57 and Swale a measly 155.13. Much better times were ahead, however, and pride in Swale House was to be fully restored.

In those days it made news if a master came to School in a car. There was plenty of room to park on the path in front of the headmaster's room. I think it was English teacher Mr. Nicholls who started the fashion. How a sixth-former's stock would have risen had he driven himself to School — but that was to be many years ahead.

It was about this time that the Old Boys decided to erect a clock in the cupola of the School as a memorial to those who died in the war. From then on time on the playing field seemed endless . . .

Speech day was always a very special occasion. It was a relaxed but very proud day and I well remember the Rev. F. M. Eagles (of Murston) conducting the service at St. Michael's. His sons, Peter and David, were both pupils and excellent sportsmen. They formed the School table-tennis team which made such remarkable progress in the national school competition.

I held the prize-winners in high esteem. I was never to be called to that stage to receive an award for school work. My second form colleagues who took such honours in 1947 included L. Chelton, J. Davies, J. Delaine, D. Denne (I think he was always first in my class), D. Eagles, R. Hunt, M. Revell and J. Spice.

I remember feeling very sad when Mr. Alan Highton left as our deputy headmaster to become head of Westlands Secondary School in 1948. I felt even then that I had lost a friend. I remember him bowling at me for hours on the playground trying to improve my square cut. I felt he could teach me just about anything.

That same year the 1st XI played 16 matches — including six during cricket week with one all-day game against the parents. I have often been shocked in recent years by the few games played by the 1st XI.

In 1949 a new loan collection of paintings decorated the corridors of the School. Just imagine the uproar when a bored pupil waiting to enter the woodwork room used the point of his protractor to scratch a very naughty four-letter word right across the painting. All playing fields were out of bounds and all School sport was cancelled until the culprit came to light two or three weeks later. It was probably the greatest scandal of my School days — although some very naughty photographs off a boat from the Isle of Sheppey ran this a close second. You really were not 'in' if you had not seen those photographs.

Sport was much more wholesome and the success of Swale Boys in soccer's Fletcher Trophy caused tremendous local interest in 1949. Very big crowds turned out for a two-leg final against North-East Kent and, after Swale won that, our team was matched with Ilford, the champions of London, at the Bull Ground, Sittingbourne, in aid of the town club. This game attracted a crowd close to 2,000 — but we lost 2 – 1. The official programme cost twopence.

Two plays each year — one by the School and the other by the Old Boys — always created a lot of interest. My main memory goes back to 1949 when the School presented "The Hasty Heart" on three evenings just before Christmas. Star of that show was Reg Waterman as the dying Lachlen with former head boy Garth Rook as the Yank. The Old Boys put on "Arsenic and Old Lace" in the January. These plays always seemed to reach a very high standard.

I always look on my last two years at Borden as the happiest and most eventful — the first of those years was spent studying for the General School Certificate and Matriculation. It was a time when close friendships were formed — for me with classmates such as Reg Robson, Bill Clements, Jeff Spice, Alan Smith, Brian Weatherall, Don Denne, Barry Davies . . .

I had just one year in the sixth form — where Mr. Hardy and English master Mr. Beer spent time preparing me for a journalistic career when I was not involved in sport and many other School activities. They were very happy years.

Now, when I look back over a distance of almost 40 years, I reflect on who and what were the greatest influences on my life at that time. Pride in School itself and that sense of belonging to something very special were paramount.

It is the teaching staff who really make the School, however and I was fortunate to have such strong and warm personalities as George Hardy, Alan Highton, Stan Ashby, 'Geoger' Hill, Jimmy Howard, George Dawkins and Mr. C. B. Beer to influence my future one way or another.