

HITCHIN BOYS' SCHOOL OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

(Formerly Hitchin Grammar School Old Boys' Association)

ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2007

General

The date for next year is April 12th 2008 so please make a note of it and come and join us. Bring a new member or any Old Boy and we will try to persuade him to join – it worked this year!

The date is fixed for the Centenary Reunion as July 18th 2009.

The centenary subcommittee has met under the chairmanship of Richard Whitmore. The prospects for 2009 are looking exciting and we are lucky to have the services of Les Jeffries to sort out the marquees, bands, catering etc for the ball on the Saturday evening. The committee hopes to arrange a number of events during the week leading up to the ball on Saturday evening. So why not book your holiday in Hitchin for the whole week as it also coincides with the Hitchin Festival period so there will plenty going on. We would welcome any ideas and comments about what you would like to celebrate this momentous occasion, so please let us know what you think.

Subscriptions are due from Associate members who left school in 2002 and Ordinary members who pay an annual sub – we shall be pleased to receive these.

Help. Can anyone let me know the Association Presidents for the 1973 and 1974?

The end of an era - Joe Monk

Stuart Halsey, Michael Hill, Dick Worbey and myself attended the requiem mass for Joe. Keith Allard, Phil White and Tom Eason - colleagues on the staff and Honary members of the Association also attended. There have been many responses to Joe's passing and appreciations of the words by Robin Barker in the last Bulletin.

Robin Gardner(1947) included the following memory of Joe.

I remember a lazy summer afternoon; the classroom windows were open and the distant sounds of cricket being played on the field could be heard. The war in Europe was over, but the Americans were still around and their colourful characteristics and phraseology had been duly absorbed into our culture and vernacular, at least those that were permissible. Jammy had just told us to turn to a passage in one of our Latin textbooks. I knew this was going to be dull and boring, so I reckon it must have been Caesar's Gallic Wars which I remember as mostly long lists of statistics. A protest from a like-minded boy who incautiously exclaimed, "Jeepers Creepers Sir, didn't we do that last week? Jammy went white – I had never seen him so angry. 'Don't you know what that phrase means boy' he thundered and while taking a deep breath 'Don't EVER let me hear it said again'. We were all transfixed, mouths agape, astounded by Jammy's reaction. The afternoon's tranquillity had been shattered.

The moment passed, but the memory came back to me more strongly in later life when I made my own commitment to Jesus Christ as my Saviour, and now I can never hear His name taken in vain without mentally flinching. I was so pleased to be able to share this story with Jammy in his lifetime a few years ago at one of the reunions.

From our President.

As the President I thought that it would be appropriate to contribute a few lines and to take the opportunity to include a few thoughts about our association.

I left school in summer 1962 and moved to a job with local insurers Beddall Bradford but soon decided that I needed a more peripatetic life style and decided to join the RAF. I trained as a navigator and joined No 210 Squadron at RAF Ballykelly near Londonderry in Northern Ireland where I flew the venerable Shackleton, then the RAF's maritime reconnaissance and patrol aircraft. This was a bit of a shock since the aircraft clearly was a direct descendant of the historic World War II Lancaster bomber and I'd had visions of a career flying more glamorous and modern jet powered aircraft rather than a noisy, smelly and sluggishly underpowered piece of aviation history. Nevertheless, and to my surprise, I enjoyed my time on the "Shack" amounting to a couple of thousand hours that took me far and wide; bearing in mind that in those days Great Britain had a network of military bases stretching as far as the Far East representing the remnants of a declining Empire. The die was cast and my later flying career continued in the maritime world and I was fortunate to be a member of No 201 Squadron at RAF Kinloss in Northern Scotland as we introduced the Nimrod into service from 1970. It is worthy of note that it is still flying some 37 years later, longer than the Shackleton's operational service life, and is planned to remain in service for a further 10 to 15 years. I took a brief sabbatical in 1973 when I flirted with a career in civil aviation based at Luton Airport with Monarch Airlines. This presented the opportunity to refresh local ties and to play some cricket and hockey but I opted to return to the RAF. The most remarkable time of my flying career came during the 1982 Falklands Campaign where I commanded our squadron detachment on Ascension Island as we conducted maritime surveillance in support of naval and amphibious operations. Another memorable event was organising the UK's response to the Herald of Free Enterprise capsizing as the ferry departed Zeebrugge. My career continued along traditional military lines with command tours interspersed with staff appointments and I finished up in the rank of Group Captain at NATO's headquarters in Norway from where I retired in January 1999. I have continued to work in the defence industry as a consultant working mainly in the Middle

East.

Having now reached a time in life when there's more behind than ahead, it is opportune to acknowledge the significant part that the school has played in my life although I have to confess that I was not a star pupil. Nevertheless, like so many of us, I thoroughly enjoyed my time at school and recognise that, in my case at least, the experience was made possible, and much enhanced, by the masters, staff and, not least, my peers. I take my hat off to all who patiently guided me through my school career with saint-like forbearance, doubtless, with teeth grinding: apart from Trevor Bartlett; never reticent when he opined that physical correction was required!

I continued to benefit from the influence of my friends, some of them masters (Maurice Dolden, Barry Robinson, John Gwinneel and David Stancombe to name the most prominent), in the immediate aftermath of leaving school and through membership of the Old Boys' Association and the Blueharts Hockey Club. However, the demands of the RAF gradually distanced me from local life and I began to spend much of my time in far flung places and was able to visit Hitchin less often. It became more difficult to maintain links and ties, attendance at Old Boys' functions became impossible but, I was able to keep abreast of developments thanks to feedback from my brother John, Mick Whitmore and John Bridges. This situation lasted until a few years ago when I returned to Cornwall to live and was able to make more trips back to Hitchin.

The Old Boys' Association does, of course, have a formal and appropriate charter but I'm sure that it has some special and unique significance for each one of us. I can speak only for myself but the Association provides me with the opportunity to stay in touch with an institution and organisation as well as people that played an important role in my development. On "Old Boys Days" I can return to savour the buildings, grounds and atmosphere that provided a sympathetic background to my developing years as I gradually metamorphosed from childhood to manhood. At dinner I sit to dine with friends in the Hall, a place that was at the centre of my life for many years: from the start of each day, through concerts, plays, meetings, to formal occasions such as Speech Day. As I sat at dinner earlier this year I looked across the Hall to see the portraits of each Headmaster looking down at our assembled group and I sensed that those who have passed on to a higher place approved – those seated on my right and left certainly did!

The association does, in addition, provide the opportunity to maintain links with the school and to stay in touch with what's happening and to be briefed on future plans. The head master provides us with a comprehensive briefing on what's happening and what is in the pipeline. Clearly, education is very much in the public eye and it is equally clear that the school is in good hands and is performing at a level of which we can be justifiably proud.

Over the years the Old Boys' Association has benefited from the services of many who have given their considerable talents to helping run the association and I know that I speak for all when I say that we're very grateful and do appreciate that without such dedication it is doubtful that we'd be where we are today. Most would be embarrassed to receive any kind of plaudit so I will just say on behalf of all of the membership to all of our current and past committee members and officers that we're very grateful and highly appreciative of their work.

The late John Bridges and the late Mick Whitmore worked very hard on encouraging those of us who'd not already taken advantage of the benefits of membership to join the association. I know that many of us joined having succumbed to their charming, subtle and tactful influence and I speak for all when I say that we greatly miss them. Tragically, John Bridges died soon after his term of office as President was completed and Mick Whitmore was slated to be President this year. As a result of his untimely death I was approached to be President and I'm pleased to be able to dedicate my time in office to Mick's memory.

This piece will appear in our bulletin and I think that it is important to understand its importance in keeping our membership informed and binding the association together. I would encourage all who haven't already done so to make a contribution to the bulletin's content. It is a good forum for airing any topic if you can spare the time to pen a few lines. For example, I think that we should celebrate Old Boys who've have done great things in many different fields embracing diverse activities ranging from sport to industry. Some receive public and formal recognition others don't but are equally highly appreciated. You will have been informed that there are some production problems as the bulletin is expensive to produce and it is unlikely that it will appear in its current form in future. It will be very helpful if those who could receive it by Email or would be content to access it on the website could tell David Stancombe.

I thank you for supporting the association and ask that you continue to do so. I'd also ask that you assist in keeping recruiting ticking over, perhaps using the upcoming centenary celebrations as friendly leverage. My closing thought is this: the association is only as strong as its membership. Please help us to stay a vigorous and successful association.

Michael Norris (1962)

We have lost another stalwart supporter of the Association – here is a tribute to;

David Stedman (1940)

David died on March 30 after an 18-month fight against cancer. He was 82.

He left school in 1940 and four months later was offered a clerical post at Vauxhall Motors in Luton. Later he began an apprenticeship, after which he became an experimental engineer and then a design engineer with responsibility for the front suspension on new model cars.

Taking advantage of a day-release scheme David started to attend Luton Technical College and in 1949 he obtained an External Degree from London University. After qualifying David began to teach part-time at Vauxhall Motors and then at Luton College. After 17 years at Vauxhall where life had become stressful he joined Luton College full time, becoming a senior lecturer teaching mainly thermodynamics.

David retired from teaching in 1982 and was then able to pursue his hobbies of photography, painting in oils and watercolours, walking and a general interest in the local fauna and flora. One of David's paintings was of the Headmaster's house and garden, which he presented to the school on the 75th anniversary of the Old Boys' Association. This painting may still hang in the Headmaster's office. David was a keen supporter of the Association and because he lived locally was able to attend the Annual Meeting and Dinners. He was president in 1978 and served as a Trustee of the Life Members Fund.

David will best be remembered for his service to the local communities of King's Walden and Breachwood Green. In 1973 he was elected to the North Herts District Council as an Independent but after three years became frustrated by party politics and did not seek re-election for a second term. He served on the Parish Council and was chairman for 14 years. He helped set up the Breachwood Green Society and established Neighbourhood watch for the area. For several years he edited the BreachwoodTimes and frequently contributed articles on local history and other topics.

A keen gardener he helped to start the Village Gardener's Club. Living in sight of Luton Airport he was a staunch supporter of LADACAN (Luton and District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise)

David was a keen churchman and participated in all church activities. He served on the Parochial Church Council for nearly 60 years; several as Vice-Chairman and Churchwarden. He learnt to ring the church bells as a teenager and was tower captain for over 60 years teaching the art to several young people.

Evidence of the esteem in which David was held was the packed church at King's Walden for his funeral service and the number of messages of condolence received by his wife Rena to who, with her family, we extend our sympathy.

John Stedman (1945)

John Gardiner (1936 – 2007)

I make no apologies for the next set of tributes as they represent the feelings of the many pupils, colleagues and thespians of one of the greatest characters to have served on the staff at Hitchin Boys' School. The eulogies were given during John's funeral service at St, Mary's Church Hitchin. The church was packed with standing room only and as the coffin left the church at the end of the service, spontaneous applause broke out; a most moving sentiment expressing the gratitude that everyone felt for John and the sorrow at his loss. John was appointed by Maurice Dolden in 1964 and left to set up the North Herts Theatre School in 1989. During those 25 years John taught English, Drama and P.E. He was responsible for setting up the Drama Department. and producing many memorable school productions, ranging from classic Shakespeare to musicals he wrote with Andrew Parr.

Those of us paying tribute to John today can provide only glimpses of the extraordinary achievements of our friend who, over forty years, inspired literally hundreds of pupils, actors and sportsmen to reach heights of achievement that they had probably only ever dreamed of. Today, first and foremost, our hearts, our love and our sympathy are with Barbie and her family. But they want this farewell to be as much a celebration of John's life as the mourning of his passing. And, as so much of that life involved laughter, when the opportunity presents itself, let it be so even today.

John was the biggest single influence on theatre in North Hertfordshire in our lifetime. Amateur drama enthusiasts of my generation first got to know him in 1966 not long after he had come to take up a teaching post at Hitchin Grammar School. He'd offered to stage a show for Carnival Week in aid of the hospital. He picked a team of 12 of us from local theatre groups and called the company 'The Externals.' The blatantly camp humour in some of his sketches and songs was new to dear old Hitchin and seemed terribly risqué at the time. Our audiences loved it, but when they flocked back for more the following year they were in for a shock.

John had decided that we should become the first amateur group to stage Joan Littlewood's amazing *Oh What a Lovely War*. Despite his own unforgettable performance as the Drill Sergeant (surely the funniest ten-minutes ever witnessed on the town hall stage) people were upset by the powerful anti-war theme, with protest songs sung to the tunes of much-loved hymns. Some of the audience walked out; others later rose to deliver a standing ovation; leaving us quietly satisfied that we had made our point. I doubt anyone in the cast has forgotten the first rehearsal; when we sat spellbound by a Gardiner lecture that – for the first time for most of us - put the hideous folly of *The Great War* in its true perspective.

From that evening on John had our undivided attention. The show was a sign of great things to come. It was also our first experience of what I would call 'proper' acting, when we found

ourselves not just performing lines but (almost oblivious of the audience) becoming totally absorbed in the event we were portraying. From then on, any show 'directed by John Gardiner' meant good box office; over eight years, his Carnival Week productions raised thousands of pounds for Hitchin's hospitals.

When the Externals disbanded in 1973, the Bancroft Players were going through a difficult patch. Work and retirement had taken their four leading directors to other parts of the country. It was John who saved the day by agreeing to become our Artistic Director. As Kirk Foster said in his tribute in *The Comet*: 'John lifted the players from an ordinary amateur society to one of such standing and reputation that they were capable of raising funds to build the prestigious Queen Mother Theatre.'

Not only was John a highly innovative director, he had an extraordinary knack of drawing remarkable performances from the most unlikely people. We saw it in 'The Crucible' and 'Judgement at Nuremburg' – plays then rarely performed by amateurs – and staged in our tiny theatre at St Anne's Hall by a cast that sometimes outnumbered its audience.

At the town hall he broke the mould by staging major productions 'in the round.' With his production of *Julius Caesar* we first began to appreciate his great knowledge and love of Shakespeare. Later came *National Health* and the pastoral *Larkrise to Candleford* when he created magical scenes of harvesting farm workers and lured the audience into leaving their seats to join in a joyful dance to celebrate 'Harvest Home'.

The following year the town hall became a sweltering jungle in the Far East for Sergeant Mitchum's platoon in *The Long and The Short and The Tall*. When Ron Decent, the actor playing Mitchum, fell ill just before opening night John took over the role. No-one would have guessed he was standing in at the last minute. A few years later (at the vulnerable age of 50 when he should have known better) he stood in for an injured Keith Swainston and submitted himself to being hurled round a wrestling ring by a fearsome female wrestler in *Trafford Tanzi*. The Players also had the privilege of staging world premieres of musicals that John wrote with his associate Andrew Parr. *Big Al* – the life story of Al Capone - and *RockaSocka* a spoof on world cup football.

Rehearsing one of his new shows was, as they say, 'an experience.' The script arrived a bit at a time on hurriedly typed pages. For a while, we were puzzled by the significance of the date 1811 that appeared regularly on every page. Then it dawned on us that '1811' should have been 'l'll' – the shift key on John's old Underwood typewriter had given up the ghost. When he'd thought up his latest song, John would call his MD down to rehearsal half an hour ahead of the cast and 'la-la' the tune. The MD would then have 20 minutes to knock it into shape. The cast appeared at 7.30 and learned the song, which John then choreographed. By 10pm it was blocked and in the bag - and time to head for the Coopers Arms.

But it wasn't just John's shows that strengthened our society. There were the brilliant social events. Workshops, visiting speakers, film shows. The annual highlight – always over-subscribed - was The Bancroft Players Dirty Weekend. Heaven knows what the residents of Brighton and Bognor thought when we 'hit town' proudly flashing our Dirty Weekend badges. In fact, it was all very innocent (more or less) usually involving a theatre visit, a trip round a stately home and mad games and competitions that only occasionally disrupted the sedate life of the hotel where we were staying.

As our Artistic Director John was the first to bring top West End artistes to the Queen Mother Theatre. Prunella Scales as the young Queen Victoria, Alec McCowen as Kipling. John spotted Fascinating Aida at the Edinburgh Fringe when they were still unknown and booked them for our next season for £150. By the time they came, TV had made them a household name commanding fifteen hundred pounds a show, but they made their agent honour the original unwritten agreement struck in an Edinburgh bar with John.

Our biggest fear was that it would only be a matter of time before J.G. was lured to London by a lucrative offer from a production company or broadcasting organisation. There, without doubt, he could have earned a fortune. But he chose to stay among us to pursue his prolific career as a playwright and director. Ever busy, but always available to give us his wisdom and his time. How lucky we were - how many of us here today are the richer for it.

John's last public performance was in April, when he proposed the toast at our Golden Wedding lunch. Conscious of his fast-deteriorating health Wendy and I told him we'd quite understand if he didn't feel up to it. We should have known better. After keeping us reassured with e-mails signed endearingly 'Tiny Todger of Tilehouse Street,' he was, of course, a storming success. As always, unable to resist the chance of blending sincerity with a whiff of scandal:

“Throughout Richard’s time at the BBC,” he said. “Wendy was always there to give support. Even late in his career when he left the Corporation amid some gossip that Graham Norton was, in fact, Richard and Angela Rippon’s love child.”

Yes. We shall miss him! Thanks, old friend, for everything.

Richard Whitmore

John Gardiner (School and Sport)

What John did for us – and still does, through our recollections – was to bring fun and laughter - and fulfilment - into our lives. Our individual anecdotes of him are countless; it must suffice for now that we are all able to picture in our minds, here at this moment, examples of the many things he did to entertain and enrich us.

He held court in the staffroom at Hitchin Boys’ School for twenty-five years. At lunchtimes we would return there from the canteen, John would sit down on a little wooden chair, tuck his legs under to rest on its bars, and just be funny - effortlessly - for half- to three quarters of an hour; he might tell some of his huge fund of stories, he might be silly – and he could be so unbelievably, wonderfully silly! or he might just start pulling faces – what an elastic face! have there ever been more incredible nostrils?! After these performances, we would leave to go out to teach, relaxed, revitalised, and with smiles on our faces. What that did for our morale, and consequently for the benefit of the boys we were going to teach, was priceless.

Needless to say, John used his gift of humour to get the best out of his own classes, from boys of all abilities, but this should never overshadow the fact that he had a tremendous, wide-ranging knowledge of and appreciation of English literature, and thus was able to inspire and gain the lasting respect of the most high-powered students. He knew his stuff – and he knew how to put it across.

At the school, of course, he helped take drama to new levels, and there too he joined forces with Andy Parr to produce Dazzle and The Dracula Spectacular - shows that have since been

performed round the world. It is a cruel twist that John was busy writing the lyrics to their new show the day before he was taken ill for the last time. Of less significance, but close to the hearts of several of us here, were his Christmas Shows, featuring sketches by boys and girls, by staff, and by guest artistes, punctuated by carols and unlikely solos on the recorder. Tickets for these were fought over; for days afterwards, Iris in the school office would have to hold a hot telephone at arm's length while a disappointed parent vented his or her indignation.

This, again, was fun, and so important for morale. John knew we all need that release. To get some of us out of school at the end of the day he founded the Toasted Teacake Club, bestowing titles on members like Grand Vizier of the Teapot and Chief Currant. He devised and MC'd quizzes and games for the end of term parties – an abiding image of John will always be - holding his clipboard in one hand and his glasses in the other as he read from it, before taking them off to look up enquiringly at the bemused or embarrassed participants/victims.

Lastly I will mention the Staff Cup - another effort by John to bring the staff together, to remove their layers of stuffy isolation by competing in games, some silly, some in deadly earnest. His Staff Cup contest survives at the Boys' School, and was held only a fortnight ago. The actual trophy is a little tankard that John had won in a boxing tournament in his youth – and this brings me round to his sporting side.

It may come as something of a surprise in particular to his most recent students to learn how accomplished a sportsman John was. He boxed at his Youth Club and on National Service; while at Loughborough College, training to teach Physical Education as well as English, he was in the gymnastics team, and took part in the National Championships in that most excruciating discipline, the rings. He participated in most sports with some facility; not perhaps at his best in golf - he was one of the notorious "Boomer Boys", who attracted the interest, shall I say, of local golf clubs by their habit of yelling 'Boomer!' down the fairways after any half-reasonable shot; or, really, in hockey – on one occasion he was playing for Hitchin's staff team against the staff of Bishops Stortford, when an ex-international playing for the oppo went round John with ease, and then thought it'd look smart to turn round and do it again. John responded equally sportingly, by whacking him over the head with his stick and knocking him out.

Rugby, though, was his passion. His choice of a Welsh hymn at his funeral may seem odd for such a stalwart Englishman, but it is because of the pleasure that the talents of the great Welsh rugby teams of the past gave him. He was Master i/c rugby at the school for over ten years, and coached the 1st XV with great success. His first club up here was Stockwood Park, and it was for them that he always said he played his finest rugby in a fine team, before moving on to Letchworth. Here he enjoyed an Indian summer to his career, and was a regular supporter ever

after.

He had the classic fly-half skills, most famously the dummy; it is not a myth that, when there was no-one to pass to outside him, he would make to pass to the crowd on the touchline – the opposition would buy it, and so too would the crowd! He also played with his head; he and Barry Robinson inside him formed what John called “the finest non-tackling halfbacks in rugby”, but he got away with this weakness so often by calling out loudly as the ball-carrier ran towards him “Leave him to me Barry, he’s mine, leave him to me” and thus convincing the guy to move the ball on to someone else!

For many, in fact, the strongest memory of John as a player and later as a spectator was the constant running commentary on the game, a non-stop high-volume verbal attack, directed sometimes at his own players – “come on you lovely Letchworth boys! Unload him, unload him, that’s the way!” ; occasionally at the opposition – “it’s a bad pass, he’s dropped it, get onto him”; and so, so often at the poor overwhelmed referee – “he’s offside, he’s offside, the ref’s seen it,... awww... never mind, never mind, you’ll see it next time, sir - won’t you!”

John captained Letchworth in 1972-3, and brought his trademark talents to the job. There was, for example, his newsletter, several pages of club news brought to life by his own brand of humour, that had players and wives racing to get to the letterbox first in the morning. If there’d been a defeat, he had other methods to raise spirits - perhaps better recounted at the bar of the rugby club!

Once again, though, the fun came after the serious bit. He always placed the emphasis, in all the activities that I saw him do, on getting the thing right first. You had to be sure of yourself in the classroom, you had to know your lines for shows, you practised hard for rugby; everyone had to know what their role was, to be able to perform it properly. This is how he got the best out of so many people, and why he has earned our gratitude and our love for all the hours and hours he selflessly gave to make us better students, better teachers, better players – and better people.

Richard Davies

JOHN CHARLES GARDINER August 13th 1936 to July 2nd 2007

John was a founding member of an initially charitable organisation that has come to be known as the "Naughty Boys". A group of 14 confused and child-like men, with an average age of seven-hundred and fifty but a mental one of 12. To give you an idea, at 53, I am thought to be one of the whipper-snappers. Amongst other things, the Naughty Boys have climbed the highest point of every county in England, scaling a massive 69,316 feet, which is twice the height of Everest.

It was an uphill struggle for two and half years, although we did once park in Hertfordshire and walk downhill to the highest point in Cambridgeshire. We also visited the death and burial place of every King and Queen of England, which took us from a rain-drenched tennis court in Gloucester to a sun-baked Abbey in Southern France. I will not try to fool you otherwise; it is an organisation formed to experience weekends of culture and drink, but not necessarily in that order.

John's comical genius was never more evident than on these weekends away. Although he always took his part in any organisation seriously, he was very much the 'ring leader' for the silliness that prevailed. At Battle visiting the Field of Hastings he insisted we all charged the hill and abbey, as a re-enactment. Like excited schoolboys he led us screaming up the hill as Norman Knights on imaginary horses, to the shock and bemusement of children, pregnant women and foreign tourists, who thought; this must be the way the English celebrate their history. He was so successful in portraying this as 'normal', that he persuaded two Korean tourists to fire pretend arrows into Harold's men upon the mount, who were, in fact, a party of primary school children on an historical trip from Hounslow.

It was from this ridiculous beginning that the infamous sightings of 'The Black Knight' began. When visiting different castles around the country he would make us all look into the distance, saying that he was convinced he could see the vague and ghostly figure of 'The Black Knight' upon the horizon.

Whilst we all stood looking in the direction he had pointed, he would nip round to the side of the castle and upon his trusty, yet invisible, steed would ride into our view, proclaiming 'Who dares challenge the Black Knight?' Then with a strange guttural sound which was supposed to be representative of a horse's whinny, he would ride off over the horizon and out of sight. This would involve him disappearing over a hillock, then, crouching low, he would scamper back round to join us, stating... 'That knight must be in league with the devil!'

At Windsor's Victoria Museum and then again at Grimsby's Fishing Museum where there were quite a few life sized dummies on display, he would sit or stand amongst them, frozen in an apt freeze, and it would sometimes take us a few moments to spot him. Disguised as a grizzled

Railway Porter or a gnarled and weathered North Sea Fishermen, he would blend brilliantly into the background.

It was at Grimsby that he sat at a table with some life-sized fishermen, and when our Skipper, Brian Hull, appeared around the corner, John suddenly moved. If you have never heard a grown man scream, it is quite an experience, I can tell you. Brian screamed, the naughty boys screamed because Brian screamed, I screamed because the naughty boys screamed and John screamed because he thought if the naughty boys are screaming then we should all scream together. I am not sure that Brian has fully forgiven him even to this day.

For a while he was known affectionately to us all as 'Gatekeeper Gardiner', this was due to his inability, whilst moving from field to field on our climbs, to open farm gates. We would watch him struggle for what seemed an eternity, with him totally oblivious to the fact that we were watching. Often he would have to give in and ask some innocent passer by, usually a lady in her late seventies, to help. The technology of 'pull lever' or 'lift latch', was something John never fully managed to conquer.

The hours of laughter and the gallons of tears that John's antics and storytelling have caused over the years is legendary, and the joyous and mischievous 'child' that was never far from the truthful John Gardiner, will be an image and memory for us to hold and treasure for the rest of our lives. I just hope that when John reaches the gates of Heaven, St Peter is there to greet him. Because there is absolutely no way that he's going to be able to open those gates on his own!

HERTFORDSHIRE THEATRE SCHOOL

Sometime in the summer of 1987, John mentioned in passing, that he was thinking of starting a Drama School for students 18 years and upwards. It would be the first Acting and Musical Theatre Course in the country, from whence, graduating performers would be able to move seamlessly and artfully from Shakespeare to Rogers and Hammerstein, from Brecht to Ayckbourn, from Pinter to Andrew Lloyd Webber, from British Pantomime to Greek Tragedy, and it was to be called: Hertfordshire Theatre School.

He didn't need me in order to start up this school, but as he was always sincerely worried that I would eventually drift into prison, or even worse, the Conservative party, he thought it better that I was involved with the project right from the start.

John started a school that is slowly revolutionising the way drama and the mind of the performer are nurtured and informed. Insisting that students not only learn the skills of their trade but that they also understand; their obligation as performers to the text, the need for professional relationships to be formed with fellow actors, and most of all, that dynamic and truthful theatre be placed in front of the paying audience.

He was sometimes disillusioned with the pretentiousness that can be associated with our profession, and he wanted students to understand that being a well-grounded human being was the most important pre-requisite to becoming a successful performer. He wanted to take the 'farty' out of 'Arty-farty'. I'm not absolutely sure if you can say 'farty' in a church, but there it is, I've said it and in doing so I may well have ushered in a wind of change.

His vision, passion and knowledge were irrepressible and totally contagious. His teaching and lessons, although always scholarly, seemed surprisingly laced with moments of great humour which made difficult learning curves more easily conquered. It is so much easier to giggle through torment than to weep. For the modern student/actor, who does not always come armed with a good classical education, historical theatre can seem a 'scary place' to go.

Ibsen, Chekhov, Webster, Marlowe, Sophocles, Aeschylus: all playwrights who can and have made many potential actors wither and crumple at the very sound of their names. These giants of our profession can send shudders of despair down the very spine, and reduce the most enthusiastic student to a quivering wreck.

Many of these writers, especially the grammar school boy from Stratford-Upon-Avon, writing in a language from a distant past, can, in the wrong hands, 'put off' rather than 'inspire', but not, if you were lucky enough to fall under the wondrous spell of John Gardiner's tuition. For with John's guidance and encouragement, his brilliance for imparting knowledge and willingness to see you through to the end, all fears were soon overcome and banished. What at first seemed inexplicable became obvious, what seemed confused became clear, what seemed shallow became deep and masterful.

But John was not only 'special' because of his endless energy and ability to teach and inspire. He mixed, effortlessly, the role of tutor, mentor and friend. His knowledge was there for you to tap into, not only whilst a pupil, but forever. No time was too long, no distance too far, that he would not make contact and check how you were doing, either by phone, or in later life by email, once he had mastered the complexities of 'Send', or more often than not by letter; letters, that on occasion, were even longer than my present tribute.

We say to the graduating students each year, that they never really leave HTS, we are always there for them, for as long as they want us to be and even longer. And so it was with John. His insistence for maintaining the bond set during training is fundamental to the school's moral and artistic philosophy today. His generosity, knowledge, advice, support and friendship were always just a phone call or postage stamp away.

Many have spoken about John and used the word 'Inspiration', it is a word constantly being used to describe his theatrical genius, and I can find no other word more apt or befitting. Although I was never an official student of John's, as an arrogant teenager I decided to plague him by making myself an unofficial one. And like Alexander at the feet of Aristotle, I hung upon his every word, and will do so for the rest of my life. I count myself incredibly fortunate that our paths crossed and entangled. True, I was not the first to call him mentor and friend, and I was not the last, but I hung around his neck for longer than most.

About now, John will be sighing somewhere out there and thinking, "Come on Kirk, not too many words, there's some serious drinking and joke-telling to be done". So let me conclude.

You were a brilliant man, John Gardiner. HTS would not have happened without you, many careers would not have been as distinguished without you, and I personally know, that I would have trod a very different and murkier path if you had not seen fit to take me under your wing.

Life is a relatively short journey, is it not? And for most, it ends much sooner than we would wish. But in order to soften the grief, perhaps we would do well to remember, and though I take the risk of dreaded cliché,more important than the sadness of John having passed on, is the fact that so many of our lives, were made richer by his passing through.

Kirk Foster

New Members:

David E Lee 1974-84

After school I obtained a B.A. (Hons) in 'political science' from Portsmouth and then became a police officer in the Hertfordshire Constabulary. Initially I was based in Hertford but then transferred to Stevenage, which was somewhat livelier! Since then I have been living back in Hitchin.

On leaving the police I started work for the Crown Prosecution Service, dealing with Crown Court casework including those involving Charles Bronson, known as "Britain's most dangerous prisoner" and also the fraud trial of Lord Brockett.

I then took a job as an internal auditor with the DTI, based in London. While there I obtained further qualifications, including a post graduate diploma in 'internal audit and management' and becoming a PIIA (Practitioner of the Institute of Internal Auditors).

I then moved, as an internal auditor, to the 'Big Five Firm' Arthur Andersen (later 'Andersen'). I spent much of my time uncovering and dealing with fraud on clients. I then transferred internally onto the 'Fraud and Integrity Risk Team' at Andersen, which was my dream job. The Enron debacle in the USA led to the global collapse of Andersen and I was made redundant.

I then worked for a couple of years for my own company, providing fraud risk and fraud investigation services to various clients. During this time I also became a CFE (Certified Fraud Examiner of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners).

My next job was as a Fraud Team Leader at Park Hill Audit Agency, managing a team which provided counter fraud services to a number of NHS clients across London and Essex.

My current job is as the 'Fraud Prevention Manager' at Transport for London.

As for the future? Watch this space.

Outside work I have tried various past times, including sky diving, some time in the T.A. (which unfortunately came to an end when I moved to Arthur Andersen and an increased work load) and I also used to do a lot of road running, including the London Marathon seven times. I expect my school games teachers may find that hard to imagine. Unfortunately an arthritic knee has put an end to most of this. I do still combine my two favourite past times though – travel and running. I run with the 'hash house harriers' which is mainly off road (better for the knees) and non competitive. I also often travel to south east Asia, where I have many friends, to run with hash house harrier groups out there. I am shortly off to Indonesia to run at a hash event there – dodging the tigers in the jungle and then running up (and down) a couple of active volcanoes. I will then head to Thailand to spend some beach time with my fiancée before returning to the UK to continue chasing the bad guys.

"Book of Remembrance" remembered

Members may recall that some years ago the Association commissioned a "Book of Remembrance" to record the stories of "Old Boys" who lost their lives in the Great and Second World Wars and whose names appear on the School War Memorials.

The sales cleared the costs and the School Library was the beneficiary of the surplus.

Unfortunately about two years ago the last box of books disappeared but fortunately, following enquiries made by the newly appointed Librarian Mr Pitchford, the box has been located.

The book is a handsome little volume, A5 in a blue cover with yellow lettering that would grace any bookshelf and several requests have been received for it in recent months. With the supply having dried up and a second edition being most unlikely, it is interesting to note that a copy recently changed hands in the second-hand book market for £15.

The recent discovery means that we have a limited number of copies available to members at £4 each if collected, or £5 each inclusive of postage and packing to U.K. addresses. Should you be interested, please contact David Baines on 01284 828091, or at dcbaines@globalnet.co.uk or at

7a Beechcroft, Stanningfield, Bury St. Edmunds. Suffolk. IP29 4RT. Cheques should be made payable to "Hitchin Boys' School".

Since the book was written, quite an amount of additional information has become available including the stories of two "Old Boys" not mentioned on the School War Memorials. Taking advantage of modern technology to the best of a septuagenarian's ability, David has produced an up to date version on diskette (floppy disk) using XP Home and Word 2000. If you would like to make a donation of £5 or more per diskette for the benefit of the School Library made payable to "Hitchin Boys' School", David can provide members with a free copy to U.K. addresses.

"Ghosts of Reginald Hine" by Richard Whitmore

You can get a copy from Richard directly or from Eric Moore's bookshop. The cost is £20.00 + postage if required. Richard's contact is 01462 433261 or email: oldnewsman@btinternet.com

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