

Hitchin Boys' School Old Boys' Association

Formerly Hitchin Grammar School Old Boys' Association Quarterly Bulletin

September 2008 General Apologies to those who were expecting an August issue but as we are now using the school reprographic department to print the bulletin this clashes with the school holidays. So I hope you will forgive us and welcome a September issue.

The 'silver leavers' held a reunion during the summer – congratulations to Steven Hilleard and John Franklin in their efforts to get so many of their year group together. Steven has written a report which is included later in the bulletin.

The AGM in 2009 will take place on Wednesday 22nd April and be followed by a Committee meeting. Please note that the Annual Dinner will be in July this year to coincide with the date that the original Old Boys' Club was inaugurated.

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

Please make a note of it and come and join us. Also a Centenary concert on Friday 17th July in conjunction with the school promises to be a momentous occasion. There are many notable names – some with National and International reputations – hoping to join us.

We are hoping that 300 members/old boys will be present at the dinner and realize that local accommodation could be a problem. I would like to ask those living in the Hitchin area to consider if they are in a position to offer to put anyone up to let me know.

Old Boy Reunions and Dinners are for all past members of the school whether they are members of the Association or not

Committee News Much of the committee work is now focused on the centenary celebrations for 2009. Members will no doubt be pleased to hear that the promised book – currently titled 'We were there' and consisting of a wide range of memories of past and present members of the school, will have its first print run in the near future. Stuart Halsey and I would welcome ideas for a more eye-catching title so please let us know if you have an idea. We are asking for subscriptions of £12.50 for the book. Subscribers names will be printed in the book provided subscriptions are received by January 1st 2009.

A form for you to complete and send with your cheque is printed at the end of this bulletin. We intend that the initial print run will be 300 copies to ensure that you get one please apply early. It is our intention to number each copy - so you will receive a limited edition.

Books will be available for collection at the AGM, the Centenary Concert and the Centenary dinner. The School office will also hold copies for collection or purchase but please let me know if you intend to use this facility.

News from Members 1983 Upper 6th leavers' reunion – 28 June 2008

Lying in bed one miserable morning this past February, it occurred to me - for some inexplicable reason – that it was soon to be 25 years since I last graced the hall and classrooms of Hitchin Boys' School. Could it really be a quarter of a century since my final Founders' Day?

Indeed, the summer of 1983 turned out to be the last time I saw the vast majority of the 50 pupils with whom I shared toil, fun and frolics in the Sixth Form house. Despite never having lived more than 15 miles from Hitchin, I rarely saw any of the old gang.

The two exceptions were Dr Mike Baxter who has had the privilege (?) to physically examine me on numerous occasions since our family registered at his Shefford practice and John (Jake) Franklin who I kept in loose touch with via the ritual exchange of Christmas cards (quite frankly that's pretty dreadful considering we sat next to each other in most classes for several years and shared the same passion for heavy metal music and beer!).

Indeed, John still lives in Hitchin and even then we never seemed to find time in all those years to stay in touch. We just sort of drifted apart which, I later discovered, was not that unusual within our particular year group. So I reached out to John and suggested that we really ought to have a catch-up after 25 years and he eagerly agreed.

And that was where the fun started. Wouldn't it be great, we thought, to organise a little gathering for some of the other 48 former classmates who took A-levels with us in 1983? How difficult could it be with the advent of our friend Google and the internet to find all 48 and celebrate this milestone together? And thus we set ourselves a challenge which began with us trying to recollect the names of everyone with whom who journeyed through the Sixth Form. The first 35-40 or so rolled off the tongue but then the onset of middle age and the effects of a quarter century ignoring the likes of Dr Baxter slowed us to the point where we needed assistance. Surely the school would have records we could rely on? Indeed it did, but only in the form of hand-written ledgers recording the A-level participants in 1983 which the very helpful Mrs Baskerville in the school office so kindly hunted out and faxed to us.

Armed with this knowledge, we divided up the list and set about our task which we were confident would be fairly easy given that not everyone could possibly have been so poor at maintaining those school friendships. How wrong we were. The task of tracing our former chums was hampered by a widespread lack of communication among our group. Most we contacted had some vague knowledge of the past whereabouts of a couple of friends but often this was out-of-date.

The internet of course proved invaluable, as did reference web sites such as 192.com where we were able to conduct national searches of telephone directories and even the electoral rolls going back several years. Hundreds of letters were mailed to all those we struggled to locate in the hope that we might get lucky – if we mail all the Simon R. Smiths in the UK surely we'll hit the bull's-eye?

Other less orthodox methods involved stalking a Norwich bar-owner dressed in fluorescent Lycra, the assistance of a 25-stone transsexual lorry driver called Nicola living in Rotterdam, and a Meals-on-Wheels lady. Honestly!

After three months and dozens of hours of phone calls, letters, emails and even knocking on the doors of former addresses, we had managed a pretty respectable 43 out of 50. Surprisingly, all but two of these were still residing in the UK and all bar one were extremely enthusiastic about a proposed get-together.

So a date and venue was set. On a fine Saturday evening, on June 28, more than 30 former class mates who had no conflicting family or business commitments descended upon the historic Sun Hotel in Hitchin where the main bar had been reserved to allow us some privacy as we regressed by a quarter of a century to share our life histories.

In addition to the core 1983 A-level students were a few mates who still live close to the school but had left before the Sixth Form. Respected local kitchen business proprietor Steve French was there, and no reunion would have been complete without the infamous Rob Norris. Our year group has fond memories of prankster Rob, my favourite being the day he painted white stripes across the Quad and attached traffic cones to poles. His April Fool's Day attempt to

recreate a Zebra crossing on the hallowed turf was met with the ignominious punishment of painting the white stripes with green paint which simply added to the hilarity of the situation, much to the annoyance of headmaster Mr. Kaye. Oh happy days!

As organisers, John and I had some cause to be a little nervous. Would everyone turn up? What will we talk about? Will we still recognise each other? This last point was easily rectified by insisting that everyone wore a name badge. It sounded pretty anal when we suggested it but it was unanimously agreed at the end of the night that it had indeed been a smart move. While most of us looked remarkably similar if not a little wrinkled, actually putting names to familiar faces would have proved challenging after such a long time. This did not apply to Jon Adams who must surely still struggle to get served in a pub, and Nick (Nicola) Franks who basks in the knowledge that he is the only one of 50 to actually have more hair than in 1983.

It's fair to say that most in attendance admitted to feeling pretty apprehensive upon entering the bar, not knowing quite what to expect. But within an hour the conversation – and beer consumption – was in full swing and 1983 seemed like only yesterday. We reflected on some of the outrageous antics that we used to share, behavior which most of us now as parents would surely chastise our children for. We laughed and shared tales of how we had become so thin/fat or bald/hairy. And it was so refreshing that the event didn't become a contest to see who had the most qualifications, the best job or the biggest house. It truly seemed like a bunch of old mates having a good time, accepting each other for what they are.

And then it was Sunday morning and our Inboxes was full of emails offering thanks and bemoaning hangovers that will surely last until the next soirée. It had indeed been a worthwhile experience to hunt down so many old friends but a part of me was disappointed that we had failed to find seven of them. It's quite possible, I was reassured, that some of our group had moved to pretty far-flung corners of the world. Indeed, based on statistical probability, it's likely that some had passed away like our dear friend Jonathan (Bod) Temple who was cruelly a victim of cancer in late 1983 and who never enjoyed our good fortune to drift into middle age amidst a million experiences and memories.

So John and I resolved to keep trying and, working on a lead passed to me during the reunion, I was soon chatting to an astonished Rob Vass early the following morning as he prepared to leave his Sydney office and head home. One down, six to go.

So to the next reunion. Should we do this every year? I suspect a full-blown annual gathering of us all will not have quite the attraction after the novelty of a first event in 25 years but many of us resolved to attend the Old Boys' Association centenary event in 2009 and probably to retain some closer, more frequent contact with former close friends. What's for sure is that we will not leave it another 25 years before we meet up again. But then again, isn't that what we all said way back in the summer of 1983?

Attendees: Jon Adams, Philip Agg, Richard Bache, Michael Baxter, Dermot Beatson, Mike Bryars, David Carter, Geoffrey Curtis, Peter Dunford, Martyn Fisher, John Franklin, Nick Franks, Steve French, Rupert Frost, Timothy Guy, Richard Hartless, William Heaton, Steve Hilleard, Rob Laurens, Brian MacInnes, Ed Mortimer, Rob Norris, Paul Pattar, Duncan Pickering, Jeremy Rackham, Jeremy Stancombe, Mark Turner, Andrew Twaits, Toby Venables, Marcus Wheel, Peter Whiteman, James Willis
Steven Hilleard

Other Old Boys I was taking a friend on a tour of Norfolk one wet day in August and ended up in broadland, in particular at Hickling. The rain was too heavy to warrant a walk along the path to see the open expanse of the broad so we resorted to the Ferry Boat Inn for some refreshment. I

took the opportunity to peruse the local paper where the main news was about the decision to allow this area of Norfolk to be left in the hands of nature and not to have any further sea defenses. I had heard via the grapevine that Alan Sellwood (1952) had retired to Hickling so I thumbed through the pub phone book, found his address and decided to pay a visit.

Alan was a dentist and had his practice in Letchworth. His youngest brother Stewart was in my class at school and the middle brother Don was the captain of the first rugby XV, the year that the school changed from soccer to rigger. I had not seen Alan for over 50 years and we spent some time reminiscing and conjuring up names that we might both have known. It was only when he realized that John Gummer was due at the village hall in 10 minutes to discuss local concerns that we said goodbye and I reminded him of next year's centenary and hoped that he would be able to make an appearance.

David Stancombe

School News

The end of the summer holidays and the start of a new school year means that we shall not get an update until our next meeting later this month.

Application for the Old Boys Centenary publication.

Name:

Years at School: -

Address:

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Please indicate preference in the tick boxes below –

Pick up from Dinner (£12.50)

Postage in UK (£15.00)

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Cheques made payable to HBSOBA and sent to the Hon. Sec. – contact details are at the end of the bulletin.

Contact Address for HBSOBA

Communications for the Association may be sent to me at Beck Springs, Beckett End, Foulden. Thetford. Norfolk. IP26 5AF. Phone: 01366 328153 or e-mail davidstancombe@tiscali.co.uk or via our website www.oldboysonline.com.