



## The Old Maidstonian

The newsletter of the Old Maidstonian Society

No. 37 – Spring 2022

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  - The current School Vice-Captain (ex-officio)
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### From the President



This is my final newsletter as President. After a covid induced extension of the term of office from one year to three years I will hand over to incoming President Graham Walker at the Annual Supper on 25<sup>th</sup> March.

It has been an extraordinary time to have been President. Wrapped up among the memories of home schooling three children (something I hope to never repeat), half hour dog walks, PE with Joe, wiping down post and trying to work are the quarterly Committee meetings of the OMS. A strand of continuity in an otherwise adjusted world.

The move online with Committee meetings enabled regular full attendance and kept timing concise. The pandemic brought forward our adoption of this technology and will enable the Committee of the future to comprise of Alumni from around the country or indeed world.

The completion of the Library was at the start of my Presidency and honestly, feels like a decade ago but at our Autumn supper of 2021 guided tours of the school were on offer and to see the library, Ron McCormick pavilion and school more broadly was a real pleasure.

In the course of my three years as President I have enjoyed reconnecting with the MGS I enjoyed as a student there. More of a revelation has been connecting with the OMS Committee. Through the work of the Committee and with Brian on the newsletter I have enjoyed enormously collaborating with people unlike those I normally work alongside. When the murder of Sarah Everard compelled me to bring my thoughts to my committee colleagues I was unbelievably gratified by the response of my fellow members. What followed was a process of listening, discussion, co-ordination with the school and the subsequent inclusion of a thought piece in the OMS newsletter. This inclusion received diverse feedback, a minority were angry to read my experiences and thoughts, but the remainder were thoughtful, considered and additive. The experience underlines that even in our divided times hard conversations are still possible where people engage in good faith.

I was delighted to be invited to participate in the work MGS are doing in Inspire to Belong and very much look forward to talking at a lunchtime event on my experiences in business in a couple of week's time.

Many thanks for the support I have received as President of the OMS. Special thanks to John, Richard and the members of the OMS Committee who I have thoroughly enjoyed working alongside. See you at an OMS event soon!

### From the Chairman

After a nightmare two years, the worst of the pandemic appears to be over and the Society is planning some events that will give us all the chance to celebrate and renew the fellowship we share as Maidstonians.

The first of these is our Annual Supper, which you can read about below. Membership Secretary Sean Scurr has been busy, as always, making sure that all members know the details and gathering their menu choices. Gypsy Tart has become as much a staple of our supper menu as it was at school dinners back in the day (whichever day it was!).

I hope that many OMs will also be able to attend the afternoon of sport on the new 3G pitch, on the day after the supper.



These are exciting times at our school, with a new building project having received planning permission, and the Headmaster will no doubt be informing us about this and other activities that are in the pipeline.

I must also thank my friend and contemporary, Chris Hipkins OM, for spotting some historic photographs of Lord Beeching at MGS, and successfully obtaining these on behalf of the Society.

### From the Headmaster

Hello Old Maidstonians. I write this article at a time when Maidstone Grammar School is going through a number of developments. Firstly, back in February, we began building the second floor of the Ron McCormick Pavilion. We successfully achieved planning permission just before Christmas to build six more classrooms to rehouse the Modern Foreign Languages department. With MGS continuing to grow in size we are in desperate need of the space, so we are very much looking forward to moving into the new premises as soon as we can. It is hoped that the new floor will be finished by the start of the new academic year in September.

In addition to the building project, we have been further developing our Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity agenda in a number of ways. Following on from Black History Month in October, we have also this year recognised LGBT+ History Month in February, as well as International Women's Day and Gender Equality in March.

With respect to LGBT+ History Month, I was delighted that Maidstone Grammar School for the first time ever was acknowledging such an occasion. In 473 years, Maidstone Grammar School has never flown the Pride flag on top of the gatehouse, and has never spoken about LGBT+ matters in such a public and open way. And for this I was extremely proud to be a part of something that was looking forward and embracing such a key aspect of diversity.

Following LGBT+ History Month, we then moved straight into March, focusing on Gender Equality and International Women's Day. Throughout the month we are having numerous conversations about topics such as equality, gender stereotyping and sexual harassment; we are inviting several external guest speakers into the school to talk about their experiences in business, politics, and the arts; our weekly tutor time programme will highlight some of the fantastic work being done to champion gender equality with recognisable figures such as Emma Watson, as well as raising awareness about the use of pronouns; and we are also having several lunchtime drop-in sessions across a range of subjects, including women in STEM and the film industry. The work we are doing in school to address these matters is really important to us and so will become integral to our work in promoting our Inspire to Belong agenda.

And finally, as part of our ongoing developments, is our persistent focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Since returning to school from lockdown it has been really important to engage students once again with their passion for curiosity and discovery. Our Inspire to Learn agenda has been doing this the past few years now, but it has never mattered so much. One aspect of this was back in February when we welcomed a guest speaker from a company called Inner Drive to work with staff on a number of aspects of teaching and learning. Inner Drive is part of Eton College's educational research programme, and during the day they were in school we looked at questioning, assessment and memory retention. This was a fresh approach to our own continuous professional development, and we enjoyed welcoming some outside voices.

To hear more about these developments, and how Maidstone Grammar School has responded to the pandemic, I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming OM Supper.



## MGS and OMS EVENTS

The Old Maidstonian Society **AGM** and **Annual Supper** will be held at the school on **Friday 25th March 2022**. Dress is jacket and tie.

The AGM will be held from 17:45 to 18:30. The Supper will commence promptly at 19:30, and will conclude equally promptly by 22:00, as there will again be a Master of Ceremonies to ensure that all runs on time, as it has done for the past couple of years, pre-covid.

The **President, Nancy Powell**, has once more invited Toby Davies as her guest. Toby left MGS in 1994. Since leaving he has worked as a stage and screen writer (something he began to much acclaim whilst at MGS). He has worked on major TV series, and stage shows, here and in the US for a range of production companies. We are certain he will be an entertaining speaker, and will be intrigued to hear what effect the pandemic has had on his industry.

The incoming **President for 2022 to 2023** will be **Graham Walker**, who retired in 2018 after 37 years at MGS, and whom many of you will remember, not least because he was the President's guest at the Annual Supper 2019.

There will again be a professional bar service with beer, spirits, port and soft drinks being served before dinner and also at tables during the meal. The bar will be open by 18:00, and the hall and bar will remain open until 23:00. Entrance will again be only through the main entrance door, where you will be greeted.

There will also be the now legendary raffle, with tickets on sale on the night.

We are delighted to confirm that the caterers for the Annual Supper will be Cucina. They will again be preparing our meal, and details of the menu and payment details have been circulated already. The caterer will provide place names with each diner's menu choices printed on one side.

### 'Super Saturday'

On the following day, **Saturday 26 March**, the school will be opening its doors to welcome back as many Old Maidstonians as possible, to celebrate the growth of sport at MGS and the new 3G pitch. Together with the Annual Supper, this will make for a great weekend event to celebrate our community.

Please come along for a drink and a bite to eat at the Ron McCormick Pavilion. The school will be opening at 12:00, and hosting some fierce alumni sporting competition for you to watch:

- **12.30-14.30:** The OM 7-a-side Football Tournament.
- **15.00-16.30:** The 2019-21 OM Rugby Team vs the MGS 1stXV.

If necessary, the school can be contacted on 01622 752101, or by e-mail at [school@mgs.kent.sch.uk](mailto:school@mgs.kent.sch.uk)

## Musings from the Penthouse

As I drift amongst the archive boxes, books, photographs and various mementoes from school visits, it seems strange to 'hear' the silence. No longer is Roger tapping away at his laptop keyboard, neither is Jeff busying himself trying to tuck files into the relevant boxes, and Kathy is absent busying herself with the students in her work as Librarian. However, the emails still arrive for archive investigation with stories of OMs past and present. One such email arrived a month or so back with what I can only call a magnificent accolade for MGS and its staff: **'I take great pride in my initial "survival" and eventual success at MGS. It has set me up for life.'**

**Simon Groom (1976-78)** wrote that he was carrying out some research for his past life and requested any information that the archives might have had about him, especially in relation to his representation of MGS and Kent Schools in the Cross-Country events. Simon says that he 'was a transferee from Oldborough Manor to MGS and put in the pre-professional set and nothing too

much was expected in terms of academic success, as I was recruited for my running ability as one of Kent's top junior under-20 runners'.

His story is not the usual one for MGS entrants as he had been brought up in care and then fostered in 1971. That is when his education and life took a turn for the better. His words are, 'with stability I achieved six good GCSEs and got into MGS to do A Levels. I won the Parent Teacher award for academic achievement in 1977/78 and ran in every school cross country and athletics fixture for two years.' He omits to say that he was always to the fore of the finishers. To continue... 'Going to MGS from Oldborough Manor (where I was top academically) was like in football terms going from playing for Gillingham to Inter Milan. It was so tough. I had to work hard to raise my game in A Level Politics and History competing against the likes of the MGS academic titans of Richard Solly, Peter Heather, Phil Wynn-Owen and Adam Sampson to name but a few. Dr Webb played a key role in my personal development and pulled me aside and said I should consider University based on my internal exam results. Me go to University? Crikey. I got A2 in history and B2 in politics (the 2 stands for a merit special pass in each subject). I went on to obtain a 2(1) from Hull in Politics in 1981, together with the University Senate prize for the best student in Social Sciences in 1981. I also achieved a Master's degree from Hull University in Political Philosophy in 1983. Without doubt Dr Pettit, Dr Webb, Mr Langston and Mr Maltby, together with John Morgan (for the running and personal development), combined with the rigorous MGS education changed my life. The MGS education that I received over two years was of a far higher standard than that at University, although both institutions served different purposes and academic requirements.' [*Icarus - my accentuation not Simon's.*] I was a complete success for MGS and myself as a late developer.'



Senior Cross Country, April 1986

Photo: K. Vollbracht

Simon is about to retire after a 35-year career in the City of London in the financial services sector. He wrote a paper earlier on in his career on the closure of mental hospitals which is in the esteemed Kings Fund Library. His final words in his email are, 'I cannot thank MGS enough in helping to create the foundations of my success'.

Regrettably there do not appear to be any annotated photographs of Simon in the archives.

Simon has proved that late developers can reach dizzy heights through work and suitable tutoring and foresight of their masters. He has definitely proved the school motto to be correct in many ways (loosely in interpretation as always): 'One day it will be a joy to remember.'

On the subject of memories, can I ask if anyone knows anything about the 'Vicar's Boys of WW2' or 'Fort Bridgewoods, Chatham'? A title which may have bad connotations these days, but was far from that in the 1940s. Another correspondent, Ms Caroline Wessel, M.A., has raised this matter and has very kindly written an article for us (which follows this 'Musings' article). As you will see she is researching for her book, so any extra help would be appreciated.

Whilst we are on the subject of wartime, Clive Holden has written a book on 'Fortress Maidstone' which includes a section on MGS and an aerial photo of the school, showing the tank defences. If you wish to have a read, it is available free of charge on the Kent Archaeology Survey site, at [www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/publications/member-publications/fortress-maidstone](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/publications/member-publications/fortress-maidstone). Clive visited the school about three years ago, and it was due to his interest that the air-raid shelters were opened up and surveyed.

As I round off Musings, Storm Eunice is howling around the house, rattling anything that will move, including two of the fence panels which have finally succumbed to the forces of nature. Most of you will remember the Great Storm of 1987, but this area often had to withstand similar storms with similar catastrophic consequences. The Maidstone Journal recorded one such storm on 3 September 1833 stating that 'during the whole of their existence, they had never had to record a storm so extensive on its ravages, or so fatally destructive to property that commenced the previous Friday evening and continued without any abatement of its fury until Saturday evening. It set in with a heavy shower accompanied with wind, which in a very short time became a gale, and



then a complete hurricane. Its effects in the immediate neighbourhood were evident, whole plantations of fruit were stripped of their fruit, hop gardens assumed the appearance of a wilderness, plants and poles destroyed... At Aylesford, several large trees were blown up by their roots and great damage done to the hops. Several houses were damaged, including the dwelling of Mr. Bradley, the wheelwright. Part of the chimney was blown down, the pot boiling on the kitchen fire was upset and a fine round of beef was sent rolling on the floor.' Who picked it up first - the wheelwright, his good wife or the dog? I wonder whether such detailed reporting will be made for Eunice!

### ***Old Maidstrivia***

#### **1929**

- Just a year after Mickey Mouse appeared in his first 'talking' movie ('Steamboat Willie'), the school was given the copyright and manuscripts for the school song by Dr. Henniker.
- It is 93 since the old pavilion was opened and dedicated by Alderman G. Foster Clark. This iconic building still stands but the new Ron McCormick building replaces it as a working sports pavilion.



#### **1930**

- The new school buildings were opened in July by the Rt. Hon. Lord Cornwallis.
- This year, workhouses were abolished in the UK. This probably was not the reason for it, but the Junior School from Brunswick House, was incorporated into the new main school in Barton Road
- The Fives Courts and Scout Hut were built. Out of the 380 pupils at the school, 198 were members of the Scout Troop. The Fives Court building still exists but now houses classrooms.

#### **1931**

- Possibly due to the relocation of the school, the cross-country run, known as 'The Aylesford Run' was changed to include more of Mote Park and less of the hop-fields. It was still known by that name up to 1937 at least, so presumably the runners travelled to Aylesford and back. Perhaps another reason for the change was to abide by the newly-introduced *Highway Code*.
- The Officer Training Corps was 108 strong out of the 408 boys in the school. In May, the government restricted the age of boys in the corps to those who were 15 or older. MGS had an answer for that and formed an 'unofficial contingent' for the 13 to 15 year- olds. The OTC band represented the school in the Mayor's Parade.

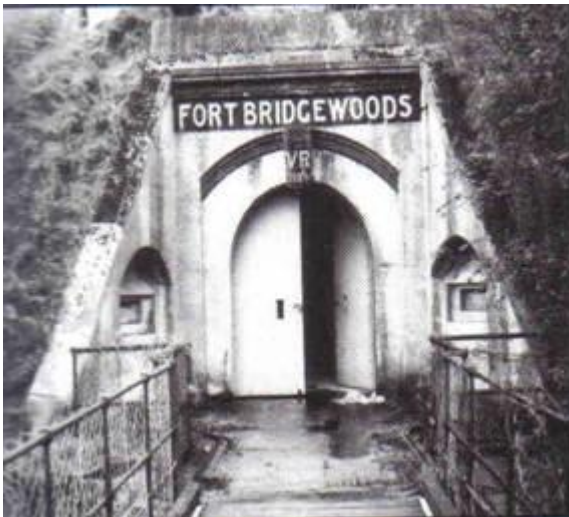
Not wishing to give you trivia indigestion, I suspect that this is a good place to stop, but it will be continued.

I wish you well as we feel a less constrained by Covid. Stay safe and protect others.

### ***Icarus***

#### **Old Maidstonians - Secret Listeners in WW2**

At the start of World War 2, the principal British wireless station for intercepting enemy Morse code transmissions was located in an old Napoleonic fort in Chatham called Fort Bridgewoods, that had been adapted as a hidden workplace for a team of highly-specialised wireless operators. Every day they were sending their work by teleprinter to Bletchley Park, where Enigma machine and other German codes were being rapidly deciphered, in order that enemy action could be known about before an attack actually took place.



The Commanding Office at Fort Bridgewoods was a retired Naval man, the charismatic Lt. Commander Marshall Ellingworth, who had excelled in his Naval career in wireless communications. At the start of the war, Ellingworth had need of a much greater staffing, but the problem was that most fit and able men had by then enlisted for active military service. So, the Commander set about recruiting boys who had just left school, but were still too young to be called up. As a regular churchgoer, Ellingworth was friendly with The Reverend Brand, the Vicar of St Mary's Strood, where he served as churchwarden. The Vicar immediately immersed himself in this task and, with the help of the Chatham Scout leader, they together rounded up about three dozen boys to train in Morse code and wireless interception and work at

Fort Bridgewoods. The Revd Brand even offered to put the boys up at his own vicarage.

It is likely that Sandy le Gassick and Aubrey Stevens, the two Maidstone boys who came to Fort Bridgewoods and engaged in the vital work to fight the war, were recruited by either the Vicar or the Scout Master. In this article we will enjoy the *Boys' Own* story of Sandy and another time look at Aubrey Stevens, and the subsequent dreadful bomb attack that took place at Fort Bridgewoods, when a number of its staff were killed or severely wounded.

**Cyril Norman 'Sandy'** (his hair colour) **le Gassick**, born on 9 April 1925, was the youngest son of WWI veteran Captain le Gassick, MC, Croix de Guerre, who had served in the Royal Garrison Artillery at Ypres and on the Somme. After leaving the Army, the Captain opted to become 'mine host' of a public house at Bluebell Hill near Maidstone. In 1939, when Sandy was fourteen years old, he asked not to be evacuated, so started as a pupil at Maidstone Grammar School. It ran an Officer Training Corps (OTC) and, proud of the military background of his family, Sandy immediately joined up. He became proficient in a number of basic military disciplines and was soon promoted to the rank of Sergeant. In 1940, with the serious threat of invasion, the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) was formed and fifteen-year-old Sandy, who was tall and mature for his age, increased his age to 'seventeen', was recruited into his village LDV and tasked with teaching his basic military skills to the raw volunteer recruits. The men were all issued with Lee Enfield rifles, on which Sandy had already been trained at school, so he led nightly patrols into the surrounding countryside looking for German paratroopers. When the LDV was re-named the Home Guard, Sandy's section became a platoon of "C" Company 13 (Kent) Battalion and, together with two other platoons, the Company HQ was set up at Bluebell Hill - his home village.

Still aged only fifteen, Sandy was promoted to Company Sergeant Major and, with the Battle of Britain screeching right over their heads, his platoon was kept very busy, frequently guarding crashed RAF or German aircraft. Burning planes were especially dangerous, as the bomb loads might explode at any moment, and locating the human remains was distressing. On one occasion, whilst attending a crashed RAF Spitfire alone in an eerie and silent wood, Sandy was terrified when a pack of some twenty German Heinkel and Dornier bombers approached right overhead, *en route* to attack London, and the remnants of the pack returned soon after. Another more rewarding incident was when a German bomber passing directly over Bluebell Hill, was hit by a battery of Ack-Ack guns - also damaging roofs in his village - and when Sandy cycled off to the crash site he found the pilot hanging from a tree. The German immediately surrendered and threw down his gun, and fifteen year old le Gassick marched him to the nearest police station, fending off angry villagers on the way. Young le Gassick also had duties as Assistant Bombing Officer and the men of his front line Battalion were equipped with a wide variety of anti-tank weapons, that he had trained them to use.

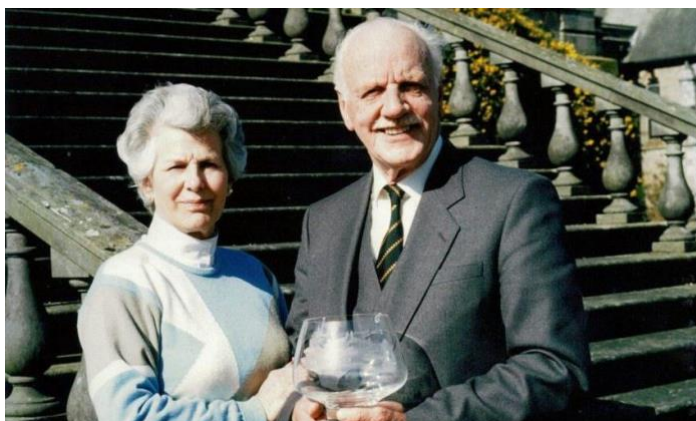
When the threat of immediate invasion had lessened, Sandy's father was one evening approached in his pub by a mysterious stranger. He asked whether his son might be interested in a War Office job, dependent on his passing an aptitude test. Sandy decided to accept and soon joined about forty other school leavers at Fort Bridgewoods. He passed the test and then completed a six-month

course learning to read Morse Code at 22 words per minute and studying the intricacies of Germany Army and Luftwaffe Morse procedures. After qualifying as an EWA, he and his youthful companions spent the rest of their wartime years intercepting enemy coded messages. In due course, with the rest of the Chatham gang, he moved to the War Office 'Y' station of Beaumanor Park in Leicestershire that had become the principal Bletchley secret listening station for the whole country.

*(Note for younger OMs: Ack-Acks were guns designed to shoot upwards at enemy aeroplanes. The word 'Ack-Ack' describes the noise of their repeated shooting)*

Caroline Wessel M.A. is currently researching and writing a book entitled *Beaumanor WWII: Secret Listening Station for Bletchley*, that is a sequel to her earlier publication *Beaumanor War and Peace: the Curzon Herrick Years 1915-1925*, which tells the stories of WWI and the wild house parties at Beaumanor in the 1920s.

Note from Icarus –



Cyril le Gassick – is listed in the 1939 *Maidstonian* 'Salvete' under heading of 'The following boys have been admitted to the School because of the war', passing his Provisional Certificate 'A' in the Junior Training Corps just one year later, and becoming a sergeant. 'Sandy' played in the school Rugby 1st team on a number of occasions. He left the school in 1942, having passed his General Schools Certificate of Education and is finally mentioned in the 'Old Maidstonian' section of *The Maidstonian* as having 'obtained

some kind of secret work.'. Googling his name reveals his importance in relation to the Bismarck, the Suez crisis, NATO and The National Trust. Another exceptional accolade for Maidstone Grammar School!

#### [With reference to our last edition](#)

**Paul Passey** says that the photograph that he provided for the previous edition, purporting to be of him and Brian Beavis, is in fact of Colin Flint (left) and Brian (right). Paul himself is not in the photograph, because he took it! Paul thanks his old friend, **Mike Starke** [ex-MGS and Simon Langton GS Canterbury] for putting him straight.

**Phil Wilkinson (1948 to 1956)** was pleased to see Colin Robbins waxing lyrically about scout treks, on land and water. Phil recalls all those that were mentioned, except the 1957 one to Iceland, by which time he was knee-deep in National Service.

Phil dug back into the photograph album and found a series of views, including this one, which shows Colin (fully and correctly dressed with all badges and accoutrements) and Phil (less so) in the Scott Patrol's flag-kayak, going south towards Monmouth.



Phil offers a salute to J Alan Blake: 'He was always a meticulous quartermaster, and managed rations with unerring skill. I remember one of the camp-fire songs we made up:

There was a little Scouter,



His Christian name was Alan,  
He cut a saccharin in half  
And put it to the gallon.  
Chorus: Oh, it ain't going to rain no more, no more... etc.)'

### Some requests

**Robin Ambrose** has been told that **Roger Johnson**, a School Captain in the 1950's, is the father of the celebrated clarinettist, Emma Johnson. Can anyone confirm whether this is true?

Some time ago, the Society received a request from Ian Huckstep regarding *A History of Langley* by **Jim Clinch** and Anne Clinch. Our Membership Secretary, Sean Scurr, advised him about tracking down a copy, which he needed in order to research the history of his house. He knew that it was a gift by the owners of Rumwood Court, to the locals of Langley, and was called the 'Langley Institute' before being converted into its current format of three houses, known as 1, 2 and 3 Old Style, Sutton Rd, Langley.

Other than some details in the book, Ian has found only one old photograph on the Internet, despite the Langley Institute evidently being popular for local events. Noel Coward is mentioned as someone who used to entertain there. He wonders if any OMs can help with the search for more photographs of the building. If you are able to do so, please contact Sean.

### A new Co-editor?

Having edited *The Old Maidstonian* for over ten years, I think that it is time for me to hand over my job as Co-editor to someone else, in order to 'ring the changes' and get a different perspective on things.

If you are interested in the possibility of taking on the job (which is not too onerous and quite fascinating), please send an email to [oms@oldmaidstonians.org.uk](mailto:oms@oldmaidstonians.org.uk)

### News of Old Maidstonians

Readers will remember **Les Broad's** sterling efforts to have a Kut memorial plaque installed near County Hall. He has written to say that he is thrilled that the Imperial War Museum has listed the Plaque on its online database. It can be seen at [Kut Memorial Plaque](#), and Les hopes that perhaps those involved, including a couple of OMs, won't be entirely forgotten.

**Bill Fullager** 'was intrigued by the reference to the retiring Archivists in the Winter 2021 Newsletter, having had good reason to be grateful to them and especially to their predecessor, Mrs Lois Birrell.

'Like archivist Roger, I still have vivid memories of W.A. Claydon, Headmaster of my long-ago school years (1950-1958), though unlike Roger I have some highly positive memories of W.A.C. Roger is clearly aggrieved that the Headmaster spoke to him only twice during his school years, but I believe that most pupils of the time would have been only too happy to have escaped with so few contacts. I too recall that the mere sound of Claydon's footsteps in any corridor was enough to put the fear of eternal retribution into pupils and staff alike.

'There was one occasion when my Form Master, the wonderful 'Bob' Rylands, told me that I had had a 'fortunate' term. I was cheeky enough to ask him to remind me of the nature of such good fortune, and - with a straight face - he simply replied that I had been due to see the Headmaster but that he had been too ill to see me. No further explanation was necessary for I then realised that I had been due to see W.A.C. to address one of my usual lapses in behaviour or performance, and that I might well have been in line for a caning.

'However, I have learned that behind that fearsome persona there was a Headmaster who truly cared about his pupils and did much to help them on their way. For example, my mother was a widow, and we were poor, so during the summer holidays following my GCEs I decided with her

that I would give up school and take a job as a clerk in the Aylesford Paper Mills, to improve our family income. When Mr Claydon found out he immediately started a bombardment of the Reed Paper Group, intimidating the organisation to such a degree that within two weeks of the start of the new term I found myself back in school, and studying the Romantic Movement. Mind you, I had to ask those colleagues who had been at their desks since the very beginning of term, what the Romantic Movement was. At that stage I knew nothing of Keats and Wordsworth, and wondered if it could refer to 'cheap' novels or modern dance.

'And thanks to the School archivists, particularly Mrs Birrell, I could much later in life take possession not only of my school reports, full of comments from the Headmaster handwritten in red ink, but also of many letters which had been written on my behalf by Mr Claydon. These included letters to Ministers and Air Vice Marshalls, declaring war on the R.A.F. for not awarding me an Air Force Scholarship, and another letter to a university which I was due to visit for a scholarship interview, explaining that at the interview I would appear unbearably aggressive, but that in more relaxed situations I was capable of behaving like a normal human being.

'I haven't forgotten my first two very painful years at school, when I was 'lost' and particularly non-co-operative, but I don't forget either how the Headmaster and his team never gave up on me. I went on to read English at Bristol, had an international business career, followed by a period as head of a major trade association, and several years as Chairman of the National Blood and Transplant Authority: this was due entirely to that Headmaster and the team of masters around him.

'Life has rightly moved on from those violent times when teachers could, and occasional did, hit pupils for behaviour of which they did not approve, especially 'Nogger' Knight, the woodwork teacher, who from time to time showed his valuation of my efforts by hitting me over the head with a heavy wood plane.

'Even at the time I did not resent the bruises, considering them justified opinions on the quality of my work, and even now, so many years later, not a week goes by without me remembering with gratitude what the school gave me, and the debt I cannot repay.'

**Ben Smith (1979 to 1984)** provided this photograph, which he took at the Bomber Command memorial in London on 8 November last year.



### Obituaries

We are grateful to Gaynor, for providing biographical information about her father, who has died at the age of 89. **Bernard Charles Albert Earl** was born in Maidstone on 5 December 1931. He and his sister spent an idyllic childhood in the grounds of South Park, where their father was the Head Park Keeper. The park included many features like tennis, bowls, putting and large playing fields, but what inspired Bernard the most were the moths and butterflies in the formal gardens and on the North Downs: this interest went on to shape the rest of his life.

Bernard excelled in sports, acting and singing as well as in his academic work. On leaving school he was called up for National Service and served in the RAOC as a Second Lieutenant. He ended up in Egypt, where he was involved in the Suez Cannel crisis for which he was awarded a medal many years later, when it was finally recognised as a conflict. Even there he could indulge his love of Insects and wildlife, and was often called upon to rid tents of scorpions and spiders. Following this posting, he continued to serve as a reserve officer and completed his military career as a Captain. Finally, he started his science teacher training at Dudley College in the Midlands, during

which time he visited the UK's first field study centre at Flatford Mill, to study the use of field study centres in education and to further his knowledge of entomology. Subsequently, he was made a fellow of the Royal Entomology Society.

Bernard became Head of Science at Chartham secondary school, where he was heavily involved in the pioneering of field study centres for use in the education of natural science. His work included setting up a field study centre at Godmersham, and supporting the development of Kent Mountain Centre on Snowdon. Bernard even carried out a field study trip with his pupils at the request of broadcaster Charles Henry Maxwell Knight, who would later be identified as the head of MI5 and the inspiration for M in the Ian Fleming novels.

One of Bernard's hobbies was hot rod racing, but his passion for moths and butterflies knew no bounds and he started breeding the world's largest moths, both the Atlas and Indian moon moth.

Eventually, Bernard became Headmaster of Highfield Secondary School Chatham. Set in the heart of the Medway towns, it was a multicultural school and Bernard embraced preparing the morning assemblies, preaching lessons from various faiths, whilst recognising that all religions are really telling the same stories of peace, love and understanding. He continued as Headmaster until the school's closure and his retirement.

During his retirement he developed a passion for Orchids, and this led to redeveloping and enlarging his greenhouse many times, until he had one of the largest collections of orchids in Kent. Bernard also had a large collection of rhododendrons, all set in the beautiful and much-loved garden that he created.

**Martin Brice** wrote as follows about **Charlie Emberson (left MGS in 1972)**.

In October 2021 the extraordinary life of Old Maidstonian Charlie Emberson came to a sudden end with a heart attack, while he was strapped into a glider about to take off. But the surprising thing about the death of this humorous, friendly, energetic and talented man, was not the manner or the too-early date of his passing, but his survival for so many years in such great danger.

Old Maidstonians will probably remember Charlie from his time in the cadet force, where he reached the rank of sergeant-major. He had no interest at all in university and his dream was to join the parachute regiment. His application to become an officer via the Regular Commissions Board was notable for an incident in which the commanding officer's dog was put in danger. His application was unsuccessful.

Undaunted, he joined the 2nd Battalion as a private soldier in 1972, a maelstrom year in which 149 police and army personnel died in Northern Ireland. He chose to use his second name, Mike, as he felt that 'Charles' wasn't a proper name for a para.

During his time there, his battalion suffered the largest death toll in a single incident in Northern Ireland with the Warrenpoint Massacre on August 27 1979, when 16 from 2 Para and two from the Queen's Own Highlanders were killed. He served for 10 years in the Paras and his OM pals saw him rarely. On one occasion he described an exercise in Turkey: long tedious flight in the hold of a Hercules, jump, land, dig a hole, live in it for three days, get on the coach for a 12-hour journey to an airport, long flight home in the hold of a Hercules. He transferred to military intelligence.

During the Falklands war in 1982 he served in Northwood HQ, operational HQ for the war.

Further evidence of Charlie being in the thick of the action was scant but convincing: on the very rare occasions when we met him, he sometimes sported a bushy beard or a full 'Village People' moustache and stubble: beards are rare in the army and in those days needed special permission. We didn't ask, but presumed this was for undercover work. He was awarded the British Empire Medal for 'meritorious service in Northern Ireland during the period 1st November 1981 to 31st January 1982'. He never once mentioned it and we found out by accident that '24302290 Corporal (Acting Sergeant) Michael EMBERSON, The Parachute Regiment' had the BEM.

During this time, he met and married Valerie, his wife of 44 years and they had two children, a girl and a boy who followed Charlie into the army, with in 2013 the arrival of grandson Hadyn – all of whom Charlie was immensely proud.

After a varied career that took him to - among other places - the US, Berlin and Hong Kong, he left the army in 1990, and (after a very brief time as an office-based civil servant that convinced him he was in completely the wrong job) served on attachment in Oman, in charge of mercenaries from Baluchistan, where he described being mortared regularly by Yemenis across the border and sheltering in a foxhole designed for six 'or 40 at a pinch'.

Charlie converted to Roman Catholicism and – remember this by a man who shunned a university education – acquired a PhD in religious studies and then went on to do an MA in Mariology, about the impact of Mary on religion. He was by now involved in anti-trafficking work, employed by the Salvation Army, Migrant Help, and Genesis TCC, and went on to become Chief Executive of The Medaille Trust, which fights modern slavery. He wrote a book, *Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery*, to publicise this modern scourge.

In 2018 he stepped down to become law enforcement liaison officer and his trips to Albania to listen to the local police – who, he delighted in telling us, were very helpful in providing the information on smuggling gangs – were a fruitful source of the cheap cigarettes he smoked so profusely for 50 years. We can presume this wasn't an entirely safe activity: those smuggling gangs were unlikely to wish him well.

While living in Deal, Charlie became an 'extraordinary minister' in the Roman Catholic church, and administered the last rites to the dying, sometimes six times a day. We'd see him once a year at the 'Jolly Boys Outing' where half a dozen of us had several pints (but not Charlie, he eschewed alcohol) and a huge meal: after the family moved to Lincolnshire a few years ago, he travelled down to Maidstone for this.

One of his hobbies, apart from watching first class cricket, was gliding. So it was, then, that on October 13, he strapped into a glider on a Lincolnshire airfield and in spite of the efforts by the air ambulance, a heart attack ended the life of this extraordinarily talented friend.



**John Gilbert** was sad to inform us that his friend and fellow OM, **Alan Livesey (1977-81)** died last September.

**Bill Fullagar** informed us that **Norman Terry (1950 to 1958)** died at his home in Berkeley, California, at the age of 82. After leaving MGS, Norman took a B.Sc. in Botany at Southampton before reading for a Ph.D. in Plant Physiology at Nottingham. He then moved to the University of California at Berkeley, where he spent over fifty years, becoming Professor of Plant and Microbial Biology, and gaining international renown for his work on phytoremediation, the use of plants to clean up polluted soil and water.

**Ron Dillon** told us that Norman used to live at Leybourne, and that they were related by marriage as his aunt married Norman's grandfather, Luke Terry, who was a farmer. Ron says that Norman's father was also a farmer.

A webpage about Norman's work can be found at  
<https://plantandmicrobiology.berkeley.edu/users/norman-terry>

**'Something for nothing' donations to our charity**



If you buy goods or services online, many retailers will make donations to charity. This costs the buyer nothing, while the charity gets income. The Society and its registered charity, the Old Maidstonian Trust, has for some time participated in Easyfundraising, a scheme used by many retailers. Recently Amazon instead started its own scheme, Amazon Smile, and we are now registered in that scheme also. Details of both schemes follow.

Please help us through one or both of these schemes. Funds donated go to support the school and its current and immediate past pupils, including through the Society's Awards. (For details, see the Society's website, <http://www.oldmaidstonians.org.uk> .)

'Easyfundraising' is the UK's largest charity shopping fundraising site. Over 4000 retailers participate and to date they have donated over £31 million. In our first year in the scheme, with only six OMs signed up, we raised over £120. Note that as well as making donations on your normal purchases, Easyfundraising circulates special offers on goods, and opportunities for enhanced donations.

To join Easyfundraising is (unsurprisingly) easy. Visit <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk>, and click on 'Find a cause'. Type 'Old Maidstonian Society' into the dialog box. We should come up as the first choice: click 'Support this cause' for us. Then fill in the form to create an account. It's very simple to complete. Make sure you can remember your password! To help you remember to use the scheme whenever you buy from participating retailers you can download Easyfundraising's 'Donation Reminder'.

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Otherwise register as a new customer. When you first use 'Amazon Smile', nominate our charity 'Old Maidstonian Trust' to receive donations. From then on use [www.smile.amazon.co.uk](http://www.smile.amazon.co.uk), just as you would have used [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

For additional information, contact the Society's webmaster, Malcolm MacCallum, at [webmaster@oldmaidstonians.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@oldmaidstonians.org.uk) or visit the Society's website's Fundraising page.

Many thanks for reading!

