

# Bedford School in the 1950's

By Simon Cauthery (47-56)

Like John Allan's experiences recently described, in those days I also went through the same sort of life although I started as a boarder at Farrars with Mr Sutcliffe at the age of 9 in 1947. John started at Nashes which was for the younger boys presumably up to the age of 8 or 9. Like him my form mistress was Miss Harman and I think Mr Pickering. At the time Miss Sillar was very much the grand old lady of the "Inky" and much respected. I think she had taught my uncle Robert (Peacock).

I don't remember that much of my "Inky" days apart from them being totally undistinguished although I did win a form prize, the first and only! But I do remember our form being shown correspondence relating to Captain Scott who was looking for a financial contribution towards his polar expedition in 1912 (which was turned down, I believe). This was prompted by the film of this event starring John Mills in 1948. After "Farrars" the next step was into the Upper School and fourth form with the move to Burnaby House under Mr O V Bevan. I chose that house mainly because it was so close to the school, a huge benefit in time saved going to and from the boarding house especially with all the papers and textbooks we had to lug about, and he was a good housemaster.



In those days by present day standards, I suppose the school looked shabby and well worn, the desks were mainly probably the original 2-seater bench type with lift up seats, ink wells, and scarred with graffiti. The cast iron frames with the maker's name cast in (George Hammer & Co). Our school books came from F R Hockliffe in the town and many of these were re-cycled to cut costs. It has to be remembered that in those first 10 years or more after the end of the war the whole country had been run down and rationing was in force for many years. Definitely "austerity" ruled, and it showed.

The Head Master in my early years was Mr Humphrey Grose-Hodge who seemed to be a god-like figure and often had his large white Samoyed dog with him. Most of the masters were characters in some way, there was Mr Cobby, our Latin Master who was truly terrifying if Latin prep was not satisfactory, Mr Cummins (Cossack) who had a cane called "William" behind his desk kept there as the ultimate sanction, Mr Hodges (Agah) a kindly soul who had lost a leg in World War 1, Mr Carlton who had lost a leg in WW2, Mr Fitt who had been a Japanese POW and so on. My form masters were, at various times, Mr Squibbs, Mr Date (I remember him as he gave me "3 of the best" for playing with a Dinky Toy car in an English lesson), Mr Rowe, Rev Peacock and not forgetting Mr Boys-Stones.

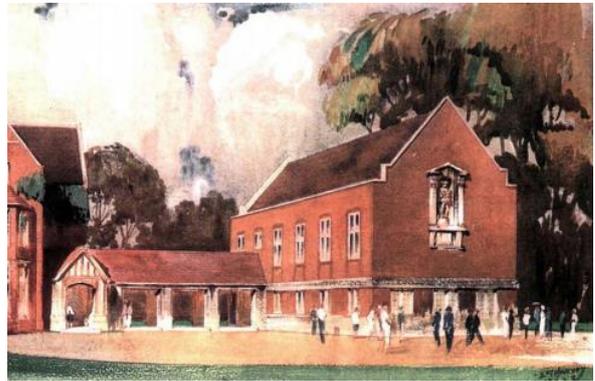


Mr AGA Hodge



The best part of the school day was the half hour break at 11 o'clock. 10 to 15 minutes of PT outside the School South face and then down to the five courts for milk and buns. These were lovely sticky "penny" buns (which cost one penny) and doughnuts for 2 pence. They came fresh from Cyril Kish the baker and even now I remember how delicious they were.

I always liked the Memorial Hall and the school Library downstairs. On the shelves round the walls were low bookcases with sets of bound copies of "Punch" and the "Illustrated London News" including photos and reports of World War 1. Fascinating reading and some of these went back to the late 1800's. At the top of the stairs was a glass cabinet with a magnificent Greek Orthodox Cope which had been worn at the Wedding of Princess Marina to the then Duke of Kent. This worthy had the splendid title of "His Beatitude the Metropolitan Germanos of Thyatera, Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Northern and Western Europe". Why it was there I can't imagine. I was obviously so impressed that it seemed to have become implanted in my brain!



Owen Bevan

Boarding house life had a strict routine of course, meals being important fixtures. I can't remember the food as being particularly interesting, just good old institutional fare, with the meal we were allowed a small pat of butter at breakfast and margarine at tea at which event we could supplement the meal with our own jam or whatever. For dessert, jam tart was a favourite, it came on a large baking tray to be cut up by Mr Bevan or a senior boy. It was important to get the rectangular pieces as these were bigger than the corner bits! The first-year boys were subjected to the "fagging" system which must seem rather quaint now but no doubt all part of the "character forming" experience, it was very tiresome being almost like a slave to the house monitor who chose you.

I was little more than average academically and not at all a "sporty" boy, preferring to read books from the little house library (lots of good yarns from authors of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, G A Henty, Percy F. Westerman, Bulldog Drummond and so on as well as model aircraft making). Going into Bedford was quite popular although there were rules to obey like not going to Woolworths or "multiple stores" or the Cinema. A popular shop was Goldings in the High Street for model aircraft kits and those sorts of bits and pieces. We would also go to Lyons for tea and beans on toast (6d for beans, 2d for tea) or, if feeling daring to Kishes for sausage egg and chips (1/6d). Every Saturday after lunch we lined up to be handed our pocket money (2/-) or 10p now. We would also have whatever money our parents gave us to last the term, in my case I think it was about £3 or 4 and we were expected to hand that over to Mr Bevan for safekeeping until required. I also remember that we were given the school fees bill to take home at the end of term



Goldings – which sadly Closed in 2019

and that a typical bill was about £100 per term including boarding, tuition and extras which then was quite reasonable.

With very good reason we had very little time to get out and about on our own, Tuesdays and Thursdays after games if we had the early session and Saturday afternoons and Sunday, of course, after Matins in the Chapel but we still had to go to Evensong. I was lucky enough to have an Aunt who lived near Wilstead, about 6 miles away and every 2 or 3 weeks I was invited for Sunday lunch which was not to be missed, I could get there quite easily on my bike or by bus if the weather were bad.



RSM Coblenz (on the right)

Wednesday afternoons were for the CCF; we only had an army section, and we used the "Royal Engineers" cap badge for some reason. I quite liked that (most of the time) We had a splendid RSM who seemed to us then quite elderly, RSM Blincoe. A very forceful character and a great friend of the school. He was succeeded by RSM Coblenz. Our rifles were all Lee Enfields from 1914-18.

There was a small "sick room" at Burnaby and when I was there for some sort of infectious ailment another boy was put in the adjoining bed and from this meeting developed a lifelong friendship. Kevin Shortis was a year or two junior which may have been why I had not noticed him before, but we found we had many interests in common especially cars and motor bikes, even then he seemed like 14 going on 40 and regarded school as something to be endured before tackling the wide world.

A popular Saturday afternoon treat was a visit to Peacock's sale rooms and see what was being put up. I think Kevin would have a go at the old bikes and managed to construct a 4-wheel bike by joining two machines together side by side. It worked quite well and the police couldn't find anything in the regulations to prevent him using it. I was tempted and bought (for 35/- or £1.75 ) a cycle motor which was a device with a 49cc motor driving direct on to the bicycle's front tyre. I managed to get this back to the house without Mr Bevan seeing and at the end of term it went home in my school trunk, oil and all!



W&H Peacock sale yard – Horne Lane

I had some fun with that at home, it went well with the exhaust pipe removed (or perhaps it was just the noise) but for some reason it came back to school with me and I took it back to the sale yard and bought a thing called a "Mini Motor" for 50/- which was a slightly more sophisticated device driving the back wheel. Again, I can't remember how this escaped the notice of the Burnaby hierarchy, but I didn't actually use it on my bike there, not having a licence and being very definitely "against school rules" and so it also went home again at the end of term as my mind must have been on a more ambitious form of transport.



In the meantime, Kevin had seen at the sale yard a frightful contraption, a “James” 3-wheel van. These were a not uncommon utility commercial vehicle in the 1930's and consisted of a motorcycle front end with a big “V” twin air cooled engine driving the 2 rear wheels. There was room for driver and passenger in the cab with this great lump of an engine in the middle. He bought this for about £4 or £5 (he always seemed to have enough cash) and thought this would enable him to visit his girlfriend in Northampton.

This van was kept in an old wooden shed in an orchard off Kimbolton Road which, for some reason, the farmer let us use. I well remember going with him to Northampton at least twice to his girlfriend's home (and a good tea). Bearing in mind he was only about 14 or 15 and I was 15 or 16. and none of us had a licence and the van not taxed (or probably insured). Kevin was in disguise wearing a dirty old raincoat and flat cap.

Around this time, I had noticed at a Saturday sale an old Morris Cowley, a 1928 model open tourer. I couldn't buy it but I really fancied it and some weeks later I was told that it could be had for £6. This was too tempting although a totally unrealistic fancy of course, but with some money borrowed from Kevin plus my £4 stake raised the necessary £6 to buy it. Quite mad but the deal was done and with the help of 3 or 4 school mates we pushed it a mile or so along Kimbolton Road to the wooden shed in the orchard. There it sat for quite a few months while I fiddled about ineffectually to try and start it. A shame really because if I then had the funds and experience of later years it would have been a worthwhile venture as it had obviously had little use in its life and still had the wartime black paint on the sidelamp glasses. Realising the inevitable I had a local garage tow it back to the sale rooms and I think I just about got my money back for it.



In our shed we also had at various times Kevin's van which he tried to “improve” with a bigger windscreen in plate glass. I don't think it would have occurred to us that this was potentially lethal! Also, we had there an old Motorcycle belonging to Kevin's brother plus a wind-up gramophone and “Primus” paraffin stove so this became a sports afternoon base for 3 or 4 likeminded boys listening to our limited record collection, brewing “Camp” coffee as well as a few puffs of “roll-up” cigarettes with maybe even a drop of that awful sweet “Empire” sherry! Total decadence and VERY much against the rules.



Simon outside Burnaby with his 'Mota Mite'

I used Kevin's motor bike once to visit another aunt in Wilden on a Sunday but all this activity came to an unhappy end when Kevin fell off this motor bike not far from Glebe Road. A well-meaning motorist stopped to ask if he was OK and where he lived and so on. Later on that evening he phoned Burnaby to enquire if Kevin was alright – so, BIG trouble for Kevin. A beating followed and after much discussion it was mutually agreed that he should leave at the end of term before “O” levels, not that Kevin was particularly bothered.

The next morning Mr Bevan hauled me out of a Library period and wanted to be taken to The Shed, so off we went, me in great trepidation. We had a good look round, the van was there but Mr Bevan said he could see it was far from roadworthy. "Do you smoke here" he said, "Oh no, sir, I said, hastily standing on the odd cigarette end. As no apparent crime had been committed no further action was taken but I was told that the shed venture must end so that was that.



For me school continued for the rest of the year, although I was by now in the 6<sup>th</sup> form, I did not stay on for "A" levels but took the Civil Service Commission exam for entry to Sandhurst so left at the end of Easter term in 1956. As it happened, I didn't get through the Sandhurst selection so went on instead to do the 2 years National Service in the REME as a Vehicle Mechanic following a truly excellent course at Taunton. The experience gained there and during the rest of my army time was invaluable in coping with future adult life generally as well as my interests in things mechanical.

When the two years were almost over it was time to look for a career and I had no real idea but had an interview with an outfit in London called "The Public Schools Appointments Bureau". There they assessed abilities and interests and gave out a list of Companies which might be of interest and which I would pick 3 or 4 and write for interview. I had 3 interviews and the last one was with the firm of Henry Simon Ltd. In Stockport, Cheshire. They were an engineering and manufacturing business building Flour Mills all over the world. The prospect of overseas travel AND, the promise that "by the time you are 30 you could be earning £1,000 per year" was enough to convince me and after a fairly cursory interview I was accepted although the starting salary was £205 per annum plus £3-10 lodging allowance. In those days very few left school to go to University unless going into a profession of some sort. Others would be taken on by whatever organisation was of interest and there was plenty of choice, mostly starting as a trainee and working upwards from there. Qualifications as such were not too important but a few "O" levels helped plus (dare I say it) a Public School background!

**Kevin J Shortis**

*Born 30 October 1939*

*Died 14 June 2019 - Aged 79*

*At Bedford School 1953-1955 - Burnaby*



Kevin started work in the late 1950s as a teenager. Originally he worked for parts distributor Vic Moore Car Spares in Lancashire. Sensing a gap in the market, Kevin, at the age of 23, set up a shop aimed at DIY motorists. It was an immediate hit. In an age where a new generation of first-time car owners liked to maintain and fit accessories to their vehicles, the business did well and before long several more branches were opened across East Anglia.

In 1971 the company was taken over by the aftermarket magnate Quinton Hazell. Kevin took a place on Hazell's board, but the relationship was short lived due to the sale of QH to Burmah. However, this was not successful, due to the lack of personal attention and after a few years Kevin formed Wilco Motor Spares and then bought back four of his original stores including the Salhouse Road Head Office.

Now joined by his son Richard, Wilco had expanded to 18 outlets by 2004. In August of that year, Wilco took over the Leeds-based Motosave with its 24 shops and fitting bays, thereby increasing the group to 42 stores staffed by over 600 enthusiastic employees, who were there to help by offering the right stock at the right price.

In 2010 Kevin won the Lifetime Achievement trophy at the CAT Awards. However he never retired and continued to work in the business with his son Richard.

Kevin is survived by his wife Vicki, sons Richard and Chris, and 2 grandchildren.

*Taken from The Ousel - 2019*

time at Bedford must have provided a good grounding although I know I really didn't take full advantage of the opportunities offered and must have been quite a worry to my parents at times.

**Simon Cauthery (47- 56)**

Kevin, enterprising as ever, worked for a while for his Uncle's garage near Stockport and then worked as a van driver for a car spares business and we kept in close contact playing about with old cars when possible. In the next few years, he progressed through various occupations before setting up a Car Spares business in Norwich in the early 60's which grew mightily to an organisation of over 120 outlets up and down the country. Sadly, he died in 2019.

My own career was nothing like as spectacular, I remained connected to the Flour and Grain machinery design and operation until retirement, at various times working on many overseas assignments including managing one of South Africa's largest mills in the 1970's and eventually retiring with my wife to Somerset where I am a regular volunteer at the Fleet Air Arm Museum and still retain my old motoring links with my 1933 MG sports car.

Looking back, I realise that my



