

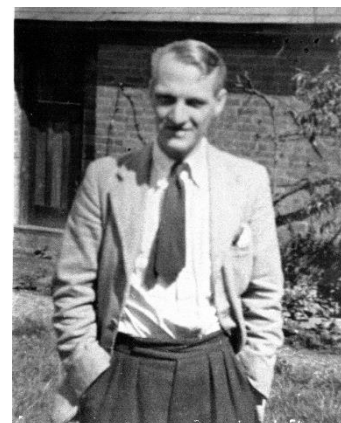
## **A Personal Memoir of The Beacon School 1953 – 1984**

### **by Hugh Davies Jones**

The ever-rolling stream of time is in danger of ebbing fast in my 81st year so this seems like a good moment to record some thoughts and memories of the Masters/Davies Jones connections with The Beacon School, a period that covers the years 1953 to 1984, thirty one years of change in the world at large and also at the school. It would have been well-documented change but for the unfortunate disposal of all records kept during this time. So what follows will be based on my own recollections, notes in Pip Masters' old diaries, on personal records kept by Sarah (my wife and Pip Masters' daughter), my newsletters sent to parents at the end of every term and the evidence of the many photographs we took while we were at The Beacon. At the last minute I have also added some information supplied by friends and family. It is more of a personal memoir than a formal history but the old newsletters contain many more names and facts for the '72 – '84 period than I shall be able to record.

#### **THE EARLY YEARS: 1934 – 1953**

The School was founded in 1934 by Stanley Fieldhouse (first in Clifton Road and then on its present site) and a five pointed star was to be the cap badge for boys, representing the five original pupils. This led to a certain amount of confusion in Chesham, many of whose residents referred to The Beacon as 'that Jewish school up the hill'. During these years the school was a small mixed boarding and day school which, by 1953, was in decline as the health of the Headmaster deteriorated.



*Dr Stanley Fieldhouse in 1935*

Behind the main school there was a private house on Oakway called Winterbourn where Stanley Fieldhouse's sister, Jean McCaughtrie, lived with her husband (universally known as Mac) and together they ran a small nursery school for boys. I am told that the husband and wife team did all the teaching (Mac taking charge of football and cricket) assisted by Miss Hall who was much loved by the boys. The boys wore the same uniform as those at The Beacon and almost all moved on there when they were old enough.

Among the first pupils at The Beacon in these early years was Christopher Copeman, later to return in the 1970s as a hugely influential staff member.

## THE MASTERS' YEARS: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: 1953 - 1973

<b>1953</b>
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In May 1953 Philip Masters started as salaried Headmaster at The Beacon, and in November 1953 he bought the school from Stanley Fieldhouse. PLM was a forceful, determined and visionary character who had taken up schoolmastering in the 1930s. As a boy Pip attended Victoria College in Jersey and from there he was awarded a closed scholarship to Exeter College Oxford to read English. Sadly, at the end of his first year he failed the compulsory



*Pip Masters in Navy uniform*

Latin papers and as a result his scholarship was not renewed and he left to take up his first teaching post at Arnold House School in London. This was followed by a stint at St Peter's, Seaford and then after the Second World War at Maidwell Hall in Northamptonshire. Having served in the Royal Navy Pip was familiar with good order and effective administration and his own education was further developed by Oliver Wyatt, the headmaster of Maidwell Hall. Pip held his headmaster in high regard and learnt from him not only how a good Prep school should be run but also how attractive gardens and grounds could enhance the educational experience of pupils. Wyatt was a prominent member of

the Royal Horticultural Society and the grounds at Maidwell Hall were spectacularly filled with trees, shrubs and flowers of all kinds. Although the gardens and grounds of The Beacon could never match those of a rural Northamptonshire paradise, it was uppermost in PLM's mind that the surroundings for his pupils and their parents should be well kept, colourful and attractive.

Visionary was a word I used to describe PLM and he must have needed that quality in 1953 as he looked round the tatty, unkempt premises set in an overgrown wilderness. Purchase of the school was to use up all the funds that Pip and his wife, Claudia, could scrape together and it was a huge leap of faith to take on such a Dickensian establishment.

At some stage PLM obviously intended to write a full account of his time at The Beacon. A brief document that was found in his letters starts:

*'I parked my car in Bois Avenue rather than at the school' [perhaps this was his ancient Austin 7] 'too ashamed of it: too shabby and battered to bolster my application for the job of salaried Headmaster. The walk to the school gave me*



*The derelict field with remains of Nissen huts*

*a good view of its setting. There was a house on the corner of Bois Avenue, then a derelict field festering with the remains of an army camp in Nissen huts then lived in by (largely Polish) squatters. Behind a collapsing close boarded fence was the front field of the school which appeared to be flat mud with occasional tufts of grass. It*

*was divided from the back field by a row of rather fine elms 50' – 60' high. My first impression of the school itself was of run-down shabbiness. The only way in was the present 'Out' gate with tottering gate posts held up by a pair of broken wooden gates, propped open and immovable. The back corner of the building was masked by a large wild cherry tree and a huge bush – so far as I remember a euonymus – which totally obscured the study window. Another large shrub grew against the front corner and spread round to the steps. There, the drive ended in an asbestos garage. The front lawn had some thin grass on it and a half dead rowan.*

*The door was opened to me by Mrs McCaughtrie and she led me to the study to meet her brother, Stanley Fieldhouse, obviously a sick man. The room was furnished with a large roll top desk – shut – and a desk chair, two rather uncomfortable wooden armed armchairs, a table, and a spluttering gas fire set in a hideous iron grate. There was a clock on the mean little mantelpiece.'* (Afternote – Stanley Fieldhouse had become reclusive in his last few months as headmaster of The Beacon and Pip told me that there was a slit cut into the side of the roll top desk in his study; anyone who wished to communicate with Fieldhouse was told to put notes through this 'letter box'. When PLM opened the desk it was crammed with unopened correspondence that cascaded onto the floor).

Sadly, PLM's notes end there but his daughter Sarah wrote down some recollections of her earliest memories of the school:

*'I moved to the Beacon with my family in the early summer of 1953 when my father was appointed as the salaried Headmaster before buying the school later in the year. My older brother Jonathan was just 10, I was 7 years old and Paul, the baby of the family, was almost 5. My father was a teacher at Maidwell Hall and we had been living in a small council house (called End House since it was at the far end of the row) with an outside, unheated brick toilet, in the village of Maidwell in Northamptonshire. The space at The Beacon must have seemed vast after the cramped council house although the family accommodation at our new home was minimal consisting of just 3 rooms on the top floor of the old building: a large one for my parents which served not only as their bedroom but also as an office, a room that my brothers shared and a tiny box room for me. A couple of resident members of staff had bed-sitting rooms on the same floor in what had been dormitories for the few remaining boarders and we all shared a bathroom on the half-landing. The kitchen and dining room were in the basement and we all ate meals together there. I can still picture the dinginess of it all, and the small colour-coded plastic pots that we each had to store our individual rations of butter, sugar and jam, though I am sure that post-war rationing must have ended very shortly after our arrival. My brother Jon remembers that sweets were still rationed and we had coupons we could use to get tuck from the corner shop on the way to Amersham, just beyond the Common. I recall how spooky I found the trip up to bed after the evening meal, going up two flights of stairs past the empty, echoing schoolrooms.'*

At this time the school premises consisted of just one house facing the main road, which contained the accommodation for the Headmaster and his family, two dormitories, two bedrooms for resident members of staff, four classrooms, a study, dining room and kitchen. The grounds comprised the 'front' and 'back' fields; the 'front' field is now the carpark while the 'back' field was where the astroturf now is and in 1953 half of that area was rough woodland. There were 77 boys in the school, including 5 boarders. The fees were 18 guineas per term and the rates were £86 per annum.

Jack Cobb, who was a pupil at Winterbourn and The Beacon from 1948 – 1955 recalls: 'Facilities in the main school were minimal and the staff seemed to be largely left to their own devices. The Headmaster, Mr Fieldhouse, was ill and could be very unpredictable; he was feared by most of the boys and I suspect by some of the staff too. The deputy headmaster, Mr Excell, could be most unpleasant. He was unmarried and lived in a hut which was originally part of the old WW2 military workshops. The best master was a Mr Dennis who

taught Maths and Geography, amongst other subjects; he had won the Distinguished Conduct Medal as a Gunner in WW1; he taught geometry in terms of simple gunnery! The only sports were football and cricket, both played within the school grounds. I cannot recall any boarders, except a chap called Deeks whose parents had lived near Hyde Heath.

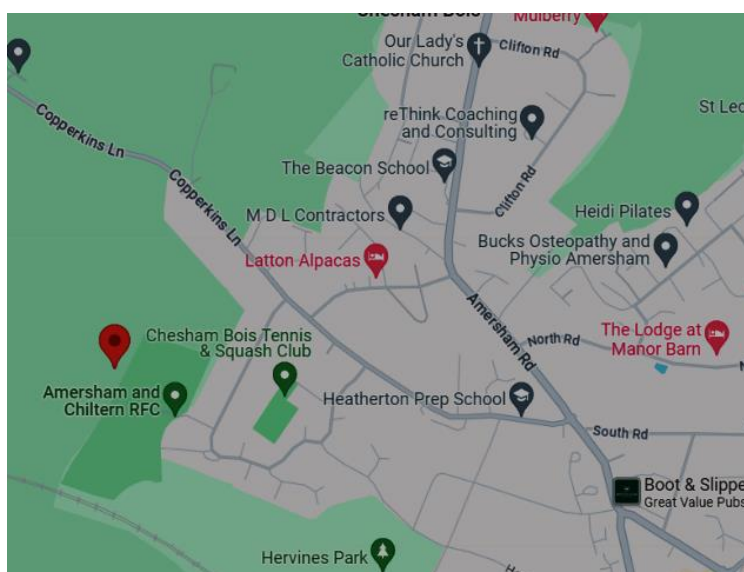
'To put things into perspective it should be remembered that the whole country was still suffering from the effects of WW2. National Service and rationing were still in place, Winston Churchill was Prime Minister and school children were given a free  $\frac{1}{3}$  pint bottle of milk at morning break. The whole country was subject to regular power cuts. Few people had cars and the vast majority of children got to and from school by public transport, walked (like Sarah at Heatherton House) or by bicycle; I cannot recall anyone who was delivered or picked up by car. Public transport links were good, with regular buses passing the front of the school, and there were frequent trains to London from Amersham station. At rush hours the station was deluged with commuters arriving either on foot, on bikes, or by bus, with the majority in bowler/trilby hats and carrying umbrellas.

'I first saw PLM when he addressed the School. The assembly room was on the left of the front door. Boys sat on the floor to the left of the entrance, to the right there were chairs in front of the fireplace where Mr Fieldhouse and some ladies were seated. PLM was standing in front of them and spoke to us as though he was back in the Navy and addressing the ship's company. Needless to say he made a great impression though I cannot remember exactly what he said. I believe that most of us knew that we were under new and dynamic leadership, but it was sad that Mr Fieldhouse looked so ill and was obviously

totally overcome by the occasion.

'The PLM changes to the school were fast and furious:

- Rugby was included in the syllabus, being played at the Chiltern Rugby Club at the end of Weedon Hill Lane
- Swimming lessons were held in a private pool at a house in Station Road Amersham
- Cricket was played on





Chesham Bois Common (quite a good pitch). PLM was adamant that a wet Wednesday afternoon meant cricket on the next good afternoon (sometimes, if the afternoons were very good cricket came first)

- Evening prep was included (after tea and a jam sandwich)
- Saturday mornings were for sitting mock Common Entrance papers, once the new wing was complete.'

PLM's notes explain that various steps were taken at once:

- application was made to the Ministry for the school to be 'Recognised as Efficient'
- an entirely new staff was engaged
- parents were notified of a rise in fees and that only day boys would be accepted in future
- it was decided to increase the numbers in the school to 150 in gradual stages and to put in hand a Ten Year Plan of expansion and development
- dormitories were turned into classrooms



*The Nissen hut gym*

- a Nissen Hut was bought and divided into an Art room and a 'Gymnasium'
- new lavatories were provided
- the playing fields were enlarged by grubbing up the woodland at the rear of the school.

Jon Masters recalls: 'This was a major undertaking; a number of very big mature trees had to be felled and cut up using hand saws, long before chainsaws were in use. PLM rented a "monkey winch" to provide a very effective highly-gearred pull on each tree as it was dug around and roots cut until it fell. Each tree was then limbed with axes and cut in lengths with huge 2-man crosscut saws. I think some of the trunks were sold, and the smaller stuff was used for firewood.'

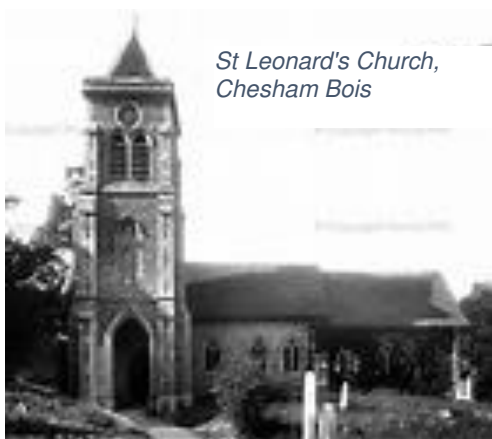
Jon also remembers: '2 June 1953 – the first time I ever saw a television – the Royal Coronation – we were all invited to see a bit of the ceremony on the McCaughtrie's TV. The screen was tiny, and at the bottom of a sort of tube so

only a very few could see the black and white grainy picture. A few years later, the family would take over the SE main floor classroom as a sitting room for the 4 weeks of the Christmas holidays, and Dad would rent a TV for the month. It was a fine big room with a wood burning open fireplace back-to-back with the fireplace in Dad's office – and there was always lots of wood to burn. (Out behind the south barn that was later converted into a changing room, there was a huge unguarded cast-iron 36" diameter circular sawbench that was belt driven by the original Ferguson tractor and used for log cutting and splitting – thankfully no-one was ever injured using it, but the thought of young boys like me using it without supervision makes me realize how lucky we were.) We were very restricted for TV viewing time, so were never around to hear the service close down at midnight with the national anthem. There were only two channels to choose from, and you had to buy a newspaper to see what would be on. These are my memories and may be wrong!

## 1954

By 1954 numbers in the school had risen to 86. Half of a new wing of classrooms was built – a single storey, flat roofed wing on the Amersham side of the main building, designed by Frank Stovin-Bradford, an Amersham architect and parent of a boy in the school. Additional playing fields were rented.

In December 1954 a full Inspection took place and the School was 'recognised as efficient'. Jack Cobb wrote: 'I well remember the Department for Education Inspection in 1954. Our classroom was opposite the assembly room and we



*St Leonard's Church,  
Chesham Bois*

were being taught by Mr Legard in French. I think Mr Legard was half Swiss, he was certainly bi-lingual (he was also an organist and played the piano for daily assembly prayers). The examiner tried to speak his version of French to us, but not with any success.'

In that term numbers had risen to 94, the first school plays were performed and Jack Cobb recalls: 'The first Carol Service at St Leonard's

Church, Chesham Bois, was in 1954. David Newth and I sang a duet (I cannot remember what); Mr Legard played the organ and the church was quite full.'

## 1955



In 1955 the new wing was completed. It consisted of a classroom/stage and 2 further classrooms all separated by wooden folding/sliding doors and finished with a semi-circular Art Room. Jack Cobb recalls: 'Once the new wing was completed

those who had helped clear the wood at the back of the school were invited to tea and a film show. We saw 'The Lavender Hill Mob', a black and white film starring Alec Guinness and Stanley Holloway and I think this was the first film shown in the new wing.'

A new block of urinals and wash basins was built, and later in the year a large house called 'Monks Barn' opposite the exit drive of the school was bought and turned into a staff house to accommodate resident members of the teaching staff. There were now 123 boys in the school.

Amongst PLM's notes for this year were:

- back field cleared (*work started on April 2 and on July 26 a bulldozer was hired for 8 hours (£10) to work on the site*)
- bought potato peeler!
- Easter holiday coaching began
- first end of summer term undergraduate employed
- first Beacon scholarship - Clarke won scholarship to Merchant Taylors
- Hervines Road (*a public park a few minutes' walk from the school*) used for games



- Jean Shilcock (junior form teacher and sister of Anne Shilcock, winner of the 1955 Wimbledon Ladies Doubles) joined the staff; also Peter Marson (sport), Roger Horne (Classics), Pauline Milne (Art), Wendy Nicholson (Housekeeper and Mother's Help), and Tony Poat (French)
- October 10<sup>th</sup> – Rev Birkett (*Rector of Chesham Bois Church*) for dedication of new Hall



*Wendy Nicholson and Chris Mayer with Jonathan and Paul Masters in 1955*

- bought 4 small cherry trees for £4.10s (*these were planted on the road side of the school and grew to look magnificent in the spring in later years*)
- First meetings of the Film Society (*October 22 – ‘Where the River Bends’; Oct 29 – ‘Kidnapped’; Nov 12 – ‘Where No Vultures Fly’; Nov 26 – ‘Scrooge’*)
- Local Badminton Club and Square Dancing Club rent rooms for meetings
- Amersham Art Club started meetings in school Art Room
- started Poppy Day house-to-house collection
- installed dimmers for stage lights (Jon Masters, who went on to become a civil engineer, remembers working on these. ‘We made all the footlights from sheet polished aluminium nailed onto semicircular wood ends, with lamp holders fitted in one end; huge dimmers on a plywood panel that fitted into one of the window recesses. Wires everywhere! Red, blue and green gels slid into slots in the wooden ends – my first electrical work!’)
- December – first full school plays: “Fat King Melon”

Jack Cobb, who left in the summer of 1955 to go on to HMS Worcester, wrote: ‘PLM changed The Beacon for the better in a very short time. I well remember, even some 68 years later, when he lectured the whole school on the Battle of Trafalgar. PLM kindly took me for my interview at HMS Worcester (there was a national train strike) in his black Ford Popular, registration number OPO 499. After my interview PLM was invited to meet the board (the Captain was a holder of the Victoria Cross) while I waited outside with the secretary. After a

few minutes we heard a cheerful tinkle of glasses as the pink gin was poured and the secretary said, 'Sounds as though you will have quite a wait'. On that note I will raise a pink gin to Pip, Claudia and The Beacon.'

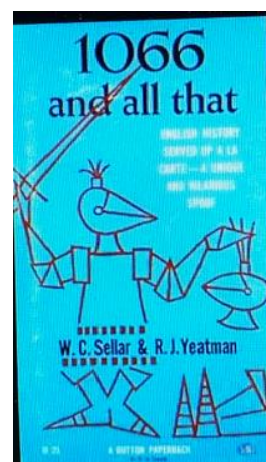
## 1956

This year saw several internal improvements:

- an extra classroom was made available
- a part of the ground floor at the rear of the main building which had previously been used for storage was enlarged and fitted with windows and made into a Staff Common Room
- another room was fitted with racks and heaters as a storage room for games clothes
- the Headmaster's study was decorated and a new fireplace installed

PLM's notes add:

- April – Easter plays, rehearsed in the holidays, took place the weekend before term started
- June 27 – swimming started (*at Amersham pool?*)
- Jean Porter joined the staff
- December – school play "1066 and All That" with every child in the school taking part



## 1957



Next to The Beacon was a derelict estate known as 'Beech Barn' (or 'Bois Farm') which was built in the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century as a farmhouse and barns. (Jon Masters recalls being told that the house and barns were built in 1615, with the main timber framing being Spanish oak beams salvaged from captured Armada (1588) boats that were towed to Tyburn, dismantled and auctioned to builders.

Some of the timbers in what later became the sitting room of the Head's house, and maybe elsewhere, still have the original Spanish boatbuilders' joint references visible.)

The estate had been allowed to fall into disrepair and was overgrown with ivy, saplings, brambles and nettles. The school (PLM) bought this estate in 1957 and at once set about clearing the ground and adapting the buildings for school use. The



*The derelict Beech Barn estate*

front barn nearest the road was made into two cottages for married staff (the Lazenby family lived in the North cottage for many years) and the large barn at right angles to this became a gymnasium.



By the end of 1957 the original farmhouse had become the Headmaster's house; he and his family moved into it in January 1958 and what had been the family's rooms on the first floor of the main school building were altered and adapted to

make a new classroom, a library and a text book store. A school office was at last provided, and a large room on the ground floor of Monks Barn was used as an additional dining room. This further expansion was necessary because the school was now up to its planned number of 150 boys, which remained the





approximate total for many years.

PLM's notes add:

- Derek and Zanne Lawson joined the staff and took up residence in one of the Beech Barn cottages
- January 16 – Norris Bazzard consulted re Beech Barn plans
- Amersham Art Club continued weekly meetings at the school
- February 14 – Bois Farm contracts exchanged
- working parties at weekends (including pupils) helped clear debris and detritus from Bois Farm site



Jon Masters adds: 'The house reconstruction was extensive. The west end wall brickwork was totally demolished with just the old oak framing left. Ley Hill Brickworks were the source of new "soft red" bricks for the new facing wall, and to



*The Headmaster's House*

tone down the bright colour a bit, it was washed down with a manure/water mix. All the tiles were removed from the roof (Harris Roofing – also a parent – son Chris was a friend of mine and would take me on horse rides, and became a renowned equine vet, though I understand sadly that he died a good many years ago). Most of the tiles were original and were originally laid in place over straw, secured by oak pegs – only a few were broken or damaged, and replacements were sourced from demolition sites of similarly aged buildings. There was some woodworm in the old timbers, but for the most part it was shallow, since the wood was so old and dry the worms had died of starvation decades – or centuries – before. A few timbers did need replacing however, and like the tiles, they were sourced from demolition sites. The ancient oak

was so hard that saw blades and drill bits had great difficulty making any headway, once any wormy outer bits were removed, so only essential cuts were made.'

PLM's notes continue:

- bought Mills Scaffolding for use in building works
- March 7 – first visit of Mr Rowntree (architect)
- March 11 – Jean Shilcock married Tony Poat (*both staff members*) at St Leonard's Church, Chesham Bois; the Beacon choir sang 'O for the Wings of a Dove'
- March 20 – telephone company moved cables for tree felling
- March 25 – Jim Ross (carpenter) started working for the school, as did Bousfield, painter and decorator, who also worked for the school for many years thereafter
- March 27 – Shirley (plumber) started
- March 28 – completion of the purchase of Bois Farm – the quadrangle buildings
- March 29 – Chris Mayer (*a bachelor who became the Mr Chips of the school*) moved into Monks Barn
- May 24 – cocktail party to celebrate the opening of the new gymnasium
- July 16 – Parents' meeting re Merchant Taylors' entry
- much of summer holiday spent clearing quadrangle, steam roller used etc



*The barn that was to become the gym after a lot of brambles had been removed*



*Chris Mayer*



- July 31 – MCM (*Claud Masters, Pip's wife and originally a Canadian national*) and Jonathan (*eldest son, aged 13*) visited Canada
- August 19 – plasterers started
- September 26 – staircase fitted in Bois Farm
- October 19 – started Beacon Bursary Fund (*Mr Newton and Mr Newth, both Beacon parents, were involved in the setting up of this fund which was designed to give financial help to any family of a current pupil who fell on hard times and needed help to pay the school fees*)
- November 1 – First negotiations with Mr Channer (*farmer and owner of Willsfield*)
- December 4 – Redferns to lay rubber tiles in Bois Farmhouse bathroom and flower room (£7 15s + tip £1)



*Claud and Jonathan with Claud's father in Canada*

***Sarah Davies Jones, née Masters, left the school at the end of 1957 to go on to Senior School. She was later asked to write down her memories of being the only girl pupil to attend The Beacon.***



*Sarah in her school uniform, pictured with her mother, father and younger brother Paul, and her aunt (PLM's sister). The asbestos garage in the background was built on the original semicircular driveway, with its back end on the original property line with Beech Barn Estate, so the other gate was only available for use after the purchase of the Estate when the garage was removed.*

*When we first arrived in Bucks I started attending Heatherton House but for some reason that I cannot remember I clearly hated it. The story goes that I was sick every morning as my mother walked me to school so quite soon my parents*

*allowed me to transfer to The Beacon where I was a very happy pupil until the age of 12. I always thought that I was treated exactly the same as the boys were (though I am sure that some concessions were made!) with the only major differences being that I wore a horrible grey skirt instead of the shorts or trousers that they wore, and that in the Spring term I did not play rugby but went horse-riding instead. I enjoyed football and cricket, attended clubs like Art with Pauline Milne, woodwork with my father, and the wonderful Saturday morning film shows, and was generally a reasonably industrious and hard-working pupil. I did Latin and Greek with Roger Horne (whose "Good grief, gentlemen!" whenever a class was being less than brilliant used to ring out across the courtyard and embarrass my father as he showed parents of prospective pupils around).*



*The school in about 1957. The car in the garage belonged to Tony and Jean Poat*

*There are some other members of staff of that period that I remember well:*

- *Tony Poat and Jean Shilcock who got married in 1957; I was a member of the school choir which sang 'O for the Wings of a Dove' at their wedding in Chesham Bois church.*
- *Jean Porter, who was Principal of Winterbourn for many years, and her sister Jenny who later became my father's secretary*
- *Peter Marson who taught games and PE and found it hard to include a girl in his lessons*
- *Mr Middleton, who taught Maths and used to rap us over the knuckles with a solid wood ruler if we made silly mistakes*
- *Derek Lawson and his family who lived in one of the Beech Barn cottages*

- *Jack Herriott, the invaluable part-time groundsman whose main job was Chief Stoker at Amersham Hospital. He had approached my father looking for a part-time job that would get him out in the open air. Jack not only taught me to drive the school tractor when I was a child but many years later took my children for rides on it too*
- *Wally Barrett was another part-time groundsman who was an early recruit to the staff. He lived with his wife Queenie and their children in one of the Nissen huts on the south side of the Beacon wood where The Leys now stands. Wally was small but immensely strong and, more of a labourer than a groundsman, he was a very hard worker who more than earned his keep.*



*Jack Herriot with our youngest son Simon in 1981*

*I made some good friends among the other pupils, including John Adey who now owns a house about one minute's walk away from me in Portugal; Jack Cobb whose sister Mary married my brother Jonathan; and lots of families like the Newths, the Wagstaffes, the Jarratts and many others with whom my brothers and I spent much of our childhood.*

*My father was a very practical man, a keen carpenter and a very hard worker, and he expected help from his family (as well as from the pupils, and sometimes their parents too). He was not a mechanic, however, and my brother Jon remembers being called on to fix mowers and motors at The Beacon from a young age – something he still does for himself at his home in Canada now! I remember well the clearing of what became the 'back field' and is now the Astroturf. In the mid-1950s it was scrub woodland and once the trees had been removed the soil was too poor to do much with. We spent hours and hours helping out by picking up flints – as far as I remember we were paid 6 pence a bucketful, and all the extra pocket money went on sweets! Some years later, during the renovation of the Beech Barn estate, I spent much of one holiday home from boarding school helping to lay the wood-block floor in what then became the gym. It was very hard work with my father being a very demanding 'boss'! My brother recalls: 'Dad bought a truck load of #1 Canadian Maple tongue and grooved flooring, got in a contractor to lay a concrete floor with trapezoidal treated wood inserts which protruded about 3/8" above the concrete. We then laid the maple strips*



*down, tapped them home into the previous board, drilled down through the top of the tongue at about 45° and nailed at each wood strip, then punched the last bit of each nail home. The floor was about 60' x 20' from memory, and it took us the whole summer holiday to complete it. The sanding and sealing was done by others – maybe using Bourneseal, which was Dad's preferred finish for floors, lockers and everything else he built. I hope it has stood the test of time!*

*'The conversion of the rooms in the old cow barns along the north side of the original playing field (where Mr Exell had lived years before) into a Science Lab was another of Dad's summer holiday projects. The most memorable part of this was the complete lining of the walls and the ceiling with asbestos panels for fireproofing – very brittle 8' x 4' x ¼" sheets were cut up using abrasive cut-off discs on saws creating thick clouds of asbestos dust, and this was long before safety masks were an everyday safety measure – amazing that we didn't end up with lung cancer!'*



*Benenden School*

*At the age of 12 my parents decided that it was time for me to move on from The Beacon and in January 1958 I started at Benenden School in Kent. A few days before term was due to start my family finally moved into the Headmaster's house which had been renovated from a near-derelict state. In great excitement, my brothers and I explored every*

*corner of the house but unfortunately we went into the attic without first securing the ladder that gave access to it. As I came back down, the ladder slipped and I fell heavily on top of it, breaking my leg very badly. It was put in plaster and I was told not to walk on it for 6 weeks so when I started at Benenden a few days after the official start of term I went everywhere either on crutches or in a wheelchair. It was a miserable start, and cold and snowy weather did not help. Neither did the fact that transferring from an all-boys' school to an all-girls' one was hard. I was used to boys' behaviour and did not understand girls at all. I was miserably homesick to start with but eventually settled and enjoyed my time there.*

*20 years after first moving to The Beacon my husband, Hugh Davies Jones, took over the Headship from my father and I enjoyed a further 12 very happy years living in the house where I had broken my leg so long before.*

1958

PLM's notes:

- January 10 – Headmasters' meeting (re Merchant Taylors' entry). Major problem with number of day senior school places available



*Jim Ross, carpenter, working on the front of the headmaster's house*

- January 11 – Headmaster and family moved into the farmhouse; Sarah Masters broke her leg
- January 19 – Sarah started at Benenden School, aged 12, having previously been educated as the only girl at The Beacon (*see her separate note on this experience above*)
- many interviews for new staff
- January 24 – first use of the new sitting room in Bois Farm
- March 2 – Jonathan Masters cycled home from Wycliffe College in Gloucestershire where he was at school. (*Jonathan believes that this was a distance of about 96 miles and recalls that he did it twice. 'The first time was very hard, and I barely made it, but the next time I did a bit more training, got home in great time and even played tennis later that afternoon!' He commented: 'Interesting that Dad actually made a note of it – don't remember him even acknowledging it at the time!'*)
- July 21 – 15 boys and 2 staff to Lords in school bus (admission, programmes, petrol, tips £17 14s 9d)
- November 12 – Headmasters' meeting re Merchant Taylors' entry



1959
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During 1959 the clearing of the land around Beech Barn continued, service



*Clearing the concrete bases*

roads and old Nissen hut concrete bases were removed except for one (next to The White House in Chiltern Road) which was turned into a pair of concrete cricket wickets – the ‘hard nets’. Eventually two grass tennis courts were laid behind Bois Farmhouse and the nets.

There were several large trees in the field behind the barn, including two walnuts, which were felled then taken to a sawmill, planked and dried. Using the wood, many years later Pip made a dining table for Sarah and me when we moved back to The Beacon in 1973 (we still have this) as well as several beds for his house in France, and at least one coffee table amongst other things.



*Our dining table made from Beacon walnut*

PLM's notes:

- January 2 – Jarvis Wills (*the moving force behind the financing of the purchase of the playing field*) writes re the acquisition of the facility
- February 15 – fence erected across bottom of Willsfield
- March 4 – first use of Willsfield (Aldwickbury 0 - 0)
- March 6 – completion date for Willsfield purchase
- May 22 – timber for shed and loft £16
- June 27 – Willsfield dance to raise funds
- October 13 – 8 cu yds Surrey loam on cricket square
- October 29 – lorry load of cocoa matting purchased for £5
- October 30 – Halloween Dance
- November 16-21 PLM busy with Michael Goodeve Docker (*fellow IAPS Head*) searching for new Public School site in the area to ease pressure on local day places

- December 12 – Carol Service at St Mary’s, Old Amersham

Jon Masters recalls that it was at about this time that PLM employed a local firm, the Breakspear brothers, to layer the tall hedges down the South and East sides of Willsfield, using the proper old rural method of hedgelaying. He wrote: ‘One of them, a very big man, was born with epilepsy, and reportedly had had a fit while attending to a fire while hedging, and got his face badly burnt and disfigured, but it seems never had another fit. He looked very scary to me as a kid but was actually very kind although horribly shy because of his appearance’.

<b>1960</b>
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In 1960, Willsfield (the additional playing field that had been rented by the School since 1954) was presented to the School, thus enabling a change in the programme. From then onwards each boy played games every day.

PLM’s notes:

- first 7-a-side rugby tournament (Swanbourne, Berkhamsted, Orley Farm, Ashfold, St Martins, Aldwickbury, Gayhurst, 2 Beacon teams)
- Produce Market started
- July 2 – Fete in aid of Willsfield
- July 12 – PLM’s first appearance on IAPS Training Committee
- August 2 and 3 – PLM lecturing to IAPS Training Course in Oxford
- October 27 – Halloween Dance

<b>1961</b>
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In September 1961 Winterbourn (previously a private house in Oakway) was incorporated as the Pre-preparatory department of The Beacon. The building was completely redecorated, re-furnished and re-equipped to house 6 forms of 12 boys each and to provide a study for the Principal, Miss Jean Porter. A small house (Field Cottage) was built on the front field to accommodate the retiring Principal of Winterbourn, Mrs Jean McCaughtrie who lived there for some years, together with her husband until his death in 1967. Jon Masters remembers visiting them both at Winterbourn and in their new house, and particularly remembers Mac’s favourite expression which was ‘Bless your cotton socks’!

A bus service to Beaconsfield was introduced.

PLM's notes:

- February 28 – Ferguson tractor delivered
- March 4 – first ever mowing of Willsfield
- March 9 – IAPS Council, PLM's first meeting
- July 19 – PLM into Radcliffe Infirmary (*for major back surgery (laminectomy) after suffering years of debilitating back pain*)
- August 28 – PLM back from hospital. (*He made a complete recovery from an operation that was then experimental and conducted by an American surgeon, Joe Pennybacker. Pip was told before the operation that it would either cure him or leave him permanently paralysed below the waist.*)



*The Masters family in 1961.  
Left to right: Pip, Paul, Claud's  
mother, Claud, Jonathan and Sarah  
(in her Benenden uniform)*

## 1962

1962 was a year of exciting progress. It had been decided earlier that the 'gym' should become a dining hall and the old barn on the western side of the quadrangle should serve as a gym. So new kitchens were built behind the dining-hall-to-be and all the ancillary work was completed. The other barn was fitted with windows and a floor and all else that was needed to make it into a gymnasium.

Jon Masters recalls: 'The conversion of the barn into a gym was a big project and I drew up plans using an ink drafting set that Dad passed on to me, which had been presented to him in San Francisco when he went over to the States as part of the crew to take delivery of HMS Striker (an Attacker-Class Escort Aircraft Carrier which the Americans had transferred to the Royal Navy). This

was the first time that my plans were used to get the necessary planning permission for a project. The conversion required total re-roofing since several of the beams had rotted after years of ivy growth over the East side – though, as with the house, most of the tiles were salvaged and re-used. One of the requirements was to have the window panes in the main area made of tempered glass to resist breakage from the ball games planned inside, and, since tempered glass cannot be cut or trimmed, each pane had to have a precise template made of thin plywood and, since the old timbers were not straight, every pane was a different shape and size. To the best of my knowledge, none of them was ever broken! The outside feather boards all had to be replaced too, and new ones had to be creosoted once they were up. (Creosote is totally banned now – and if this was done in hot weather, it brought us out in a nasty rash – Jack Herriott was particularly susceptible!).’

A house called Farthing Cottage, in Clifton Road, situated just a few hundred yards from the school was bought and turned into two staff flats.

During the bitter winter of 1962/63 the whole school froze up and the main school buildings were then re-plumbed from top to bottom in copper pipe, and electrical installation was made to minimise any future risks.

PLM’s notes add:

- May 5 – Party to celebrate ‘transfer of deeds’ of Willsfield
- May 24 – clock installed on front gable of Gymnasium
- June 5 – PLM, as IAPS representative, in discussions on the 11+ exam as a threat to traditional 13+ Common Entrance exam
- June to December – PLM working on 11+ survey
- summer holiday – the family (Pip and his 3 children) laid gym floor



*The new clock on the gable installed 24 May 1961*



## 1963



*Monks Barn after the fire*

On 20 January 1963, Monks Barn, the staff house, was very extensively damaged by fire, but it was rebuilt in record time and many improvements were incorporated such as the installation of central heating and of extra bathrooms.

In the summer of 1963 four old cowsheds were run together to make a new bootroom and the old school dining room (in the basement of the main building) was converted into a French

room. The old larder (also in the basement) became the Science room; the old clothes storage room became a spare classroom and a small room was set aside as a dark room for the Photographic Club.

PLM's notes add:

- January 14/15 – school froze up; Shirley (Plumber) started work
- January 16 – term should have started; postponed 1 week
- January 20 – Monks Barn fire
- January 23 – term started; first lunch in new Dining Room
- March 6 – new kitchens in use
- March 14 – visit to HMS Diamond (PLM + 1 staff + 10 Prefects)
- March 28 – PLM got German Measles
- April 5 – PLM meeting in London with TES over 11+ survey, with John Dancy (Headmaster of Marlborough College)
- April 29 – Gang from Stewarts and Lloyds erected cricket net frames
- May 17 – TES article on 11+. PLM on BBC 'Tonight' programme
- September 9 – Kristine Rose started as school secretary
- November 26 – IAPS 10 District meeting at The Beacon
- November 29 – new switchboard fitted to stage
- December 3/4/5 – full inspection
- December 6 – school plays
- December 7 – staff party



- December 14 – new French Room open to view
- December 14 – Carol service

(In 1964, PLM wrote “The Ten Year Plan of expansion and development is now, broadly speaking, complete; if and when the money is available a swimming pool will be built next to the tennis courts; a pavilion will be erected on Willsfield and a groundsman’s cottage nearby.”)

### 1963 - 1972

The years from '63 to '72 saw The Beacon thrive and after the initial flurry of building in the '50s and early '60s there was a period of relative calm while the school established a reputation for effective, traditional teaching and for high standards in academic work, sport and behaviour. Good manners were instilled into sometimes reluctant boys and the tipping of caps in greeting to adults was an important part of daily routine.

In all weathers PLM would stand on the steps of the

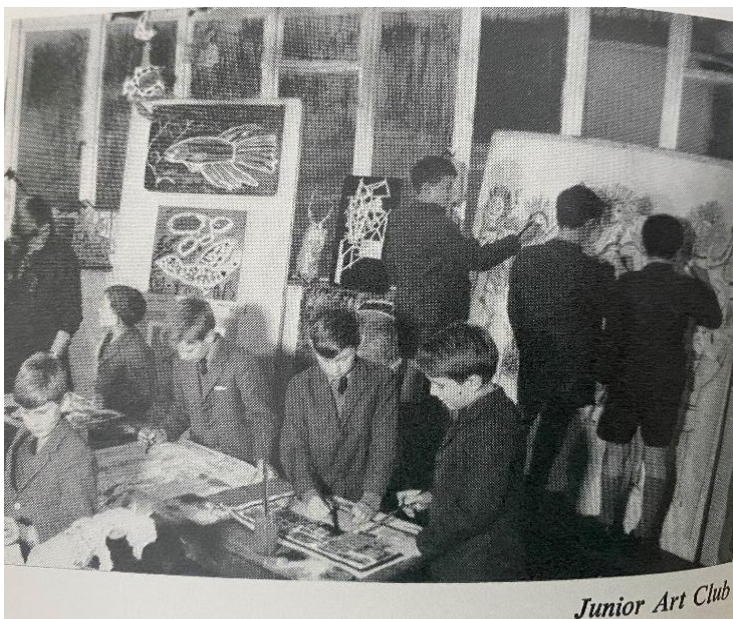
main building from 8am to greet boys and parents and to ensure that visitors of all ages behaved themselves; he was the Captain on the bridge ensuring that all was shipshape and in good order. As a result of firm leadership and clear

direction the school became first choice for parents in the local area and places were in high demand but the numbers were pegged at around 150 because there was no physical space to accommodate more pupils.

As a senior figure in the Prep school world (by this time Pip had served on many committees and was a powerful voice within IAPS) he had been commissioned to write an account of Prep school education for those



PLM in 1965



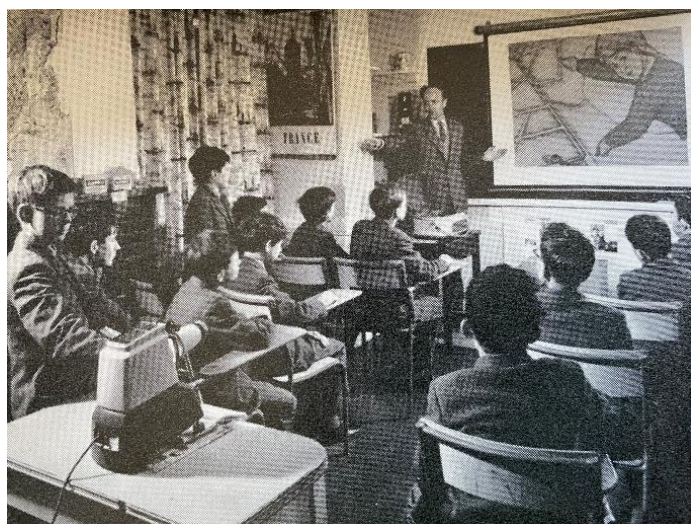
Junior Art Club

This picture of Pauline Milne's Junior Art Club was in PLM's book 'Preparatory Schools Today'

who wanted to know more about the independent sector. His book 'Preparatory Schools Today', published in 1966, was well received but was never likely to become a best seller. It is, however, a valuable historical document and its facts and figures make interesting reading today.

As they neared retirement Pip and Claud began to think about future plans for themselves and for the school. They were determined that all the work they had done in developing The Beacon should not go to waste and that they should sell the school as a going concern rather than realising a vastly greater sum by allowing developers to bid for a very desirable building site. In 1970, with the help of D'Arcy Biss, a parent and leading London solicitor and senior partner of Ashurst, Morris, Crisp, they began to work out details of how to turn the school into a Charitable Trust and then retire; debentures would be redeemed over a period of years by Pip and Claud and their children as payment for the sale.

At this time Pip and Claud began to spend more and more time in France at the small house they had bought in the hills behind Nice. This was a large artist's studio which had belonged to Manolis Calliyannis, a well-known Greek artist. As was their way they had many projects and schemes to convert this into a small holiday home that they could enjoy with family and friends, and they did much of the work themselves. This development meant that they spent more of the school holidays away from Buckinghamshire and delegated far more at The Beacon than they had in the past. Pip had found a highly capable



*James Mogridge teaching an audio visual French lesson*

lieutenant in James Mogridge, first engaged to teach French and then, having proved an outstanding staff member, rapidly promoted to Deputy Head. Terms became shorter for PLM and his own holiday times were extended while he was in France but the school continued to flourish with James Mogridge settling into the role of likely successor to PLM who was all set for a seamless exit.

James was clearly able to step into his shoes – but although he was able he was not willing. A man of principle who was well aware that he was teaching the children of the rich and privileged, James decided that he should give his

talents to those children who might need him more and he informed PLM of his wish to teach at a state primary school in a deprived area. He became headmaster of such a school in the steel town of Corby and became a much respected figure in the area – as he had been at The Beacon. PLM asked him to be one of the founding Governors and this role he accepted and rapidly proved himself invaluable as a link with past practice at the school while bringing in fresh ideas from a different sector of the educational world.

So retirement dreams for Pip and Claud were in some peril and a solution needed to be found. Serendipity had seen their daughter, Sarah, marry a schoolmaster in 1969 (at a wedding in Chesham Bois church with a reception held in the dining hall at The Beacon). The bridegroom taught at Clifton College Prep school in Bristol and he was now a housemaster and head of the History department. Pip knew that, prompted by the Clifton headmaster, I was just beginning to look for a Prep school headship so here was a ready-made – if nepotistic – solution. The question was



*Our wedding reception was in the dining hall at The Beacon*

asked, the answer considered and the offer accepted on the basis that I would serve for one year in tandem with Pip and after that would be on my own. The school was to be an Educational Trust from September 1972 so my contract would be with the newly formed governing body to whom I was answerable.

### THE DAVIES JONES YEARS 1972 - 1984

Like Pip Masters I had become a schoolmaster almost by accident. After an education at Clifton College in Bristol I went to University College, Oxford to read History. After graduating I intended to start a law course but the terms were arranged on an annual basis starting in January so I had six months to fill before I resumed studying. In a curious twist of fate, my parents, making a very rare visit to London, found themselves standing next door to my former Prep school Headmaster, Mark Hankey, as they ascended the Piccadilly escalator. He enquired after my career and was told that I was slobbing about at home until January. 'Ah' he said 'then why doesn't Hugh come and teach



for a term at Clifton while one of my members of staff is off climbing in the Himalayas?' Since I would be paid a full teacher's salary during this time it was clearly a no-brainer and in September I joined the staff, most of whom had taught me eight years earlier. An interesting sign of the times, few had teaching qualifications but all except one (the Head of Art) had Oxbridge degrees.

I had a whale of a time and, blissfully unaware of the true responsibility involved in teaching, I enjoyed the enthusiasm of the Prep school boys and the company of my new colleagues. At half term I told Mark Hankey that I would like to stay in teaching and asked if I should apply for a Dip Ed? He told me quite firmly not to bother since by far the most important part of a one year Diploma was the teaching practice and I would already have done that. He would write to the 'ten best Prep schools in the country' to see if he could find me a job for January. As good as his word he facilitated my move to

Marlborough House in Hawkhurst, Kent, where I spent two very happy years at a small boarding school. I was then asked by Mark Hankey to return to Clifton to act as his boarding house tutor (for 35 boarding boys aged 7 -11) seeing out his last year as Head and acting as a continuity figure for his successor. So in 1966 I returned to Bristol and while in this second spell at Clifton encountered Sarah who was doing her teaching practice at the school following graduation from Bristol University. We married, had our first son Mark and followed that with a second son, Paul, in June 1971. By that time I was Housemaster of a day boy house of forty 11-13 year olds and we lived in a school flat above 'the shop'.



*Reading a bedtime story in the dormitory (taken by a photographer from The Sun to illustrate an article on Prep schools)*

Encouraged by the then Clifton Headmaster, Jim Hornby, who had already sent me on an IAPS Heads Course at Oxford, I had looked at a couple of schools advertising for Heads but in both cases it became apparent at interview that they were looking for someone to inject funds as well as expertise into their schools and while I might have been able to make a modest contribution for the latter I could provide nothing on the former. So when the offer of The Beacon came I was not only very surprised but also pleased at the prospect of a school which appeared to be exactly the sort of thing that we were looking

for – Sarah and I having decided that a boarding school was too much to take on with two very small children to look after. So, in the summer of 1972 we moved into Sarah's childhood home, the former farmhouse of Bois Farm.

Pip and Claud had always invested all their energy and all their resources into the school and their only remaining home was the one in France, so when they moved out of the Headmaster's house at The Beacon their first priority was to find somewhere to live. To start with they rented a very attractive little property in Hyde Heath for an initial period of a few months. They would have happily renewed their tenancy but unfortunately the owners had other plans for the property so in October 1973 they moved into a very pleasant little bungalow in South Heath where they remained until Claud's death in August 1985.



*Our last Sports Day at Clifton Prep*

As for Sarah and me, our first aim on moving to The Beacon was to meet as many of the staff as possible and we invited each one in for a drink – separately rather than en masse so we could try to get to know them better. Like the Clifton staff there was a total lack of teaching qualifications (except for Nick Webb, the Deputy Head and Head of PE) and most of the staff members were crusty ex World War 2 veterans who simply taught pupils as they had been taught themselves. I was no radical but was quite surprised not only by the traditional views of the staff but also by their age – I think every one of them was older than I was and most by thirty years or more! I was absurdly young to be a Head but these were different times when young people were taking up jobs that used to be reserved for much older people; Kennedy had been President of the USA and all things were possible. The new Head of Winchester College was 36 years old and if I was conscious of my lack of experience I was not particularly concerned that my 28 year old self would be seen as 'too young for the job'.

Coming from a city school with classrooms designed for the purpose I was surprised to find that rooms at The Beacon varied so much in size and shape that teaching could not be anything other than strictly formal because there was little room for staff or pupils to move around. In addition, the number within each class was determined by the number of boys that could be fitted



into the room. The décor, although clearly very different from the Fieldhouse days, seemed shabby, desks were individual and antique, the changing room was dark and gloomy, there were no showers and the school felt cramped for children and staff. All of these judgements were based on a comparison with what I had known at Clifton and took little notice of the huge improvements made by PLM during the preceding twenty years but all Prep schools were beginning to emerge from their post war austerity, with many becoming Charitable Trusts rather than being privately owned so facilities were being improved at a rapid rate in most leading schools. The Beacon was in danger of falling behind in teaching methods and educational facilities. This was not an easy view to express to a long-standing and successful headmaster who had done so much to establish a school with an excellent local reputation but, to his great credit, Pip Masters was supportive of change and keen to see the school develop in its next stage. He even tolerated one of my first decrees – that ashtrays should be removed from classrooms! (Like many of the staff members, Pip was a heavy smoker and could not get through a lesson without lighting up, but now classrooms became smoke free zones although the staff common room increased its density of smog).

In my drive to establish good relations within the school community I began to understand the scale of the task at a time when a headmaster's role was very different from current practice. Of course I did have a teaching role – the bit that was familiar to me – and I sorted the timetable so that I could see each class at least once a week in order to familiarise myself with all the boys. But I was also expected to be curriculum planner, finance and estate Bursar, caretaker and event manager as well as emergency groundsman and plumber. Most of these roles were entirely new to me so necessity became the mother of invention. Fortunately PLM had assembled a loyal and capable team of essential cogs to drive the machinery of school life. Jack Herriott and Phil Haselgrove looked after the gardens and grounds with skill and pride, Henry Bogue was a very capable caterer, book keeping was meticulously performed by Mollie Wilkie, a widow living in Beech Barn South who also had the job of providing an evening meal for the resident staff, and cleaning was carried out by Rene and the comedy duo of Chris and Gwen who had worked at the school when Sarah was a teenager and were still going strong when we left. All these key people I had to bring on side since their loyalty was to the Masters family and not to the new incumbents. 'I expect it's all going to be kipper ties and jeans now,' said the cleaner, Chris Hanchant, with a smile on her face – but she was airing a general suspicion and warning that change might not be accepted without question.

If I had a lot to learn, Sarah did too. Her parents had always worked as a team with her mother doing lots of routine jobs quietly and efficiently in the background. Sarah naturally expected to take on these roles but her strengths and interests were rather different from her mother's, and of course everything had to be fitted in around looking after two small children. In some ways she was well prepared for her new role since, as a teenager still living at home, she had often helped out with mowing the playing fields or acting as a teaching assistant with the junior children in Winterbourn. She knew the school well – including many members of staff – and she happily took on the supervision of the catering and cleaning and quite soon the job of registrar and some maths teaching too, but some things like the school bookkeeping and arranging the flowers for all school functions (something Claud excelled at) had to be taken on by others.



*Claud seldom had to buy flowers since there were always lots in the school grounds. For very special occasions parents would be asked to bring in flowers from their gardens to supplement the school's own supply*

Our final link in the school's chain of key players was the parent body. This was a different group from those I had been used to in Bristol and most of them lived a lifestyle I had not encountered before. Many fathers would drop their children off at school at 8am and would then head for Amersham station, not returning from their London offices until after their children had gone to bed. Sarah and I needed to know more about these commuting parents and so we resolved to see each set of parents individually during our first year. We saw four sets a week during term time, inviting them in for an evening drink in our sitting room and hoping very much that they would be hungry and want to leave after an hour. They were invited for 7.15pm so that many fathers came straight from the station and most left about 8.30pm leaving us to write up notes which proved invaluable as reference over the next few years. The majority of these meetings were a delight and we discovered much about family backgrounds, aspirations for children and specific difficulties or problems that might exist. Some of the stickier interviews were happily

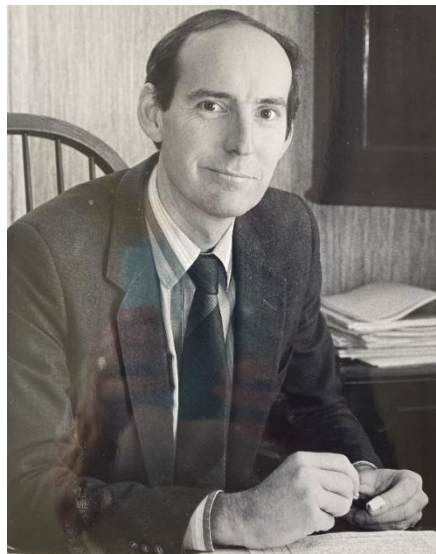
rescued by the appearance of one or other of our children from upstairs and the shared bond of dealing with a familiar family situation often broke any forming ice very effectively. We were relieved when we crossed the last Winterbourn parents off the list (we had started with parents of the oldest pupils first) but the whole experience was worthwhile and helped to foster a feeling of mutual interest between the two of us and Beacon and Winterbourn parents. Thereafter, we continued the practice with new parents but this, of course, was much less arduous and we had usually seen our quota by the Autumn half term. The principle was firmly established that parents were no longer to be at arm's length (many had been in awe of PLM) but they were to be more involved with their children's education and the social life of the school.

### 1972 - 73

The Davies Jones family moved to The Beacon in July, allowing time to sort out domestic arrangements and to meet all the ancillary staff as well as many of the teaching staff before term began. A contract of employment was signed between the new Headmaster and The Beacon Educational Trust which decreed that Sarah and I were to be paid a joint salary of £3000 plus an entertainment allowance of £300. It seemed like riches although the sum was not a great deal more than we had earned as teachers at Clifton. However, we had an attractive house to live in, gardens and grounds to be enjoyed by the whole family (it was not long before Paul learned that if he toddled across the courtyard to join the domestic staff on their morning break he would be fed well-buttered toast!). It was a new life that promised to keep us very busy for the next few years.

Much of the summer holiday of '72 and many of the holidays thereafter were spent painting classrooms to try to make them more appealing and less institutional. Often we would be accompanied by our two children – Paul in a playpen in the middle of the room which was being painted and Mark, equipped with a small brush to tackle bits which we could easily overpaint later! One of his tasks was to paint the new radiators which had replaced the old, fummy and hazardous gas fires which had previously inadequately warmed classrooms. Although it was time-consuming the decoration work was also satisfying because the school gradually became smarter and more welcoming to pupils and their parents. Eventually after two years of work we could proudly say that we had repainted every room in the main school building.

Filled with a missionary zeal to plan some modernisation I wrote a paper for the newly appointed Governors trying to evaluate strengths and weaknesses as I saw them. The strengths were obvious – an excellent academic record, a



reputation as the best Prep school in the area, a committed staff and a loyal – though distant – parent body. I saw the weaknesses as lack of space and some inadequate classrooms with a shortage of modern facilities (primitive loos and washing facilities and no showers). These, I claimed, needed to be addressed as urgent priorities and in years to come we should add hard tennis courts, a swimming pool, a Willsfield pavilion and other amenities which were beginning to become commonplace in modern Prep schools. In these aims I was supported by PLM although he must have had to bite his

tongue as I criticised some of the improvements made during his tenure, but together we began to plan for development even though I and the Governors were conscious that the embryonic Beacon Educational Trust had no money and was committed to repaying Debentures, a debt which, at the time, seemed like a financial millstone.

Much to the credit of the new Governors – (from memory James Mogridge (former Deputy Head), Jim Hornby (my old boss at Clifton), Derek Seymour (head of Bloxham School), Peter Barkas (a partner of Howard, Son & Gooch, local estate agents, and a surveyor whose expertise on buildings was to prove invaluable), Basil Garnons-Williams (headmaster of Berkamsted School) – and to the far sighted Chairman, D’Arcy Biss – the Board saw the need for development and once convinced of the worth of planned improvements set about enabling them.

Frank Stovin-Bradford (the local architect who had designed the single storey extension comprising classrooms, hall and art room) was asked to devise a link between the main house and his ‘new’ block so that classrooms in the main building could be expanded, the lavatory and washing facilities between the main building and the ‘new’ classrooms could be upgraded and an access to the classroom block would ensure that pupils and staff no longer had to brave the elements when moving from class to class. He produced an exciting plan which looked ideal on paper and was thought to be within our budget (from memory £60,000). Bids were requested from three local building firms and I





*Spring 1973 Mark and Paul and a friend playing in the groundsman's handcart*

remember well the moment of opening these sealed bids in the study with PLM, Frank Stovin-Bradford and me gathered together hopefully. We had already put in an order for steel girders, integral to the project, on the basis that prices were rising rapidly and therefore it was both disappointing and alarming to find that all three bids were way over budget. One of the weaknesses of the plan was that it could not be reduced in scale, it was an all or nothing project and the Governors after some agonising decided that Plan A had to be scrapped and we needed to find a

cheaper alternative. As it turned out, I believe the second plan was not only much cheaper than the first but set us on the road to development of the classrooms which were, at the time, just what was required.

In the summer of 1973 I produced the first end of term newsletter as a means of letting parents know about school events and policies. Kristine Rose, the wonderful Headmaster's secretary, was less enthusiastic about the document than I was since this gave her an unwelcome chore among her myriad end of term tasks. The pages of the newsletter had to be typed on a stencil and then laboriously copied on a Gestetner spirit duplicator, stapled and stuffed into report envelopes. Hard working and loyal Kristine carried out the task with only the faintest of complaints and her 10 hour day at school extended to 12 hours until the task was completed.



*Kris Rose*

The first newsletter contained an explanation to parents of the Beacon form structure, ten classes partly organised in streams with the top two forms being VI for Scholarship candidates and Shell for Common Entrance candidates. They and the two Fifth forms stayed for tea and prep at school and the two Fourth forms were added to this number later in the year. (The school day ended at 6.15pm after evening prayers but there were clubs and activities for the boys until 7pm.)

I noted a curriculum change – that the Nuffield Biology course would be added to the Physics and Chemistry in the new academic year.

Bravely, there was to be a small change in the uniform! Winterbourn boys were no longer required to wear a grey shirt and tie but now would have a thin grey turtle neck sweater under a maroon v-neck pullover (although the top form, Form A, had to soldier on with ties so that they could manage the Beacon uniform when they transferred). Tracksuits were also introduced at Winterbourn and The Beacon. Beacon boys were granted the concession of only needing one pair of black shoes rather than two (one had been a pair of 'house' shoes, the other for outside use). I remember that this was introduced after I had spent many hours in the changing room searching for missing shoes, usually unmarked and unused.

Other items in the newsletter were less original. There was an exhortation about hair length – 'not over the collar or over the ears'. The new headmaster also relaxed the rule about the compulsory watching of all home matches by those boys who were not involved in teams. I suggested that any lack of support would not affect adversely our results (but in fact I had been appalled by this archaic practice which involved non-sporty boys in a couple of hours of needless misery on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons). Another change made rather more subtly was that of permitted staff dress; the female staff members had not been allowed to wear trousers but, without any formal decree, this restriction was removed.



*In 1983 George Brown brought a team of boys from his school in Peru to play football*

on the grounds that his fare would not be detained for very long! I also recorded the death of Alf Burt, one of the Beacon gardeners, who had done a fine job under PLM's guidance for seven years.

There were some staff changes. John Gotch, teacher of History, left after 6 years at The Beacon and George Brown arrived, a lively, bearded figure who was a good teacher and a keen sportsman. He lived in Monks Barn and later became a Prep school Head in South America. In the timing of his appointment, George was lucky to have been interviewed by me; PLM had a prejudice against beards and if any prospective staff member arrived from the station with facial growth Pip would ask the taxi driver to wait,

For the first time sports results were revealed to the parents. As usual the cricket season produced modest results but the swimming, under Nick Webb's tutelage, was successful and two pupils, Peter Handy and Peter Sweet, had been selected for District Training.

Art and Music saw successes. Pauline Milne, a brilliant teacher of Art, produced her usual triumphs with Tim Hearn, David Brown and Alexander Mennem all having work accepted for the National Exhibition of Childrens' Art



*Ann Isaac*

at The Mall Galleries where 600 pictures selected from 75,000 entries were displayed. (Writing the name Mennem reminded me that Alexander's father was Motoring Correspondent for The Daily Mirror and each week, to petrol heads' delight, he would turn up with a new car that he was evaluating for the newspaper.) In Music I recorded that over one third of the boys in the school were learning to play musical instruments, encouraged by Maureen Lang and Ann Isaac, two invaluable staff members who were form teachers as well as musicians – a rare combination nowadays.

The end of the summer term 1973 marked the moment when Pip Masters finally retired as Headmaster. The Governors set up a fund for parents, both present and past, to contribute to a leaving present for Pip and Claud and many letters of appreciation were received. All were fulsome in their praise of what had been achieved in the preceding 20 years with comments like 'How lucky we have all been to have them here!' and 'They have certainly made The Beacon a school to be proud of'. One lengthier tribute reads: 'Mr Masters has provided a stimulus and driving force by enthusiasm, example and leadership which has inspired the staff and, in turn, has encouraged the boys to do not only their best but that little bit more which has made a great difference to their future. His affection for his pupils has been tempered by discipline and regard for high moral standards and good manners; and he has had regard also to their well-being after leaving the school as guide, philosopher and friend. In all this he has had the support of Mrs Masters who has also laboured devotedly for the school in the perhaps less glamorous spheres but, nevertheless, spheres of great importance. In short they have worked as a splendid team.'

At the end of the newsletter I paid tribute to my father-in-law. 'Finally, I would like to put on record my grateful thanks to PLM. Releasing hold of the reins after twenty years of a very firm grip is difficult but no outgoing headmaster



could have been more tactful or helpful than he has been. He is justly proud of The Beacon; I shall do all I can to ensure that the school's reputation for academic excellence and fair but friendly discipline is maintained so that he can relax and enjoy a well-earned semi-retirement, though we expect to keep him fairly busy maintaining the grounds and buildings in first class condition.' (This we did.)



*The school and the new classrooms in 1973*



I was on my own now!

**1973 - 4**

### **Autumn term 1973**

My Autumn term newsletter recorded that I had attended the Prep Schools (IAPS) Conference at Cambridge just before term at The Beacon began. One of the speakers was Roy Hattersley, Deputy Leader of the Labour party, who in a chilling and antagonistic speech stated that it was Labour policy, as soon as they were elected, 'seriously to weaken and subsequently to abolish all Independent schools'. Pompously I told the parents, 'As far as The Beacon is concerned, we plan to continue as a school, to develop and improve our existing facilities and to disregard the thundering of politicians'. 50 years on, independent schools are still here and are thriving but the threat has not gone away.

Also In the week before the September term started Sarah organised a sale of second-hand school uniform with a cut of the takings being added to the Beacon Amenities Fund. This was something new at The Beacon but soon became a regular fixture of the school holidays.

Notable events recorded were the departure back to her native New Zealand of Maureen Lang after eight years at The Beacon. This was a sad loss not only to the school but also for me personally because Maureen had been very supportive of my efforts to inject a more modern professionalism to the staff and she was a popular and respected teacher with pupils and their parents.

She had been instrumental in starting the 'Sunday at Six' services at Little Missenden church, once a term events that gave a chance for a Beacon choir to sing in public and for a different sort of service to be offered to parishioners. The delightful and innovative Rev Roberts, the Vicar at Little Missenden,



*Inside Little Missenden Church*

was welcoming and appreciative of our efforts and, of course, he gave us an opportunity to make The Beacon name known in the wider community. Some of the evening services in the ancient church are among my happiest memories of my time at The Beacon and I well remember listening to our excellent readers practise under the gaze of figures from the medieval wall paintings.

Little Missenden held a Festival every year and in this particular year a party of Beacon boys went to listen to poet Ted Hughes talk about his craft. Such 'outside' visits had been very infrequent in the past (except to watch cricket at Lords) and I was keen to try to make our pupils less insular.

Joining the gardens/groundstaff was Len Martin, a retired farm worker from Chesham, strong as an ox and a strict Baptist and teetotaler ('Adam's ale only' (water) was his reply when offered a beer). Despite his own firm beliefs, he was tolerant of his colleagues and in particular the stalwart Jack Herriott who liked his beer, whose humour was earthy and who could use some fruity language (although never in earshot of boys). Jack, Len and Phil Haselgrove were a great team of loyal, hardworking and committed support staff who would turn their hands to anything and needed very little direction.

Other notable information in the newsletter gave details of The Beacon's first participation on an IAPS educational cruise visiting Venice, Mykonos,

Famagusta, Alexandria and Katakolon. I had taken cruise parties from Clifton in the past and was keen to see the Beacon boys benefit from guided foreign travel. Peter Flynn, one of the few younger members of staff, was to be the party leader.

David Moss and Mark Carey were congratulated on passing their grade 3 Associated Board violin exams – we still had limited horizons in our musical ambitions! David Moss I remember well because he had a remarkable memory; we had been reading Browning's 'Pied Piper of Hamelin' in an English lesson so I challenged David to learn the whole of it by heart. Despite the length of the poem, the next day he knocked on the door of my study, proudly to recite the poem faultlessly – for which he received a double credit on the credit/debit chart! The credit system was in place when I joined The Beacon and it led to many altercations with parents because those in credit at the end of each term received a half holiday and those in debit balance did not, staying at school as a discontented rump while their angelic colleagues swanned off to enjoy themselves. Staff were keen to retain the system as it gave them sanctions; I never liked it!

In the newsletter I gave a list of the schools I had visited during the term (and did this in the future as well). When I first arrived at The Beacon I wrote to all the schools to which we sent or were intending to send Beacon pupils and on a Friday afternoon I would drive off to visit so that I could meet Heads and see their schools allowing me to advise parents about school choices with personal, rather than received, information. Because at that time Beacon boys went far and wide in their secondary schooling (and the majority to boarding schools) I covered a considerable mileage – Malvern or Shrewsbury, I think, being the furthest away.

My final remarks were about the imminent prospect of petrol rationing (a by-product of the '73 Arab - Israeli war) and the school's measures to help out. For January a bus had been arranged to transport Beaconsfield pupils leaving St Michael's Green at 7.40am and staff would be on hand to meet and greet at Amersham station those boys who normally travelled by car. (Although ration books were issued, rationing was not imposed so these precautions proved unnecessary).

One other topic covered is a matter that became a recurring theme in newsletters. I reminded parents to register siblings early since pressure on places now resulted in a requirement to put a boy's name down before he was

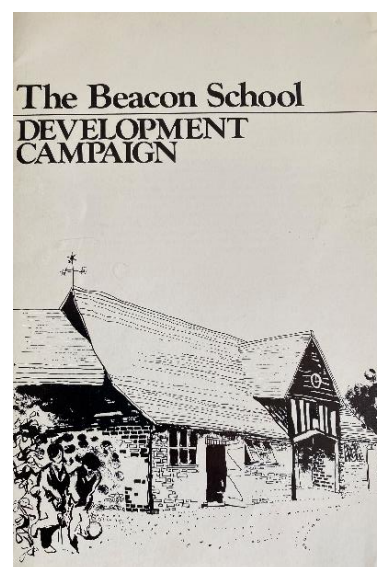


three months old in order to secure a vacancy. 'Contrary to some local beliefs we do still operate on the strictly fair system of offering places on a first come first served basis.' During my time at The Beacon recruitment was only a problem in the sense of trying to find space to satisfy demand. There were several pre-natal registrations over the years.

### **Spring term 1974**

The newsletter bemoaned the virulent bugs that had laid so many boys and staff low and the monsoon weather that had turned the playing field into a muddy morass, but I made no mention of the power cuts and inconvenience caused by the three-day week – by the time we had reached the end of term no doubt everyone was sick of the subject. Nevertheless, the school had kept going despite electricity cuts and we even used gas lights and candles to ensure that Prep could be done at the usual after dark times. I remember being quietly proud of The Beacon's resilience in the face of some major national difficulties.

The main topic of the newsletter was the Appeal. When planning the new building the Governors had recognised that with no money in the coffers and a big Debenture debt to repay the school needed to find money to pay for building work they agreed was highly desirable. School appeals were in their infancy at this stage and bore no resemblance to modern, slick and professional operations. In the early '70s there were two firms who offered some expertise in the money raising field, Hooker Craigmyle and Richard Maurice. The former specialised in senior schools and the latter in Prep schools. Since, in the past, most Prep schools had been privately owned it had been morally difficult for owners to appeal for funds but now that charitable trusts were becoming established the situation was different. All contributions were to a school, not to an individual with a direct financial interest.

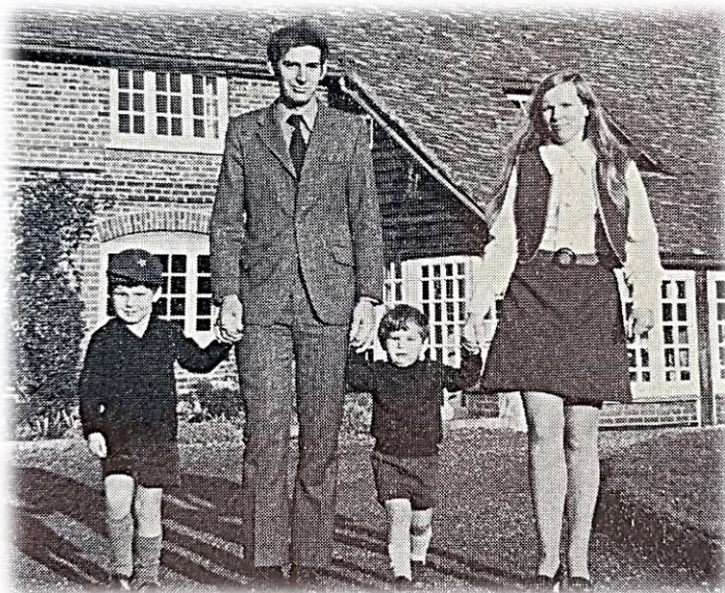


*The appeal brochure*

Fund raising firms appeared to operate in a simple way: try to find some big donors, exploit them and send round a personable ex-serviceman to persuade them to give as much as possible. We had signed up Richard Maurice (who took a slice of whatever sum the firm raised) and

were introduced to Eddie Baines, an affable retired Naval Commander who had set to work to visit parents and seek donations. In September 1973 I had written an introductory letter asking parents to expect a telephone call and explaining who would be calling them and why. We then eagerly anticipated the return of 7-year Covenant forms which not only gave us a stated sum but also a chance to claim a tax benefit on each donation. There were few very large donations but there was a heartwarming avalanche of medium to small donations which added up to a tidy sum. I acknowledged each donation with a handwritten thank you

letter and the more I wrote the happier I was! By the time of the Spring newsletter we had raised £44,000 which rose to near £50,000 after a final push – considered at the time to be an excellent result for a relatively small, day Prep school. This, of course, was not money in hand but promised money over a seven year period; it provided the necessary basis



*The appeal brochure featured this family photo alongside a message from the Headmaster*

for borrowing from the Bank and development could begin. The Appeal had been hard work for all concerned but a very educational experience for me; it was clear that there was no magic formula in fund raising, grateful parents would give if they a) thought the proposed scheme would benefit their children and b) if they had affection for the school and the staff within it. We could do it ourselves next time, I thought – and we did!

The boys were involved with fund raising via a summer fete, advertised in the newsletter. This was another opportunity to involve all sections of the school in a common effort and although many hearts sank at the prospect, the die was cast!

Further uniform changes were announced. The grey suit (cost at Wheatleys in Amersham £21 for the smallest size!) was to be phased out with maroon V-neck pullovers taking the place of the grey jacket – to be compulsory wear by Sept '75. (Wheatleys were the school outfitters, based in Amersham. They

continued to stock the uniform for The Beacon and Winterbourn throughout my time at the school.)

Once again Beacon artists were represented in the National Exhibition of Childrens Art – this time Nicholas Pegley, Peter Schroeder, Simon Cox, Thomas Petersen and Simon Lague.

On the sporting side 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby results were modest and Beechwood Park won the Beacon Sevens competition (fielding, as I recall a six foot giant beanpole in their team, Martin Bayfield, later to become an England international and a TV Commentator).

### **Summer term 1974**

There was much talk of the fete held on 13 July which had involved large numbers of parents (mainly mums) in a corporate effort. The fete with its many stalls and sideshows had been deemed a great success and raised a useful extra sum for the Appeal.

I wrote confidently about the building plans which after interminable delays had finally been passed by Chiltern District Council but at this stage the Stovin-Bradford scheme still appeared to be a runner and work was set to begin, I thought, later in the summer. Little did I know about the alarmingly high bids shortly to be delivered. However I was able to report some in-house building progress. Winterbourn was a cramped building designed as a private house and far from ideal for small children. Like The Beacon it lacked space but unlike its sister school there was little room for expansion. One way of making a little more elbow room was to find a storage solution for coats, boots and other paraphernalia that the small boys required. I noted 'Winterbourn has now sprouted a new wooden covered way, cunningly designed and expertly built by the ex-headmaster (PLM), ham-fistedly feather boarded and roofed by the current headmaster, lovingly painted by the Headmaster's wife and finished off by her mother. In addition Mrs Isaac's son, Anthony, provided us with four weeks of expert carpentry and our own workforce of Jack Herriott (Bucks champion hole digger), Phil Haselgrove and Len Martin enabled us to complete the work on the night before term began.' This extra space allowed us to upgrade the lavatory and washbasin space which had been totally inadequate.



There were lots of staff changes. Ian Campbell, who lived in Field Cottage at the far end of the classroom block, was to retire after 9 years teaching science. He was an excellent teacher of those who had a scientific interest but had been less effective with those who found science difficult. I had never found him the easiest of staff members to deal with despite his unfailing courtesy. He was very much old school and our teaching philosophies never matched. Also going but after only two years at the school was Nigel Spears. He had been an effective teacher of English but found some of the boys difficult to manage, particularly one who seemed to develop a taste for biting Nigel's arm whenever he was criticised! Peter Flynn, who had taken Form 3, went off to teach abroad and some Winterbourn changes also took place.



Ian Campbell

These departures gave me a wonderful opportunity to recruit staff who were more modern in outlook and more prepared to follow the direction in which I was trying to guide the school. I was able to appoint Chris Copeman to be in charge of English and can safely say that in nearly thirty years as a Head he was the best appointment I ever made. Formerly a pupil at The Beacon he had gone into the Navy, retired because he injured his knee disembarking from a boat and then turned to teaching. He already had a national reputation as a leader in the field of English teaching, he knew personally some influential poets and authors, he had written his own text books and he was brimful of ideas. Because he had been teaching at King's Canterbury he had been paid a senior school salary and was thus 'expensive'. If we were to match that sum I had to invent some extra responsibility posts. Directors of Study were just becoming popular appointments in Prep schools so I rapidly appointed Chris to that post at The Beacon, paid him an extra allowance for it and signed him up.



Chris Copeman

of the lovely, tender meat and wished  
that life was always that good.  
I hope you enjoyed <sup>writing</sup> this as much as I enjoyed reading it!  
almost booked an air ticket on the spot!  
A credit.

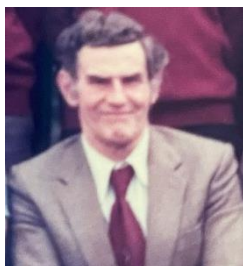
A Hot Morning - 14th May, 1982.

The warm, hazy stillness,  
silence only broken by the birds

Chris Copeman always showed a genuine interest in what each boy wrote and made really valuable comments on each piece of work

It will ~~with~~ his pointing suck  
Well observed, but spelling lets you down!  
You MUST (a) ask me for more spellings so that  
I can help you.  
(b) take more care writing words down.  
dipped pushes measures piece  
spirit points pointing

Generations of Beacon boys were to benefit – including our own sons, one of whom achieved a First Class degree in English at Cambridge and to this day credits Chris Copeman for stimulating and nurturing his interest in the subject.



*Donald Gillies-Reyburn*

Also joining the staff was Donald Gillies-Reyburn who taught history. His pupils loved the subject as he taught it but sadly exam results failed to match their enthusiasm because boys remembered the stories he told but not the history! He was a really useful addition to the staff and was well liked by everyone.

Another new recruit was science teacher Will Foley who had retired from the state system but still wanted to teach. He was a calm, authoritative character who knew his subject and although he was older than the ideal person I was looking for he proved a very able teacher and was much more up to date in his methods than his predecessor.

Filling a Winterbourn vacancy was Pauline Baxter whose ex husband had been a Beacon boy noted for his sporting prowess. Pauline was a hugely popular teacher with the smaller children and their parents and, like Chris Copeman, she became a stalwart staff member. Her son, James, was an outstanding games player and later went on to be a Prep school teacher himself.



*Pauline Baxter*

In the newsletter I revealed the answers to the questionnaire I had sent out about uniform changes (after the predictable mixed reaction to the phasing out of grey suits). The compromise was to settle for v-necked sweater and maroon blazer and this was infinitely preferable to the grey suits – and much cheaper.

An innovation was the movement of the end of term sports day to Willsfield where we had created a 400 metre grass track. Sports Day became more of a showcase for athletics while the lavish tea in the main quad continued as ever. One sign of the times was that the catering for this tea – probably attended by at least 300 people – was done entirely in-house with a group of long-suffering mothers coming it to spend their Saturday morning making sandwiches in the school kitchens! Each year in advance of this special occasion Claud had always done some baking and in later years Sarah used to go through to the

school kitchen each evening after the staff had gone home (and the boys were in bed) to make a batch of mini-meringues; she aimed to make a total of 1000 of these each year and could be sure that every single one would be eaten by the time Sports Day was over!

## 1974 – 75

### **Autumn term 1974**

The term was notable for being unusually rain sodden and this was mitigated by the introduction of two free choice afternoons when boys could choose either an activity such as chess or handicrafts or opt for a different sort of sport like squash at the Chesham Bois squash club or horse riding. A third non-negotiable option was detention which was introduced for the work shy; fortunately this less appreciated option was also a minority participation activity.

At the start of my newsletter I took the opportunity to warn parents of an imminent and significant rise in fees. The Houghton Report had recommended a pay rise for teachers which was way above inflation and while this was good news for them it was bad news for parents at a time when the economic climate was as uncertain as the weather.

Common Entrance results (there were always a number of candidates in the Autumn term in those days) were celebrated – two boys passed to Wellington, one to Malvern and one to Radley. Art triumphs in national competitions were now joined, since Chris Copeman's arrival, by literary success – poems by Beacon boys were to be broadcast in BBC's Living Language programme and three stories by Nick Pegley, Alex Pegley and Tim Greenslade had been chosen for 'Books, Plays and Poems', a BBC Schools programme celebrating child authors UK wide.



*Margaret Habershon*

At Winterbourn the lively and cheerful Josie Tresise was leaving to return to her native Cornwall and Jane Butcher, later to become Collinson, joined and was soon to show what a useful staff member she would become. Jane joined an established team led by Jean Armitage (later Lefroy) with Margaret Habershon as her stalwart and able lieutenant.

On the building front the grim washing and lavatory facilities were remodelled so that what had been a totally inadequate classroom and former garage was now filled with washbasins and the loos next door had new urinals and cubicles. As usual PLM did much of the carpentry work involved with these alterations while the plumbing was done by Mulkerns of Chesham who were gradually sorting out the intricacies of some eccentric plumbing all around the school premises. We were well served by Mulkerns over many years and also by the obliging John Swain, the school electrician and the only man who understood the wiring of the old buildings. Fortunately, before he retired he had passed that knowledge to his assistant who took over the business. I enjoyed building up a good relationship with these local service providers and it was a comfort to know that in a crisis – and we had a few – they would turn out at more or less any time and in all weathers. I also learned a few DIY skills from watching trained workmen operate and became an expert in unblocking urinals – an accomplishment not to be underestimated in both its immediate usefulness and instant satisfaction.

I advertised a future Brains Trust evening to be held in March at which a panel of the Heads of St Edward's, Oxford, Berkhamsted (John Spencer, a Beacon parent and Governor), Pangbourne College and Dr Challoner's Grammar School would talk about their schools and give educational advice. These evenings became a regular feature with Heads of Public Schools keen to participate and advertise the excellence of their schools in a discreetly competitive manner! I was delighted that John Loarridge, the Head of Dr Challoner's, had agreed to attend this first effort at providing relevant information to parents. I developed a very good relationship with John and he always did his best to help Beacon boys and parents, often bending over backwards to accept new entries at age 13 rather than earlier. Difficult for him but very helpful to me. John Loarridge later became a Governor and contributed a great deal to meetings with his wisdom, broad educational knowledge and refreshing common sense.

One campaign at this time was ACAC – a local drive headed by Peter Harper, an Oakway resident and parent of two boys in the school, to persuade the authorities to scrap plans for re-routing Heathrow take offs directly over Amersham and Chesham Bois. It met with partial success and at the time was much discussed in the press. In the newsletter I thanked the many parents who had signed a petition against the proposed flightpath.



## Spring term 1975

In the New Year at last we were able to build new classrooms. Plan B after the scrapped Stovin-Bradford plan was to find a means of providing improved facilities at a lower cost. PLM and I toured a handful of schools to see how others had tackled the problem and we discovered our preferred solution at The Oratory Prep School. Here the school had erected Guildway buildings,



*The site for the Strong Building*

prefabricated in wooden sections and then brick clad so that they appeared similar to conventional constructions. They were very well insulated (unlike all other Beacon rooms), double glazed and easy and quick to erect. The Oratory had employed a local firm called J Strong and Sons who had previously been traditional builders but now specialised in Guildway construction. We had a site meeting with Strongs, three brothers all short in stature but practical, imaginative and experienced builders who came up with sensible ideas to solve our particular problems.

And so the Strong Building was commissioned, a line of four classrooms running East to West parallel to the single storey block containing the science room and children's workshop. A covered way was to be created between the new building and the old so there would be weather-proof access to the classrooms and the changing room. Because this passage was to be wide with double doors at each end we could put notice boards on one side (there had been nowhere before to display notices and messages had to be verbal, usually at lunchtime) and we also had the luxury of providing good size lockers for boys to store their books. PLM set up a very efficient mass production line in his old workshop and turned out wooden lockers which were sealed rather than painted and installed on stands against the walls of the buildings that ran along the covered way. The classrooms were to be a Maths room, an English room and two new bases for Forms 1 and 2 with a space in between for the youngest children to hang their blazers and change their shoes. The 7 and 8 year olds tended to be alarmed by the crowded bustle of the main changing room and so this would be a big plus. The rooms were to be carpeted (then a

real innovation) and they all had store cupboards, something all other Beacon classrooms lacked! All this was to be achieved at a fraction of the cost of the previous plan and build time would be during the Easter holidays because of the nature of the construction and due to preparation of groundworks early in the year.



*Stripping the turf*

These groundworks began with stripping turf from the site, work carried out by an Old Beacon boy, Richard Blacklock, who ran a turf farm near Wendover. In early January he cut the sodden turf with a fearsome machine and a team of helpers, including PLM and me, followed behind rolling the turf for transportation – a back breaking labour but worth the effort. We sold this back field turf to parents, helping to swell the school building fund and providing good quality grass to gardens all over South Bucks! After we had finished, Strongs came in with a JCB that they had driven from Reading, dug out the rest of the site and laid a concrete base – all the work being done in weather that made the area more like a World War One battlefield than a fitting

site for a new building. But disruption to normal school life had been minimal and at last we would have new classrooms which would ease the pressure on space elsewhere in the school.

I enjoyed the whole project which was an entirely new experience for me, and it was satisfying to find furniture – smart chairs and tables and even the new invention, whiteboards – that would make the new rooms attractive. As I



*Paul DJ posing in front of the finished Strong Building.*

observed in the summer term newsletter ‘Good teachers can provide even better results when teaching in a congenial room with all the necessary aids and equipment rapidly at hand.’

### Summer term 1975

I was conscious that by building on the back field we were nibbling into the boys’ playspace so we planned to spend some more money. Because the Strong building was well within budget and because we were now making a satisfactory annual surplus – even after the re-payment of debentures – it seemed like a good moment to provide another facility I was conscious that we were lacking. A hard play area was needed – something that had become all too obvious after such a wet autumn and winter – and I scoured the catalogues to try to find a surface that would survive footballs at breaktimes yet be suitable for tennis in the afternoons. The area between the changing room barn and the back boundary of the Oakway houses was underused but was large enough to accommodate 3 tennis courts. The courts were built during the summer and En Tout Cas gave us a finished product that looked very smart in its two colours of red and green. Immediately, as the boys played their break time games, it became apparent that the netting would not survive footballs but once again PLM came to the rescue, constructing wooden brackets that attached to the base of each post so that a board could be fixed at ground level between each upright. It did the trick and there were no more problems. The new building and the tennis courts marked the start of the second phase of development after PLM’s initial Beech Barn conversions. This



*The new En Tout Cas tennis courts with PLM’s protective measures for the netting*

time, however, we had purpose-built facilities to complement the historic buildings.

In my summer term newsletter I addressed a parental concern – the new building work had made some suspicious that the school was going to expand and there was resistance to this. For me, part of the

appeal of the new classrooms was that they were designed to be large enough to accommodate classes of 20 pupils but the average class size had been 16.

This average was certainly low for a day school although quite normal for a boarding Prep school and usually the reason for this was that day schools were more modern while many boarding schools existed in old buildings with limited space in classrooms – something that had been the case at The Beacon when I started. I revealed that we were planning to increase Beacon numbers to 175 from 160 but this would mean class sizes ‘would increase by 0.5 boys per class’. I pointed out that although this increase was small it would help keep fees to the lowest possible level!

I noted that 18 boys had passed CE to 11 different schools, while two more had won scholarships and four others had passed into their senior schools via the scholarship exam. In the ‘70s there were far fewer scholarships offered by senior schools, most offered just one music scholarship and a few were just beginning to provide art scholarships. Sports scholarships were almost unknown – although Millfield School was a notable exception.

As a result of an increasing need among hard pressed parents (and because the local grammar schools did such a good job) we had begun to take the 12 plus exam more seriously, familiarising boys with the tests and entering some for the County selection procedure at parental request. In 1975 fourteen boys passed and were offered places at grammar schools but, as I recall, no more than one or two actually took up their places.

Further triumphs in national Art and Literature competitions were recorded and nine boys went to the BBC in London to read and record poems and essays. On the music side I claimed that over half the boys were learning to play musical instruments (although we were certainly not at this stage a musical school – Grade 4 passes were occasional and Grade 5 a cause for huge celebration). We did, however, hold an informal concert at the end of the summer term.

In sport, the familiar tradition of modest cricket results was upheld but Simon Moore, David Grover and Jamie Marson reached the National Finals in Prep schools athletics. Nick Webb had a great deal of success with Beacon athletes over many years.



*Nick Webb*





*Eunice Maloney*

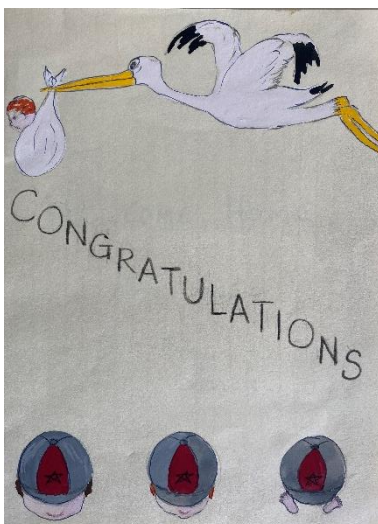
On the staff side I noted the departure of Francine Ilott and greeted the arrival of Eunice Maloney as Form 2 teacher – another recruit who was to prove an outstanding teacher. As someone who had received a Distinction in her Certificate of Education, Eunice added professionalism to a staff common room that was becoming more modern in outlook and methods.

We had come a long way from the crusty ex-military approach although some of the survivors of the old regime, like Hugh Osborne in his Maths teaching and Tony Whittaker in the Classics, had shown themselves adaptable and prepared to mix the best of their traditional methods with the best of the modern approaches.

My final note in this newsletter was about the Little Missenden Millennium celebrations. The church was celebrating its 1000 years with all sorts of cultural activities and The Beacon's contribution had been a huge paper collage of the church building which Pauline Milne had overseen. It was on permanent display in the church and was remarkably striking among the medieval wall paintings in the church.

## 1975 – 76

### Autumn term 1975



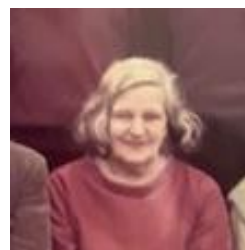
*Our most original card came from the Grover family*

The Autumn term newsletter begins by celebrating a busy term made even busier for Sarah and me by the arrival of our third son, Simon, in November. We were, of course, delighted to welcome an addition to the family but we were also very touched by parental interest and reaction to his birth. So many parents wrote to congratulate us, many offered help in all sorts of ways and we felt an avalanche of good will engulfing us. This was reassuring confirmation that we had moved towards making The Beacon a family school where everyone in the community felt valued and involved. I noted, 'I count myself fortunate to have two such pleasant families (though the larger one is less trouble and better behaved than the smaller one).'

Looking back I believe that having children of our own of a similar age to those we taught was a great help in establishing ourselves at The Beacon. We were of similar age to many of the parents, we could empathise with the stresses and strains of family life and we tried to make them feel that The Beacon was their second home. We were not a big school so I knew all the parents by sight and could put names to them – and, of course, knew all their children even better. Many parents – particularly those who helped with dances, teas, sport and myriad other school based activities and events – were very regular visitors and, for many mums in particular, The Beacon became a social hub. Our lives were totally tied up with the school and we expected to turn our hands to anything – it was a different way of life from the role of Headship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and my rose-coloured memories confirm my feeling that we were lucky to have been at The Beacon in this era. We worked six days a week and on Sunday would usually be taking our own sons to play in some sporting event where we would meet other Beacon parents doing similar things. We were able to take longer holidays as the school required less in the way of painting or maintenance but apart from August when we would flee to my parents' villa in Ibiza (then an idyllic island with tourism in its infancy) we were happy to be at The Beacon in a community that felt friendly and supportive.

Following PLM's example I stood on the front doorstep of the main building every term time morning from 8am and was able to do all sorts of minor school business in the three quarters of an hour before morning prayers. I soon learnt to write things down or I would face the wrath of my secretary, Kristine Rose, for failing to pass on an important message. Increasingly I had to act as traffic warden with some who would insist on dropping off their sons at the nearest point to the archway thus causing a traffic jam out into the main road for those cars behind them but I usually enjoyed this interaction with parents and there were some memorable moments. At 6.15pm I would again circulate among the parked cars to talk to parents, often to hold just social conversations but at times to tell parents about triumphs or disasters that their children had experienced at school. Better communication had been an ambition when we first started at The Beacon and with Sarah as involved as I was, we were, I believe, able to achieve it.

The Beacon car park was never short of incident. One father with three delightful and distinctive boys in the school would deliver his brood from his Rolls Royce clad in a trilby hat and pyjamas. It was this same parent who bought the massive, seven foot tall, fur clad King Kong that Pauline Milne had



*Pauline Milne*

created with her artists; he strapped it to the roof of his Roller and took it back to his home in Latimer. We often had enormous fun with parents – I remember only too well being reduced to helpless laughter as we tried to erect a canvas awning between the dining hall and the gym in preparation for a dance. A journalist parent had decided to augment his income by purchasing and then hiring out a marquee and sundry bits to go with it. He generously offered to lend this to us but had no idea how to erect the marquee or the covered walkway that went with it – and his skills definitely lay with a pen rather than a screwdriver. A summer's evening was spent with several parents and the would-be marquee entrepreneur trying to create a weatherproof corridor. It was a disaster but involvement in the operation had many London solicitors and serious accountants having to lie down on the grass in the quad to recover themselves after being left prostrate with laughter in the shambles of trying to perform an impossible task. It was those sorts of occasions that forged real bonds with parents.



*The quadrangle before it was laid with tarmac*

I cannot remember which year saw the quadrangle laid with tarmac to replace the dusty pea shingle that was death to lawn mower blades and an eyesore if not raked frequently. I do remember, however, that I was gullible when the dubious looking character

rang the front doorbell at the school and explained that he just happened to have a large load of tarmac left over from another job and he would love to help us out by laying it at The Beacon. It was only after this happened again several times that I realised it was a traditional con but I innocently agreed to take the tarmac at what I was told was a bargain price. Remarkably quickly, a large West Indian turned up with two lorries, came over to me and said, 'We'll do a good job for you, sir' and set to work. The result was certainly better than the old surface and, on balance, the large West Indian was as good as his word. I have a feeling I paid in cash!

In my newsletter of Autumn '75 I paid tribute to Donald Fromow, a leaving staff member who had taught French effectively, first with James Mogrige and then on his own as Head of Department. He had a thorough and serious approach to the subject and his lessons and results reflected this. To find good French teachers was hard since those with a real aptitude for the subject tended to be snapped up by senior schools so I remember that response to the advertisement for Donald Fromow's replacement was very thin. I ended up appointing Greville Rimbault, a man with a good academic background and a Cambridge degree who had been for the previous four years ship's headmaster on SS Uganda, a cruise ship that took educational tours, mainly around the Mediterranean. I had known Greville slightly when he had taught at Clifton Prep but had little knowledge of his teaching. Although a pleasant and affable man, his time at The Beacon was not easy for either of us. French became a 'problem' subject.



Bill Foley

On the subject of staff I celebrated those who had just attended various holiday courses. It was then usual for the IAPS to organise refresher courses, usually held during holiday time, when staff members would spend three or four days brushing up their skills. Bill Foley and Hugh Osborne had been 'refreshed' in this way

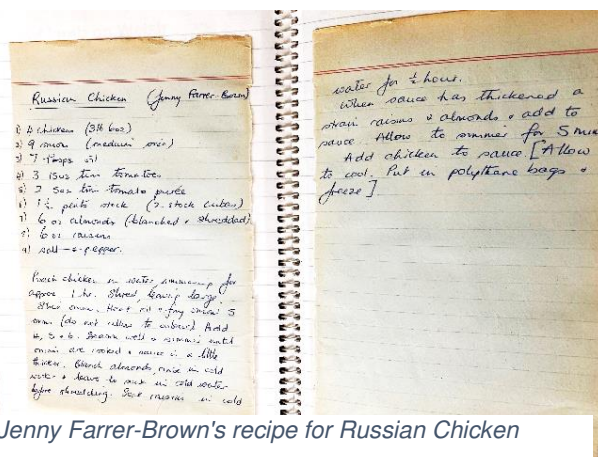


Hugh Osborne

and one of the Governors, Peter Barkas, had been to a one day course for Governors at St Paul's School. The school paid for the cost of training but, as I recall, there was no question of reimbursement for expenses; times have changed!

A disco dance was held in the dining hall at half term on October 24 and over 200 parents attended. It was one of the first of many similar occasions and gradually over the years a wonderful team of helpful parents formed,

marshalled by Sarah, to do the catering and preparation for functions. Jenny Farrer-Brown was a brilliant organiser and caterer and took on many events with a professional touch. (Sarah still has a recipe for 'Russian Chicken' which came from Jenny; she supervised a group of mothers making vast quantities of this for the first dance



Jenny Farrer-Brown's recipe for Russian Chicken



and it was a huge success!) We raised money this way but the main purpose of such evenings was fun and entertainment and rarely were the events anything other than successful. The only downside from our point of view was noise. An event in the dining hall might just as well have been in the children's bedroom (whose paper thin walls abutted the dining hall) so sleep was impossible. It was not easy being the children of a Headmaster living on site.

The same problem occurred during holiday times when we let out the dining hall for wedding receptions. This was a lucrative trade for us and the idea of making otherwise unused buildings earn their keep was attractive. Nancy Hazlehurst, a caterer from Chesham, who had worked at The Beacon in PLM's time, was keen to use the school for wedding receptions and meals and in the Easter and the summer holidays most Saturdays were taken up with weddings. Although this involved us in no work and Nancy always made sure that the kitchens and the dining hall were left immaculately clean and tidy, the intrusion on our privacy was irritating. After several years of suffering this, we eventually put a stop to the wedding receptions after a particularly bad experience with wedding guests taking photos in our garden and peering in through our back windows! We didn't need the money that badly by the early '80s!

Frequently I used the newsletters to air my own views on issues and I listed four in this December newsletter. Language ('Oh God' and 'Oh Christ' being used inappropriately); bed times (too late for too many); marking of clothes (not nearly enough and in silly places) and reading (parents were urged to keep an eye on choices – I considered Ian Fleming 'just about acceptable'!). Amazingly parents seemed to accept these moral signposts and my pompous pronouncements sometimes may have had some beneficial effect.

### **Spring term 1976**

'Flu struck in the spring term of 1976 and there were many absentees. The rugby XV only won two of their six fixtures but success for the basketball team was noted. Nick Webb was a keen basketball player and he transmitted his enthusiasm to the boys who trained in the old gym and on the new hard courts. It was a popular sport at that time.

George Brown left the staff to move to a new post in Lima, Peru. He had been an energetic and popular teacher and he was replaced by Mike Brigden, a graduate of Borough Road College, an institution becoming well known for

producing top class sportsmen and women. Mike had no experience of the independent sector – and for that reason was a breath of fresh air! He immediately impressed as a hard worker, an exceptional games coach and a very professional teacher in the classroom. He and his wife, Lisa, were a newly married couple and they moved into the Monks Barn flat vacated by the Browns. The Brigdens became well-known faces in the Beacon community and threw themselves into all aspects of the school's life. Mike also played rugby for Chiltern 1<sup>st</sup> XV when not on team duty at the school and it was good to have someone who not only coached sport but was a keen and talented practitioner. Mike gave the school many years of service and it came as no surprise to see him move on to a deserved promotion as a local Primary School Head. He had a major and beneficial influence on many boys and despite being a tough character himself he had a sensitivity that allowed him to serve the needs of a wide variety of pupils.



*Mike Brigden with the U9 relay team Summer 1983*

In my spring newsletter I apologised for falling behind in our schedule of seeing each new set of parents for drinks in our house. I blamed Simon, our new arrival, who kept Sarah busy in the early evenings. We gradually caught up during the summer and continued with a practice that we found very useful in



helping us understand the personalities and ambitions of our parental body.

One innovation commented on was the introduction of new style reports now to be in a folder with an individual sheet for each subject. In the past, like many schools, we had followed the practice of one single sheet report with small boxes for each subject. Comments were brief – often one word – and if the last person to fill in his or her box made a mistake or spilt coffee over the report everyone had to start again! I hoped that the new style report would allow staff to make constructive comments and to analyse a pupil's performance more accurately. I talked about this at staff meetings and gradually reports became

WINTERBOURN	
REPORT	
Name <u>Mark David Jones</u> Age <u>6.11.10</u> mths Average Age <u>6.11.7</u> mths	
Form <u>5A13</u> Number in Form <u>12</u>	
NUMBER	Mark is able to do all the work well, but sometimes gets wrong answers because he reverses double numbers. His mental arithmetic is good, and he has really begun to master tables. His work is always neat and well-presented. MH.
ENGLISH	<p>Reading: Good. Mark reads slowly and steadily, and is beginning to put more expression into his voice when reading aloud. MH.</p> <p>Written work: Mark writes long, imaginative stories and accounts with great speed. He seems able to use a wide vocabulary and express himself well, but must concentrate more on accurate spelling and punctuation. MH.</p> <p>Drama: Mark has been less self-conscious, and speaks out well. MH.</p>
TOPIC WORK (including Nature, & History, Geography)	Good. Mark is keenly interested, and contributes very fully. MH.
ART	Mark enjoys Art and has done some careful good work this term. ST.
MUSIC	He has a very clear singing voice. AS.
PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES	He has improved considerably this term and has a much better eye for a ball. MH.
FORM TEACHER'S REPORT	Mark has gained confidence this term and found a freedom in his work and activity, while working purposefully. He contributes fully, and we shall miss him in Beans! MH.
PRINCIPAL'S REPORT	Mark has made very good progress this term. He is a pleasant and helpful class member, and is quite ready for form A next term. Ken Amittave.

more helpful to parents and pupils – and certainly more time consuming for staff and headmaster. I read every single sheet for each boy in each subject partly to inform myself but mainly to proofread. There were some members of staff at The Beacon and Winterbourn who, while they might have been inspiring teachers, were

Old and new report formats

not good at expressing their thoughts on paper. Spelling and punctuation lacked the computer aids of the modern era and usually there were 50 or 60 rewrites required by the headmaster. I tried to write a personal report of some length on each child with a few pointers to ways in which performance could be improved. Trying to follow the advice I gave to staff I always began with something positive before moving on to any criticism and I also tried to keep the touch light. Reports took up an enormous amount of time but I felt they were important for parents, pupils and staff.

In the previous term I had introduced a £1 voluntary levy on the fees to support the Beacon Bursary Fund and this had raised £224 which indicated an almost 100% support. The fund had been gradually declining as calls upon it exceeded income but this trend was now reversed. In the '70s we were less conscious of inertia selling and this extra on the fees did not seem to worry the parents. I was able to thank them via the newsletter for their contributions which continued for many years.

The annual Easter General Knowledge quiz – 'compulsory for the Beacon Upper School' – was set once again but it had changed a lot since I first inherited the practice from PLM. The tradition had been that each staff member set ten questions and children received no guidance on how to find answers. Now the emphasis was on asking questions that could be easily

answered by research in reference books and information was given on the quiz paper as to where answers might be found. Nowadays, Google would provide all the answers in a matter of a few minutes but in the '70s reference books were an essential tool to learning and the quiz, although not universally popular with boys or their parents, provided a means of training in information gathering.

### Summer term 1976

In the summer newsletter I celebrated the enthusiasm of the boys, noting that many arrived on the dot of 8am and had to be persuaded to leave at 8pm! I wrote 'In a moment of exhaustion, I thought I would provide you with proof that your money is being well spent; if a boy does a regular 11 hour day (and many do a steady 12 hours) with a further 4 hours on Saturday this adds up to a 59 hour week. At the current rate of fees this mean that your sons are being educated (and fed) for about 33p per hour – not bad value in 1976!'



*Jeremy Edwards*

Jeremy Edwards was announced as a new staff member to join in September. Fresh from St Luke's College, Exeter, he was another useful sportsman and an effective teacher of English who was mentored by Chris Copeman. Jeremy was an ambitious and talented character who went on to become a Prep School Head. He also had the added attraction as a new staff member of lowering the average age of the staff, something I had been working on since my arrival at The Beacon. Younger staff members tended to be well trained, they could usually help with games coaching and they were less expensive than the old stagers! By 1976 the age balance of the staff was much less weighted to the top end and there were some excellent, enthusiastic younger teachers to blend with the more experienced core of the staff common room.

Among the usual artistic and literary successes are two names that I remember very well for different reasons. David Honigman had national success with his writing, unsurprising since he was an immensely talented boy with a wonderfully quirky sense of humour. He won a scholarship to Eton and I think he was still at the school when he wrote a hugely successful book explaining the intricacies of Dungeons and Dragons – the new craze among fantasy game players. The other name that I recall very sadly is that of Raymond Van Geuns whose art work had just reached the final stage of judging in the Kelloggs national art competition. Raymond was Dutch and his parents had moved to



Buckinghamshire as a result of his father's job promotion. Tragically Raymond began to have problems with his legs that became worse and he was eventually diagnosed with bone cancer. He was taken into Stoke Mandeville hospital where I used to visit him and bring him work from school to keep him occupied. He was always cheerful with the most beguiling smile but did not survive many months after his diagnosis. He was an only child. Raymond's death was the first I had encountered among pupils but sadly it was not to be the last.

Cricket results followed an established tradition – the 1<sup>st</sup> X1 won one match out of 10. Athletics, however, had established itself as a leading sport and Beacon athletes were familiar and often successful entrants in District and National finals. Tennis too was becoming a strong sport for Beacon boys with our new courts being used to good advantage.

Further changes in reporting were advised with Winterbourn now moving to a pattern of alternating each term written and oral reports. Other innovations included the starting of a paperback bookshop to encourage reading – already noted as succeeding in its aim.

Plans for the summer holidays were announced with showers to replace the old footbath at the end of the changing room. The footbath had been a PLM project which enabled boys to sit around the edge of a large rectangular bath filled with lukewarm water that became increasingly muddy and brown as it was used to clean (more or less) mud caked knees. Although the footbath had been lovingly constructed it was dated and inadequate and so we planned to replace it with showers. This time it was a job for Mulkerns the plumbers and we paid for it out of Development Fund money which continued to be funded by covenants from the original Appeal.



*Newspaper collection*

One final matter of interest was the usual plea to parents for old newspapers. Every term for some years now we had been collecting old newspapers which were tied in bundles and stored in the

tractor shed, the barn on the Chesham side of the gym building. When the barn was full we would call the collector's lorry to pick it up and then start again. This provided a steady drip of funds into the Amenities Fund while encouraging the children to recycle a waste product.

<b>1976 – 77</b>
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### **Autumn term 1976**

My Autumn newsletter began with an extended piece of educational philosophy and an outline of the school's aims and how we intended to achieve them. I also asked parents to play their part in helping us – suggesting they should take a sensible and sensitive interest in their sons' work, back up the school's rules and regulations, try to encourage a positive attitude to school and lastly set an example in courtesy, consideration and manners which were 'caught not taught'. At the end of my diatribe I remarked 'It has taken me five years to get this pompous; I promise to leave it for another five before my next Olympian pronouncement'. I am not sure that I kept that promise!

On staff news I recorded that Jean Shirtcliff would take over from the long-serving Liz Parker in the junior form 'Camels' at Winterbourn and that Jane Butcher had become Jane Collinson after her wedding in Chesham Bois church.

I also mentioned the Jonathan Ballard Fund. Jonathan was an intelligent, cheerful and sporty Beacon pupil who had, like Raymond Van Geuns, been diagnosed with cancer and after a very short battle tragically died of the disease at the age of 9. Jonathan's parents donated a sum of money and we decided to start a fund in his memory with a view to buying books for a new library. Jonathan had been an avid reader and this seemed appropriate. Nearly £1000 was raised and with this sum of money we were able to fit out and equip the Jonathan Ballard library, the first room on the right hand side as one entered the main building (previously an inadequate form room). A wooden plaque was engraved on a base of pale oak and fixed to the door. (On a recent visit to the school I was pleased to see that this plaque is now sited in the new and much more lavish library). It was the first time that The Beacon had enjoyed a library and although not extensive it was a comfortable place to sit and read the ever-increasing stock of books. To lose two boys through cancer within a two year period was tragic indeed for the grieving parents and for the school community as a whole.

I introduced some new visiting music teachers who were engaged to help with a growing number of musicians. Expressing regret, I warned that termly charges for lessons would have to rise from £11 to £12.50.



*Mike Brigden*

On the sporting side a young soccer side had produced mixed results but I noted the successes of the gymnasts, a new group of enthusiasts coached in a 'Club' activity by Mike Brigden. As the years passed Beacon gymnasts were to earn an impressive reputation as outstanding in the Prep school world and beyond.

There were the usual evening lectures to broaden the boys' knowledge and one of these was given by Raymond Jones, a parent and local farmer, who explained to his audience the problems posed – and the results of – the summer drought which had been a part of an unusually hot summer.

All the usual achievements were recorded with national success for boys in art and writing. Pauline Milne had achieved the remarkable feat of having at least one exhibitor in the National Art competition since it had begun ten years previously. Tim Hearn and Mark Knights had their work published by the BBC in 'Poems from Living Language'.

No doubt many boys read with sadness that afternoon biscuits at 3.50pm were to be discontinued on the grounds that a substantial tea was provided at 4.40pm. The scrum for biscuits was always a source of trouble, some boys managing to exceed their ration while others who turned up late had none. Prefects used to organise the giving out of biscuits and depending which one was on duty the queue for allocation was usually either rowdy or totally shambolic. The easy option to avoid the daily squabbles was to abandon the practice and so I took it!



*Prefects and Sub Prefects were identified by badges sewn onto their sweaters*

### **Spring term 1977**

In the Spring I was able to tell parents that the new Winterbourn building would be ready for the new school year. Once again we employed Strongs to construct a Guildway building to match the four classrooms that had been so

successful. They were to be sited on a line with the new building to fill space between the Strong Block and our boundary with Oakway gardens with a paved path laid between the building and the tennis courts. This time there were to be four classrooms with a staff common room in the middle and loos at the end and the change from the small and inadequate classrooms of



*The lorry delivering the Guildway Building*

the old Oakway building was to be massive. (The Nursery remained on the ground floor of the old Winterbourn building but they too had extra space because the older children had been rehoused). The classrooms were to be carpeted, there were to be large store cupboards (although never large enough for some) and they were light and bright with a passage on the tennis court side where coats could be hung and boots stored. Perhaps even more than the four new classrooms at The Beacon this was an improvement to the facilities that made the biggest difference to teaching and learning. The Winterbourn staff had been constricted before but now they and their pupils



*Work started on the new Winterbourn building in May 1977*

could spread their wings. This time no appeal was needed since the school was making a good surplus and the debenture repayment – once an alarming debt – now appeared, in the light of inflation, to be a much more manageable sum. The Governors were happy to back the project.

On the rugby field the 1<sup>st</sup> XV had mixed results, but the Colts were unbeaten until their final match at York House when a last minute try gave victory to our hosts and spoiled the hope of an unbeaten season. The under 9s and 10s won their Mini rugby games at Caldicott and, for once, I could claim that there were signs of real improvement in Beacon rugby. Much of this was due to the influence and inspiration of Mike Brigden who had cajoled Hugh Osborne and Jeremy Edwards into adopting modern coaching methods.

A final paragraph was about bedtimes and I quoted the results of a survey of Prep boarding schools divulged at a recent local IAPS meeting. 'On average



most 8 year old boarders have to go up to bed at 7pm and they have lights out by 7.30pm. 12 and 13 year olds go upstairs by 9pm with lights out by 9.30pm at the latest. On Saturdays these times were advanced by half an hour'. I remarked 'That should cause a few arguments!'

### Summer term 1977



*Tony Whitaker*

The newsletter for the Summer term began with a tribute to Tony Whitaker, the head of Classics who had sadly died during the holidays. Tony had given 18 years of enthusiastic and loyal service to the school. He was usually the last staff member to leave the Common Room at the end of the school day and I commented on his attention to detail, his meticulous correcting of pupils' work and his effectiveness as a teacher with a variety of pupils from the very intelligent to those who found Latin difficult. Tony was of the old school, always courteous and respectful to colleagues and parents and full of bubbling encouragement for pupils. In particular, he was a vociferous supporter of the Colts teams that he coached and took more exercise running up and down the touchline than many of those on the pitch. He was a sad loss to the staff. Tony was replaced by David Foster who had been head of classics at nearby Westbrook Hay. David also was of the old school with methods typical of Latin teachers of bygone years. He was hard-working and keen to produce good results but it would be fair to say that those who found the subject difficult were not treated with the same sympathy or understanding that Tony had shown to them.



*David Foster*

There were high hopes for the cricket team because we had two cricketers who were outstanding. Justin Carter was a very capable bowler and a sound batsman and he captained the side with enthusiasm. David Harland was an excellent opening bat and while he was at the wicket the chance of victory was always a real possibility. Unfortunately narrow losses and too many draws resulted in a disappointing season but, as in the rugby, there were signs of improving standards. Athletics continued to be very strong with the team winning all its matches and five boys won their way to the Prep Schools National Finals. The tennis team won all its matches until they lost narrowly to Aldwickbury (who had a future world racquets champion playing for them).

Among those boys I congratulated for their achievements was Aaron Jones whose imaginative account of The Battle of Naseby earned him an invitation from the Sealed Knot Society to witness their reenactment of the battle.

My final note in the newsletter thanked parents for their help and I listed the ways in which we had received assistance. By this time I felt we had managed to involve parents significantly in the life of the school. They were no longer at arm's length but were welcome visitors and helpers, enjoying the social 'club' of Beacon activities but, happily, not interfering with the daily running of the school. There was no formal PTA but there were lots of ad hoc groups of enthusiasts who got together to ensure that dances and other social events were successful and enjoyable. As the years went by Sarah was no longer required to do the lion's share of all the work as parents became familiar with the workings of the kitchens and the sources for their requirements for social events. As young parents we really enjoyed our involvement in this side of the school's life and even though there were times when we sighed over yet another event, when the time came we rarely failed to enjoy the evenings.



*Work continues on the new Winterbourn building*



*The completed Pre-Prep alongside the Strong Building*

<b>1977- 78</b>
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**Autumn term 1977**

In my autumn newsletter I embarked on a long explanation about the introduction of 'take home' books. I explained that The Beacon's philosophy had always been that a boy should have finished with all his school commitments after a long day at school but I added that sometimes this was more hopeful than realistic. For a variety of reasons some pupils might not have finished their work at the end of the day and if this was the case a member of staff would record what still remained to be done in a small book which could be taken home and shown to parents who would check that the chore was completed before the next day. This seemed like a good idea and was to be experimental, but it was soon phased out because those who were required to use the books usually managed either to 'lose' them or they failed to show their parents the information that had been written in the book by a member of staff. Sometimes, and probably quite reasonably, parents felt their children had experienced a day that was long enough without extending it further by working at home. The experiment quietly petered out.

A more successful experiment was the school shop. Originally set up as a sale held once each holidays it had proved popular with parents and in September 1977 it moved to a shop open from 8.30 to 9am each Wednesday morning in term time, and from 2 to 3pm each Wednesday of the holidays. This was staffed by Sarah, assisted by Mollie Wilkie and various parents when the need arose.

In staff changes I recorded that Greville Rimbault was leaving at the end of term to become Headmaster of Moyles Court School and was to be replaced by John Cross as Head of French. I was delighted to appoint John, a teacher from Repton, who was young, enthusiastic, an excellent speaker and teacher of French and, as a bonus, a soccer player who had played as a trialist for the Public Schools representative team. French ceased to be a problem subject and such was John's effectiveness that it was no surprise when later he became a Prep school Head in Bristol. Equally, I was not surprised to see him return to The Beacon as Headmaster in the mid '80s, restoring the school on an even keel after the hiatus caused by my immediate successor. John and Carol Cross lived with their family in Beech Barn South and became valuable members of the school community.



*Greville Rimbault*





*John Hopkins*

We were also joined by John Hopkins who took on one of the junior forms and helped Pauline Milne with art teaching (nearing retirement Pauline wanted to do less). John was another good sportsman and played rugby for Chiltern 1<sup>st</sup> XV, joining Mike Brigden as a team member. John was a personable young man, keen to do a good job but more encouraging than demanding as a teacher!

The efforts to recruit younger staff were bringing improved results in sport. The soccer 1<sup>st</sup> XI won 8 out of 10 matches and the Colts team had only two narrow defeats to tarnish their record.

Once again there were CE candidates in the Autumn with Justin Carter (a talented and enthusiastic sportsman) going to Ampelforth, Charles Hodder (a Gold Medallist hurdler at the IAPS Championship) moving to Berkhamsted, Charles Tincknell to Bradfield, Jonathan Vaile to Bryanston and Simon Walker (whose father, a partner of ex-Chairman D'Arcy Biss at Ashurst, Morris, Crisp had joined the Governors) passing to Radley. We continued to be proud of our academic success to a wide variety of schools and boarding schools continued to dominate parental choices. At this time Radley, under the benign and impressive Dennis Silk, was probably the most popular senior school for Beacon boys.



*Colours were awarded for all major sports*

### **Spring term 1978**

In the new year of 1978 I celebrated the variety and number of 'club' activities available for the boys. Among the most popular were Greek Dancing with Chris Copeman, History Modelling with Donald Gillies-Reyburn and French folk song singing with John Cross. The staff members, all of whom were expected to take one activity a week, were busy but the boys benefited greatly from the range of extra-curricular pastimes on offer.

Mike Sandercock, our genial and long serving Geography teacher, returned after an absence while his heart problems were treated, and Hew Motion, who had helped out while Mike was away, stayed on to help with Classics and French. Hew had been a Headmaster in Scotland but having fallen out with his



Governors had joined The Beacon staff. He and his family lived in Oakway and Hew could be summarised as one of our more unpredictable staff members! Verbal explosions from his classroom were frequent. Also joining the staff as a groundsman/cricket professional was Mike Herring who had recently left the Sussex County staff. This was my attempt to produce a better, more consistent cricket square (Jack Herriot simply lacked the available time to tend it as carefully as was needed) and also it was intended to improve the parlous state of Beacon cricket. Mike was not as successful as I had hoped in either area and he was not with us for long.



*Hew Motion*

I referred to numbers in the newsletter and noted that the Beacon now had 187 boys and there were in total 285 boys across the three departments (including Winterbourn and the Nursery). There had been a steady growth since 1972, made possible by the new classrooms that had been built.

In one paragraph of the newsletter I told parents that we would still be expecting boys at school on the newly created May Day Bank Holiday. It seemed ridiculous that boys, having just had four weeks holiday, should have a day off just one week into the new term. With heavy irony I wrote that we would be 'adhering to the spirit of the day by having maypole dancing instead of cricket and singing the Red Flag in music lessons'. I remember one parent responding with a splenetic letter saying that he thought my attitude was outrageous. At first I thought he was protesting that parents were unable to share the Bank Holiday with their sons but as I read on I realised that he had taken my comments about maypole dancing and Red Flag singing seriously! I had to compose a careful letter of explanation to calm his fears.

It was rare indeed for a Beacon boy to achieve a music scholarship but Piers Ricketts (who was tutored in music outside the school) won an award to Eton. Piers also sat an academic scholarship to the same school but was not as successful as he was in his music although he did himself great credit with highly respectable papers.

I flagged another of our popular Disco Dances to be held in May but pointed out that we had been surprised by the numbers attending the last disco in the previous year. 200 tickets had been sold but 240 parents turned up! As usual I appealed for parental help in running the event and we were never short of volunteers.

My final plea in the Easter newsletter was for boys to carry combs! ‘Combs are necessities for boys, not just for straightening hair but also for playing as musical instruments, for studying the properties of static electricity and for sundry devious practices known only to schoolboys. Please equip your son with a comb and in return we shall do our best to ensure that he uses it for the correct purpose.’

### Summer term 1978



*Work in progress on the Jones Building*

Re-reading my Summer newsletter I was intrigued by the changing tone of my writing. From being merely a purveyor of news and information in my early years now, six years in, I certainly sound more confident and more certain about the school's direction of travel. Having extolled the virtues

of our two Guildway buildings – the Strong Block and the new Pre-prep building – I explain to parents that we were planning a new four classroom block to run alongside the old Stovin-Bradford wing which had been added in PLM's time. As I reasoned in my explanation, the old building, being a multi-purpose structure, was, like many such designs, not very successful in fulfilling any of its functions as Assembly Hall, classrooms and stage/theatre. The classrooms were cold, uninsulated and not soundproof. The folding doors that separated the rooms were reaching the end of their useful life and the stage was small and restrictive. By adding the new Guildway block we could create another covered way to ensure access to the Hall and the new classrooms was dry, the tiny semi-circular Art room could be extended by incorporating the classroom next door and four new purpose built classrooms would replace those lost by leaving the old building to serve solely as an Assembly Hall. By this time there was no need for an Appeal since by building up a surplus over

the years we were now able to finance such a project – how times had changed! Although the new building would encroach onto the green space of the back field there would remain enough space for Colts cricket and by now PLM had perfected cunning window guards which would protect glass in all the classrooms that might be in danger from big hits by cricketers. With 305 pupils now in the combined schools the extra space would be invaluable – although I reassured parents that there was no intention to increase numbers in the school. This was largely because there was now a clear pattern and structure of forms within the school.



*Kris Rose with Simon - summer 1976*

I gave early warning that my invaluable secretary, Kristine Rose would be leaving in due course although not for a couple of terms while her fiancé finished building works at a large and decrepit house in Somerset. Fortunately for me the move never happened and Kristine was to stay with me until eventually I left before she did.

I was able to celebrate a much better cricket season, largely because of the runs made by David Harland who gave an unfamiliar stability to Beacon batting. I also noted that our Athletics squad was now undefeated over a three year period and that 12 Beacon athletes had won their way to the IAPS National Championships. The tennis team had lost only one match and the first pair of David Harland and John Threshie had won all their matches. In other competitions the school had won a certificate from WH Smith for the consistent excellence of the literary output, two boys had their work read on Schools Radio and Pauline Milne had maintained her extraordinary record of having Beacon art work selected for the London exhibition of the best entries in the annual Kelloggs Art Competition – Mark Watson-Gandy and Jonathan Rugg being the two exhibitors on this occasion. I paid tribute to Pauline Milne and Chris Copeman for their part in helping the boys to achieve these successes. Ensuring



*Sports Day 1978*



submission of entries was a time-consuming business but both staff members were prepared to give this time knowing that it gave the boys a goal and allowed them to feel confident in developing their artistic and literary talents. Naturally I was delighted because I was able to celebrate the success as an indication of the quality on offer at the school.

I was also able to celebrate the range of visits and expeditions that the boys had enjoyed, varying from field trips in Devon to trips to the local Police station – among many others. We had travelled a long way from the solitary trip to Lords that had in the past been the only outside activity!



*Summer holiday 1978 HDJ with Simon, Paul and Mark*

**1978 - 79**

### **Autumn term 1978**



*PDJ first day at The Beacon*

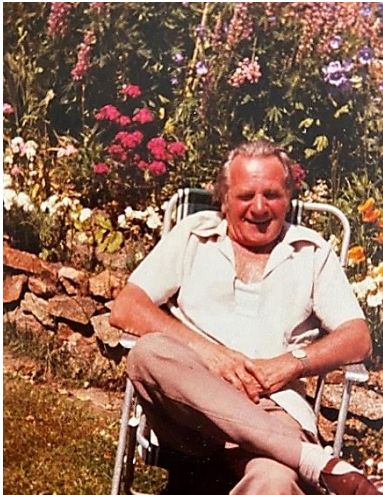
In what had become a standard pattern of introduction, I began my autumn newsletter by offering parents yet more advice. This particular diatribe – about exposing children to culture through, among other things, theatre and museum trips – remains timeless and seems as relevant now in the social media age as it was then. I noted how easy it was to become addicted to a screen (in this case television) and how this resulted in mental laziness and undemanding entertainment. I suggested parents should be more proactive in discussing world and news events and should ensure a balanced diet of culture, mixing the popular with the more adventurous. I doubt whether I would have written such advice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because it would have provoked a backlash from some and argument from many but in 1978 I got away with it.



On the staff side I noted the departure of Jill Gasking who had been at Winterbourn for three years and the arrival of Sarah Huggins (a name I always thought appropriate for a teacher of very young children!). Sarah was very soon to become a popular teacher among boys, staff and parents; she proved herself to be a hard worker with lots of good ideas – another useful addition to the staff.



*Sarah Huggins*



*Jack Herriott on holiday in Jersey in 1978*

I also observed that Jack Herriott, groundsman and odd job man, had notched up 25 years' service at the school. He was, as I wrote, 'an unsung hero' of the school and was integral to its success. PLM always said of him that Jack's DIY skills were confined to a six inch nail and a hammer yet this was an affectionate remark about the Beacon's most loyal, cheerful and hard working staff member. I listed many of the jobs Jack had undertaken over the years and they amounted to a chronicle of the school's building and ground development – Jack had seen and done it all.

The new building – the four classrooms running parallel to the Hall – was coming on well, on schedule to open in January, and we had eventually decided to use a local builder, Alan Jones, who specialised in Guildways. By this time Strongs of Reading, who had built the original block, were too busy to meet our time frame so Alan Jones became the contractor. An affable and cheerful character with a practical mind he did a good job for us despite being slightly distracted by a passing interest in Kristine Rose! The two ended up good friends, both with a keen interest in sailing. With stunning originality, I decided that having called our first Guildway the Strong Block, after the builders, the new block would be called the Jones Building.



*Back row: Jeremy Edwards, John Cross, Nick Webb, HDJ, Fletcher Nicholson. Front row: John Hopkins, Hew Motion, Mr Charlton and Geoffrey Farrer-Brown all played in the Fathers v Sons match*

After the usual list of CE successes (three candidates) and literary and artistic triumphs I finished with thanks to those parents who had helped Sarah with the chore of washing team shirts after matches. Up to this point team shirts (introduced two or three years previously to smarten up representative sides) had always been washed every Wednesday and Saturday evening by Sarah. Our home domestic washing machine had already given up under the strain and a new machine was threatening to go the same way so parental help and a division of labour was much appreciated. Perhaps few Heads' wives nowadays would expect their weekends to be filled by washing and drying 50 to 60 heavy rugby shirts but Sarah did this uncomplainingly despite the time and effort that it took.

### Spring term 1979

In my first newsletter of the year I celebrated the fact that we were now in occupation of our new building. The first of the classrooms was designated as a Latin room, the next was for History, the adjoining one for Geography and the last at the end was to be a French room. This now ensured that all academic subjects had their own subject base, something I



*Children gathered in front of the completed Jones Building*

had been working towards since starting at The Beacon. I was conscious that Science was still confined to its old inadequate home in a lab designed and built by PLM for a different age and style of science teaching – but it would have to do for now! In miserable weather during the term we had been able to use the old Hall as an extra gym and it had been a boon, as had been the extra space in the Art Room, now doubled in size. Once again we had been able to put up a building without interfering in the day to day life of the school and the back field had been preserved as grass space still usable at break times and for Colts cricket.

On the academic front, there was nothing much to report except that Piers Ricketts, having won an Eton music scholarship the year before, added an academic award at Harrow to his roll of honour.

As was often the case with our muddy pitches, games had suffered badly because of the weather but a young 1<sup>st</sup> XV showed promise. The star player

was Charlie Foster, a speedy runner and brave tackler who was the best Beacon rugby player we ever sent to a soccer school! He went to Malvern with his friend Mark Farrer-Brown, also an athlete who had a distinguished sporting career at the school. James and Mark Farrer-Brown were a pair of brothers who were pivotal to Beacon teams of this era and Mark was also outstanding at cross country and distance running.

In my advice to parents I observed that Radley had become the most popular choice for Beacon parents but that if they were to be successful in securing a place there, their sons needed to be registered while they were still at Winterbourn – so at least five years before entry date. Dennis Silk, Radley’s charismatic and impressive headmaster, had done a wonderful job in turning the school’s fortunes around.

Yet another Beacon dance was advertised well in advance with double tickets on sale for £7, including the meal. ‘In order to try to avoid cliques or block booking we shall limit each pair of parents to two double tickets as a maximum’. These tickets had become much sought after and Beacon dances were now established not only as popular social events but also useful fund raisers. This particular dance would be raising funds for stage curtains since now that the Hall was primarily used for assemblies and plays, front of stage curtains were desirable and practical additions and there was a need to replace the ancient patchwork curtains that had been lovingly made by Claudia Masters and a group of parents more than 20 years before. It did not take long to raise the funds and a pair of red velvet curtains soon appeared at the front of the stage, transforming the look of ‘the theatre’ and allowing scene changes in rather more privacy than before!

### Summer term 1979

I remember this particular term with great pleasure. The Governors had given the go ahead for the next stage of development – a heated outdoor swimming pool and a pavilion on Willsfield. Both of these had figured in PLM’s original development plan but I



*Work starts on building the swimming pool*



had felt that classrooms were a greater priority before we embarked on providing the 'extras'. Having seen an appeal in action when first we raised funds for the classrooms I felt we could easily do the same job ourselves without the middle man. By now I was seven years into my headship, I knew the parents and was conscious of the goodwill that existed, so asking for Covenants to fund a popular project held no fears. However, even I was surprised by the speed with which money rolled in! We raised £45,000 in the first 8 weeks of the appeal and the target figure of £50,000 was achieved without difficulty by the end of term. A number of parents wrote very nice letters when submitting their 7-year covenants and many observed that they were delighted to be spared a professional fund raiser. We created a poster with a thermometer recording the amount raised and this was displayed in the quadrangle for all to see as they arrived at the school. Parents were as excited as I was at the speed with which the 'thermometer' heated up! Thus, in my end of term newsletter I was able to tell the parents that both the planned facilities would be built.

The swimming pool was to be heated by a gas boiler housed in the tractor shed but we hoped that solar panels erected on the south side of the pool would mean that we only had to resort to the gas heating occasionally. Sadly, the solar heating never worked very satisfactorily and this early example of a new technology was less effective than we had hoped. The pool was constructed by Penguin



*The completed swimming pool*

Pools and we surrounded it attractively with a wooden fence, ensuring that we allowed plenty of space at the Oakway end to assemble teams for galas. We were delighted by the result. I remember showing it off proudly to John and Julia Adey, parents of 3 boys in the school, who had made a generous contribution to the fund and while admiring the solar panels Julia took a step backwards and was, I think, the first parent to use the pool! She was remarkably relaxed about her unplanned dip and saw the funny side of it. In fact, her 'swim' was illegal because in obtaining planning permission for the pool we had to agree that the pool would be for pupil use only. Chiltern



Planners always seemed to want restrictions and we had many battles with them over the years. The siting of the pavilion was also a bone of contention but eventually we were able to build it in an appropriate place. The structure, like the tennis courts, was an En-Tout-Cas Design and at last we were able to store cricket kit at Willsfield as well as groundman's tools. PLM created shutters to protect the windows from being broken by would-be thieves and he also built in storage bins for equipment. The building was small but functional and made summer term cricket at Willsfield a much pleasanter experience!

Leaving the staff was Ann Isaac who had been at the school since I started. She was off to marry a former teacher of mine at Clifton, Bob Overton. Ann had been an excellent Form teacher at The Beacon and had also been a key figure in developing the musical life of the school. I noted that while she had been at the school The Beacon Orchestra had been born and the number of boys learning musical instruments had quadrupled. She had also been the driving force on the musical side for our annual Carol Services at St Mary's, Chesham. These services were a high point of the year because they were candlelit and very atmospheric. We agreed to put the candles up in the church every year because they were needed for the Civic Service which closely followed the school's carolling. I remember many of the readers with great pride; they had to project their voices without microphones and almost every year the readings, which were delivered by a boy from each year group, were audible and confidently spoken. Perhaps the most atmospheric service featured John Cross playing his guitar while the choir sang Silent Night in the original German. It was a magical moment in the candlelit church!



*John Cross*

The cricketers reached the start of July without a defeat – a remarkable feat for a Beacon cricket 1<sup>st</sup> XI. David Nicholson won a Gold Medal in the Long Jump at the National Prep Schools Championship and the Athletics squad, very well coached by Nick Webb and Mike Brigden, continued to be very successful despite suffering their first defeat in four years at the hands of Beechwood Park.

As had now become familiar, four artists had their work chosen for the National Art Competition and eight boys had their literary works broadcast by the BBC,

Sadly, the list of Common Entrance candidates and scholars was always published in a separate circular to parents and these records were destroyed but I remember that once again we had 100% success at CE to a wide variety of schools.

One of the vintage terms!

<b>1979 - 80</b>
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### **Autumn term 1979**

I was pontificating again in my newsletter at the end of the calendar year. I considered Beacon boys and their virtues and vices and after a general assessment wrote about three aspects of their lives – table manners, materialistic preoccupation, offhandedness. Amazingly there were no letters of outrage that followed!

I was able to report that the swimming pool had been finished and was ready for use next year but we were still grappling with the planners about the siting of the pavilion. The appeal, aimed at raising £50,000, had ended up with a total of £60,021. I remarked ‘I know the raising of funds has meant a lot of hard work for many people but it has also been great fun and it has united parents in a common effort which has been particularly successful’.

Eleven boys had sat their Common Entrance in the Autumn term and had gone variously to Berkamsted, Merchant Taylors, Malvern, Shrewsbury, Stowe and Wellington. We were losing some formidable athletes including Mark Farrer-Brown, an all-rounder but an outstanding middle distance runner, Tim Hall, a sprinter and hurdler who like Charles Hodder before him had won a medal at the Prep Schools Nationals, Daniel Silver, an excellent rugby player and Head Boy, and David Nicholson, another all-rounder who had been a stalwart member of many successful teams.

In staff changes I noted that John Hopkins was returning to his native Rhodesia ‘at a difficult time for his country’. Andrew Dean was also leaving after only one term; he was a remarkable character who used to stand on his head in the corner of his classroom as a form of meditation. The boys never knew quite what to make of him – neither did I.



Vi Toynton joined the staff. Vi had been a Primary School Deputy Head and she soon became a real character in the staff room and an excellent teacher of one of the First forms.

The soccer teams performed reasonably well, winning seven of their ten matches, and I noted that the Gym Display by our talented gymnasts had delighted parents, that basketball players had been impressive and only swimming lagged behind as a less successful sport – but no doubt the new pool would change that!

As usual the Clothes Shop (still run by Sarah) advertised its weekly opening times during the holidays and the information was given that a new, machine washable maroon blazer would now be stocked. No one remembered the grey suits!

### **Spring term 1980**

There was little to report in my Easter newsletter except to celebrate the success of the gymnasts who had won the Southern Region Schools competition and thus earned their way into the National Schools Final. The gymnasts had now bounced out of the narrower Prep school world and were competing against all UK schools. Mike Brigden and Andrew Adamson had Junior and Senior squads who could hold their own against the best in the UK – a remarkable achievement in just a few years of training.

In my innocence I promoted Jimmy Savile's appeal for funds to rebuild Stoke Mandeville hospital. Two parents, Annie White and Pam Cohn, were holding coffee mornings to help the cause. In retrospect it was unfortunate that such a good cause was later tarnished by the flawed character fronting it.

I also noted that Mike Herring, cricket coach and groundsman, was leaving to take up a similar post at Berkhamsted School. This was not a particularly hard blow because Mike had not really fitted in to the workforce at The Beacon. He was the only employee who failed to establish a rapport with Jack Herriott and Jack thought he was lazy and didn't pull his weight – a rare occurrence in any Beacon staff member!

### **Summer term 1980**

I do recall that this was a time of considerable frustration. The planners were being very uncooperative about the siting of the pavilion, perhaps because I had unwisely submitted plans for constructing two squash courts with changing rooms before the pavilion plans had been approved. There were mutterings from the planners about 'over development of the site' and neighbours were vociferous in their objections to both schemes. In my summer newsletter I commented that Press coverage had been one sided and critical and I tried to set the record straight. Willsfield had as its boundary on the Oakway side a tall hedge which had remained as a barrier ever since I had been at the school; it effectively blocked the playing field from view and would have completely hidden the planned new structure. However, as soon as we submitted our planning application an Oakway resident cut the hedge down to knee height, summoned members of the planning committee to a site visit and then claimed that the new pavilion would ruin his outlook! Similarly, residents the other side of Oakway who had already carped about the swimming pool were up in arms about the prospect of squash courts at the end of the pool near their boundary. We had also been exploring the possibility of turning one of the Oakway properties into a small boarding house for 'convenience boarding' – a new concept at a time when traditional boarding was sacrosanct and many boarding school Heads were terrified of allowing any flexibility. These investigations further upset locals. In the case of both planning applications the professional officers themselves were happy to accept our proposals but the planning committee had clearly been nobbled by the local objectors and despite recommendations for approval they demurred. Eventually I decided to sacrifice the squash court scheme in the hope of achieving success with the pavilion and this was indeed the result. Having lived in relative peace with our Oakway neighbours for many years it was a new and unwelcome experience to find them hostile and antagonistic. Eventually we were granted permission for the pavilion, and we decided to gain extra changing space for the boys by expanding the existing changing room, adding



an extension to the original barn that now housed an increasing number of boys in the school (over 300 in total).



*Mike Sandercock*

On the staff side Mike Sandercock retired after 18 years' service. He was the last survivor of the 'old guard' who had been staff members when I joined the school. An enthusiastic amateur with no formal training he had taught Geography and a number of other subjects, but he had recently suffered health problems and his style of teaching seemed increasingly dated at a time of rapid change in methods and outlook. Mike had been a very loyal servant, but his batteries had been running down for some time.

Also leaving was Hew Motion who left following his appointment as Headmaster of Becketts School at Little Hampden Manor. Hew had been a slightly controversial member of staff whose volcanic eruptions in the

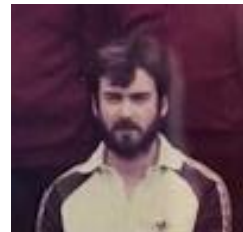


*Mike Robbins*

classroom were not what I – or indeed the boys – were used to; we parted on good terms but with some relief on my part.

Joining us were Michael Robbins, a very competent teacher of History, and Andrew Adamson who had already done a stint at The Beacon when undertaking teaching practice. Quite early on in my tenure I had forged some useful links with teacher training colleges with a view to

possible recruitment and as an attempt to show some of the older staff members that new teaching techniques were possible. Lesson planning and continuous assessment were foreign to most of the old guard, but student teachers were brought up on such things. Andrew Adamson formed an immediate partnership with Mike Brigden and together they were effective coaches of many sports but especially gymnastics, ensuring that Beacon gymnasts became well known nationally for their prowess.



*Andrew Adamson*

Another staff success was in Art where I noted that Pauline Milne had now had fifteen consecutive years with Beacon boys being represented in the National Children's Art competition – it must have been a unique record and underlined the remarkable nature of Pauline's teaching. When asked for the secret of her success she would simply reply, 'I don't really do anything'.

On the sporting side cricket had reverted to its usual pattern of inconsistency but I was able to celebrate the busy use of the swimming pool, now a facility



*Denis Compton with the Colts cricket team in 1980*

much enjoyed by most of the boys. I claimed that the solar panels were working well but I am not certain the claim was entirely accurate.

If solar panels were an example of new technology so too was computing although I think no one at the school then realised what an impact was about to be felt. However, I was at least aware that something important was afoot and I was able to advertise a lecture to be given in October by Martin Rogers, Headmaster of Malvern

College. He was Chairman of an Independent School committee researching the effect of micro-processors on education and for many this was the first acknowledgement that a major change was on its way. By this time I was serving on the IAPS Training Committee (nowadays designated as the Education Committee) which kept me very much in touch with developments in education and, like PLM who had also served on the committee in earlier times, I was able to put the ideas of others to good use at The Beacon and keep teachers and parents informed about modern educational developments.

Big news, at least for me, was the announcement I made about the resignation of D'Arcy Biss as Chairman of the Governors. He had been an immense support to me and although he rarely appeared at school except to chair Governors' Meetings, he had his finger on the pulse and in the first few shaky years of the Beacon Educational Trust (and at a time of national recession and hyperinflation) he piloted the school with skill and confidence. Once he was certain of the stability of our financial base he gave every encouragement to development and investment in buildings and facilities. Short in stature and nearly as broad as he was tall, he used to appear at school in his tiny Volkswagen Sirocco. His emergence from behind the wheel was a long and difficult process made no easier by his holding a large cigar in one hand; quite frequently the stub of his cigar would end up in the footwell where he was happy to leave it. Our sitting room in Bois Farm hosted the Governors' meetings and for several days afterwards the rich smell of Havana would linger. Without his leadership of the Board and his wise guidance of a new and

inexperienced headmaster The Beacon's rate of development and success could have been very different and the school owes him a great debt.

Many headmasters have difficulty with their Governors and Chairmen but I was particularly fortunate to have a wonderfully supportive – and useful – Board. They were exactly the critical friends that a Head would want but of course the Chairman was a crucial figure in determining direction and ethos. If I had been lucky to have D'Arcy Biss as my first Chairman I was just as fortunate to have Michael Hatfield as my second. The Hatfields had sent both their sons – Adam and Sam – to The Beacon and both boys had prospered before moving on to Radley. Adam, a very useful rugby player, had gone via CE and Sam, a very conscientious and effective Head Boy, had followed via the scholarship exam. I had known the Hatfields as involved and helpful parents of their sons and was delighted when Michael agreed to take on the Chairmanship. As Managing Director of Guinness he was a well-known and successful figure in the corporate world and he proved to be an effective and inspirational Chairman. He would frequently appear at the school for special occasions (often accompanied by his wife Pam), making himself accessible to parents, and he thought carefully about the academic side of the school as well as the financial side. In the nicest possible way he challenged my ideas but, once convinced by argument, he was energetic and effective in making sure developments were carried through. He had an easy charm which concealed a very sharp mind and I always enjoyed his company and his skillful chairing of meetings.

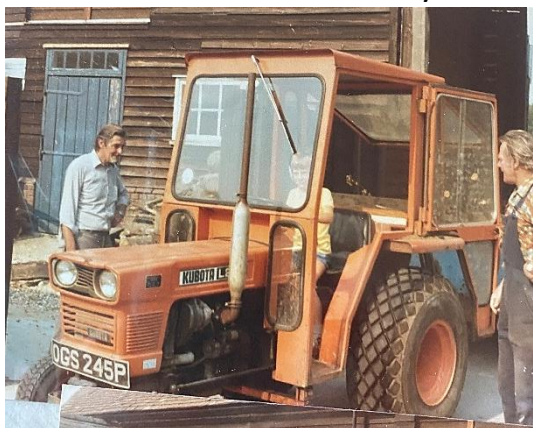
<b>1980 – 81</b>
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### **Autumn term 1980**

In the Autumn term I began my newsletter by celebrating the contribution to the school of the long-serving support staff who numbered 21 by this time and included kitchen staff, cleaners, gardeners and groundsmen. This was prompted by the death of Mollie Wilkie who had lived in Beech Barn North and had been a wonderfully conscientious and reliable Housekeeper for many years. Her prime job was as bookkeeper, a job she did with enormous care and accuracy. She checked bills, prepared cheques for signing and once a week I would go to her office to do what I was told! I explained to her any expenditure of which she was unaware and I duly signed staff salary cheques which were always correct and carefully prepared for my signature. She was

brisk and efficient with the school finances, but she also did myriad other jobs, helping with the serving of teas, flower arranging for big occasions, helping Sarah with provision of staff suppers for resident teachers and doing chores and errands for staff who had forgotten to order vital supplies. Her life outside school was centered on golf and she was a single figure handicapper who was much respected in the local area. It was fitting that her very sudden death should occur as she was playing in her Club Final at Whiteleaf, her golf club, but it came as an enormous shock to us. Mollie was succeeded in due course first by Kay Mason and then by Elizabeth Kerry, both of whom were very capable bookkeepers but they were never as involved in school life as Mollie had been.

I celebrated the work of our two septuagenarian gardeners, Phil Haselgrove and Len Martin, both hard workers and as one staff member pompously observed, 'nature's gentlemen'. Jack Herriot, our groundsman, had notched up 26 years of continuous service and he was now assisted by Ken Smith who worked well with Jack. They did far more than simply mow the grass and were



*Jack and Ken worked well together. The new Kubota tractor had replaced the old Ferguson.*

expert at unblocking drains and digging foundations for building works. It was part of my job to organise all the support staff but this was remarkably easy because unless there was a specific new project to undertake they knew what needed to be done and did it cheerfully and efficiently. I would try to visit their morning tea breaks most days and for five or ten minutes I would enjoy banter with Chris Hanchant and Gwen Atkins, our inseparable cleaners

who kept the men in order and ensured that Len had enough butter for his toast – a demanding task since he liked his toast to be drenched in butter! The Old Kitchen in the basement was usually as warm as the camaraderie of all these staff members who were friends with one another and tolerant of everything I may have asked them to do. Chris would always say when asked to take on anything extra, 'Of course I'll do it as long as I get my gold watch'.

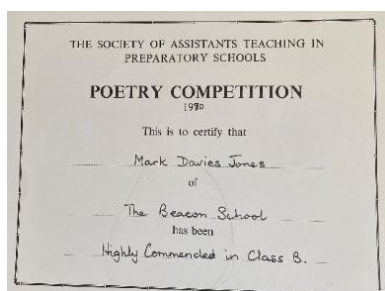
I pointed out that in times of crisis I knew that everyone would rally round and help; The Beacon really was a family school with a culture of mutual reliance. After Mollie Wilkie's death the bookkeeping was done for an emergency period by Kris Rose, my secretary, by my wife Sarah, and by Claud Masters, my mother-in-law. The bookkeeping was a job Claud had done before and she



took the major part in ensuring that school finances were properly supervised and that staff were paid. It was a difficult time but our accountants were duly impressed when they came to scrutinise the accounts and congratulated the 'amateurs' who were as meticulous as Mollie Wilkie had been.

During the term we had added a gym storeroom at the back of the barn that was used as a gymnasium. Now that gymnastics were so popular we needed space to store mats and the new high jump landing cushion we had recently purchased. PLM and his elder son, Jonathan, built the gym storeroom after Jack and Ken had dug the foundations for it. A family school indeed!

There were some staff changes. Sarah Stoddart who had done a good job with the music left to teach older children at a comprehensive school near Bath while her duties were taken on by Rosemary Wilson. We were also joined by ex-parent Pam Pegley whose son Nick had been an excellent Head Prefect in his time at the school.



Once again Beacon boys had excelled in the National Poetry competition and two talented Beacon boys, Caspian Owen and Andrew Lykiardopoulos received their prizes from the Poet Laureate. A number of boys were also able to visit the BBC with Chris Copeman to record their work for the 'Living Language' programme. They were commended by the producer for their 'professional approach and clear diction'.

I announced two changes to Beacon routine. The first was ensuring that our keen sportsmen had one afternoon each week when they occupied themselves with a hobby activity other than sport. This was an attempt to broaden the interests of those whose sole interest was the game of the season. Also, I finally ditched the credit/debit half day – much to the annoyance of some staff members. Every term those who failed to earn their half day were entirely predictable and it was the same names every term which suggested the sanction was not having the desired effect! Now parents were to be informed of their sons' credit/debit balance at half term and the end of term and they could interpret their own progeny's performance against a quoted form average (it was necessary to quote a form rather than a school average because the younger boys always earned far more credits than the older

pupils). I felt this might be more informative and it certainly removed a bone of contention for some parents.

I finished the newsletter by letting parents know that I was always available for a chat between 8 – 8.40am Monday to Saturday but if they wanted a more formal appointment they should telephone Kris Rose to organise a time. My Saturday mornings usually involved three hour-long appointments with prospective parents followed by one slot for current parents who may have wished to talk about school choices or other matters. I also saw prospective parents at odd times during the week when I was free but I made a rule that I would only see those to whose son we could offer a place, otherwise my entire week would have been filled with showing hopeful parents around the school. There was a waiting list for entry for future terms but we usually closed it at 7 or 8 names and most of those on our waiting lists never received an offer of a place; if a boy was not registered before he was six months old there was little chance of his arriving at the Beacon.

### **Spring term 1981**

In my newsletter, after my customary homily (this time about parental pressure and the dangers of unrealistic expectations), I noted that Jane Collinson was leaving to have a baby, and that she would be replaced by Maureen Carter. Jane had joined the Winterbourn staff in 1975 as Jane Butcher and became form mistress of Crocodiles. Artistic and efficient, she had been an excellent teacher of the young Winterbourn boys and she had been popular with her colleagues and with the boys that she taught. She had been one of the youngest members of staff when she joined us and had tactfully contributed a fund of new ideas; as a newly trained teacher her methods had been an eye opener for the older and long established teachers and Winterbourn had evolved under the leadership of Jean Armitage (now Jean Lefroy) from very traditional teaching into a happy blend of the modern and the best of the traditional approach. The new building had allowed more scope for teachers and pupils and it was a place that I could take new parents with a certainty that I would be showing off a centre of excellence.



*Jean Lefroy*

In the course of the preceding few months we had added an extension to the Changing Room which relieved pressure of overcrowding in the old barn. The new extension constructed on the west side of the old building, mirrored the gym storeroom in style but was much larger, giving boys much more elbow room. We also replaced the old pegs with wire cage lockers on the principle that even if boys never hung up their games kit it would at least be contained within the locker space. Although clothes still went missing the new arrangements were a great improvement on the old and one of the last remaining blackspots in our facilities had been removed.

Scholarship exams to senior schools were held in four batches in this era and senior schools opted for either a slot in the two available sets of dates in the Easter term or one of the two dates set aside in the summer term. Public schools set their own individual papers which varied widely in difficulty and style so preparing boys for scholarships was something of an art form. Continuation scholarships had just been pioneered by Oundle, a crafty way of securing talent at age 11, so that a boy was committed to his senior school before the 13 plus scholarships took place. Andrew Mayhew won one of these Oundle scholarships while Edward Webb won a 13+ scholarship to Malvern



*March 1981 The U10 Mini Rugby team was unbeaten*

and Christopher Gill earned an Exhibition to the same school. Dominic Ricketts followed his brother's example by winning a music scholarship; Piers had achieved the feat at Eton while Dominic did it at Harrow.

If the academic side continued to be very secure Beacon sport had developed really well under its keen young coaches. Rugby results were very respectable while the gymnasts, just beginning to make their mark nationally, won the Presentation Plate as the best school which had not been a previous winner of the IAPS competition. Squash players too were

improving their standard and for the first time we had a seeded player (Marc Sabido) in the IAPS Finals.

I published a thank you from the Moir family for the support they had received after their son, Richard (known as Ricky) had sustained an injury during a 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby match on Willsfield. I remember this with great clarity because Ricky,

who was a brave and useful centre three quarter, dislocated his hip when falling awkwardly in a tackle. It was immediately obvious that he was in great pain and that the injury was serious and he was transported by ambulance from the field to Wycombe Hospital where he spent several weeks with his leg in traction. Many team members' parents went to see Ricky in hospital and I made frequent trips taking him work to do – Ricky was probably happier to see most of his other visitors! The hospital organised some schooling for him but this was very basic and he needed to be kept on course for Common Entrance so the Moirs were grateful that Beacon staff kept sending and marking work. Ricky and his brother Michael contributed a lot to Beacon sports teams and they went on to Wellington College where, like David Nicholson before them, they prospered.



*Nick Webb teaching a junior science class in 1983*

I reported that Nick Webb would be on temporary leave in the Summer doing an in-service course to refresh his teaching techniques. It was unusual for a staff member to have a whole term away but Nick was special to The Beacon and he was conscious that as one of the staff members with no degree he wanted to improve his academic base. I had 'inherited' Nick as my second in command when I started in 1972 and we had been good friends as well as colleagues. Nick was an excellent schoolmaster; he had a natural rapport with boys and we saw eye

to eye on our approach to discipline. We both believed in what PLM had called 'submariners' discipline' – relatively free and easy most of the time but when the 'officers' gave an instruction it was expected that it would be obeyed. My Management Team as such – although it was not dignified by any such name at the time – consisted of Nick and Chris Copeman and, if the Pre-prep was involved in a policy, Jean Lefroy as well. Sarah too normally had her say! She and Kristine Rose were invaluable links with the parents and in a very male world we needed and benefited from their input. Looking back, I am amazed that we had no female Governors – a lack I certainly regret in hindsight although I always felt that the male Board did a very good job.

My final words of thanks were to those parents who had come in to talk to the Scholarship form. I had introduced these talks to try to widen the horizons of



boys who were preoccupied with sport and pop music. Messrs Overend, Fuller, Freund and Sandys-Lumsdaine visited to talk about their own specialties. I certainly remember an excellent talk on the law and becoming a barrister by Sean Overend, and a very entertaining talk on the growing of tea by Gillem Sandys-Lumsdaine when boys had a chance to taste an enormous number of different varieties of tea; they particularly revelled in the slurping and spitting involved in assessing them.

### **Summer term 1981**

Oddly, I began my summer newsletter with a list of exam results. This was unusual because I normally circulated a list shortly after Common Entrance results had been received and kept them separate from the newsletter. Why I changed this habit I do not know but, as I claimed, it had been 'a good year' maybe I wanted to celebrate that fact on a piece of paper that I knew all parents would receive. Most circulars were sent home with the boys so one could not guarantee delivery but the newsletter went out with the reports in an envelope at the end of term and it was certain to get home, even if it was not read. It was a struggle to produce all the reports and the newsletter ready for the last day of each term but it did at least mean that the immediate chores were out of the way when each term ended. There was usually at least a week's work sorting out odds and ends after the finish of each term but this was low key after the rush and bustle of the previous weeks.

The list of schools to which the leaving boys were going was as varied as usual and boarding schools still predominated but the trend towards day schools



was discernible as was the steadily increasing trickle to the Bucks grammar schools. While the Labour government had been busy closing grammar schools all over the country, Buckinghamshire had been fighting an effective

rearguard action by submitting unworkable schemes to the Department for Education. They were required to explain how they would restructure secondary schools in the new Comprehensive era but by suggesting either politically unacceptable or educationally absurd schemes they managed to spin out the grammar schools' demise until a Conservative government was elected and the status quo could be safely maintained. The local grammar schools were of high quality and at a time of economic recession the prospect of a first class education without payment of fees was attractive. So in my newsletter I tried to argue the case for keeping boys at The Beacon until age 13 rather than sending them to the grammar schools at 12. I admitted to self-interest on The Beacon's behalf in making my argument, but felt – and still feel – that the last year at Prep school is often not only the most enjoyable from a boy's point of view but is also the most valuable in terms of a pupil's general development.

In the newsletter I was able to celebrate the difference our new, extended changing room had made. Changing room tidying was a tedious job that a rota of boys had to carry out at the end of each school day, replacing clothes on hooks and collecting unmarked kit for later identification. A member of staff supervised the tidying which in the past had been a tiresome fifteen minute chore at the end of a long school day. I claimed that with the new locker system and the increased space, tidying was now a two minute job. I may have exaggerated.

Among the boys leaving was Head Prefect Andrew Lykiardopoulos (the spelling of whose surname caused the rewriting of many subject reports). Andrew was a very engaging character who, among many excellent others, was one of my best Head Prefects. He went out of his way to learn the names of all the boys in the school and tall in stature and avuncular in manner he chatted to everyone from nursery children to his own contemporaries. He was responsible but had a great sense of humour and he had a particular rapport with Chris Copeman, no doubt partly as a result of their shared Hellenic interests! It was the Head Prefect's first duty of the morning to turn up at my study and let me know that the school was assembled and ready for morning prayers in the Hall. Andrew usually had some cheering words to say and by the time I reached the Hall he would have enlivened my day. He was a real character and much liked by everyone and I believe his career at Radley was equally successful.

Another notable leaver was James Baxter, son of an Old Beaconian and whose mother was a very popular teacher at Winterbourn. James won a Sports

Scholarship to Cheltenham (that school was then unusual in having such a specific award on offer) and it was well deserved because he had been the lynchpin of Beacon teams throughout his time at the school. He was outstanding in all the major sports – as fly half in the rugby team he was probably the best in my time at the school – and he was also one of the leading gymnasts and a fine track athlete. James trained as a lawyer but perhaps remembering his happy days at The Beacon he changed careers. I was delighted



*1981 Unbeaten athletics team, with James Baxter sitting in the middle of the second row*

to employ him as a Latin teacher at St Andrew's, Eastbourne, and he is now a senior member of staff at Elstree Prep school.

We were beginning to lay down firm rules for use of facilities in the school holidays but it seemed only reasonable that those who had paid for such things as the swimming pool and tennis courts should be allowed to use them. They were available to boys – but only when supervised by parents – from 10am to 6pm on Monday to Saturday and there was usually a steady stream of visitors during the summer holidays. Rather like a publican at closing time I frequently had to ask parents and boys to leave the pool at 6pm because on a sunny summer's evening it was a pleasant place to be and the temptation to linger was strong but our neighbours deserved some peace. We asked for voluntary contributions to be made to the Amenities Fund as payment for usage of the school facilities and most parents far exceeded the suggested 15p per person per visit when they sent cheques at the end of the holidays.

As always I finished the newsletter by thanking our many parental helpers who had undertaken all sorts of chores during the term. We were always well served by these volunteers who were an integral part of the school community.

<b>1981 – 82</b>
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**Autumn term 1981**

In the Autumn newsletter my customary homily was delivered on the benefits of communication between home and school and vice versa. 'This is partly why I write these termly newsletters in the hope that it fosters and strengthens our partnership, ensuring that we try to achieve the same ends. I mean, of course, not just academic success but the less tangible, more important aims; a sense of Christian values, a respect for others, good manners and self-discipline. It is impossible to achieve such ideals unless there are standards set at home and at school.' Reading these words forty years after I wrote them I may be uncomfortable about the preaching, uneasy nowadays about expressing specifically Christian values but essentially the basic message rings true and as a *raison d'être* for the newsletter they are valid. After my general introduction I then record what the school (me) expects of boys in all sorts of aspects of their lives. All very 'unwoke' but I concluded 'I have written this introduction in a similar vein before but it does no harm to repeat points which are of common interest to parents and school. We are, as I have said, in partnership. If we help one another in a consistent approach to all joint problems it will be our sons who will derive the benefit.' ('Our sons' included our own brood, Mark, Paul and Simon who were all in the school at that time).

On the academic side there were four successful CE candidates, two to Berkhamsted and one each to Wellington and St Edward's. The St Edward's leaver was Jonty Sale who in the previous term had won a Gold Medal at the National IAPS Athletic Championship.



*Jane Collinson*

On the staff side I was able to congratulate two stalwart ex members of staff – Eunice Maloney and Jane Collinson – on the births of their babies. I was amused several years later to find myself showing Eunice around St Andrew's, Eastbourne where she arrived as a prospective parent. Joining The Beacon staff to teach

English was Simon Whittle, a talented teacher who later became a Prep School head.



*Simon Whittle*



One Governing Body change was the departure of Basil Garnons-Williams, one of our original Governors and former Headmaster of Berkhamsted School. He was replaced by Richard Morgan, now Head of Cheltenham College and before that Sub Warden of Radley. I had known Richard for many years and admired his enthusiasm and his experience. He was a very useful Governor, full of practical ideas and up to date with modern educational good practice. Many years after leaving The Beacon I met up with Richard once again when we both served as Governors at Clifton College. He was as ebullient as ever!

It was not a vintage term for sport but the Colts team had an excellent record and the Mini rugby players shared the winners' trophy at the Moulsoford Festival. I noted that well over half of the Beacon boys had represented the school in a team during the term. Perhaps some of them were fitter than usual because Andrew Adamson had started voluntary cross country runs for boys at 8am and an extraordinary number turned up to exercise their lungs before the



*The Beacon Ski Trip 1981*

school day began.

Another voluntary activity at the other end of the school day was also well supported; Jonathan Masters, Sarah's brother, was taking a carpentry hobby proving to be, as his father's son, a chip off the old block....(sorry!).

An innovation announced for the new calendar year was a sherry party to be

held on the day before the January term began, introducing all new parents to the staff members who would be teaching their sons. Sarah and I of course continued to meet all new parents for an evening drink during a boy's first term but I thought it was time that the staff got to know the parents better – and vice versa.

I also made a plea for an increased voluntary contribution to the Bursary Fund which was supporting a number of Beacon pupils whose parents had encountered hard times. The suggestion was to raise the £1 voluntary levy on the fees to £2 and as I recall this caused no problems. It increased the termly income to approximately £600 which was a helpful sum.

## **Spring term 1982**

A General Election loomed and independent schools were facing a direct threat from the Labour Party which had, as a manifesto promise, outlined a policy to eliminate independent schooling. ISIS (not a terrorist organisation but The Independent Schools Information Service) was running a campaign to protect and save independent schooling and my first newsletter of the term was political in nature asking parents to support the campaign and join the ISIS Association which was actively fighting the Labour party threat. Writing this in 2023 it is sadly familiar to hear the Labour party making similar noises once again.

## **Summer term 1982**

In the summer I announced that finally, after 26 years at the school, Pauline Milne had decided to retire. She had been appointed by PLM and she was a genius. Her art teaching was exceptional and to some extent her own assessment that she 'did nothing' was true. But what she did do was, very sparingly, offer advice, suggest a slight change or simply encourage. I never saw her try to embellish a boy's art work by taking up a brush herself but she gave her pupils enormous confidence to 'think big'. Many children, presented with a large sheet of blank paper, might be daunted but Pauline had the knack of persuading children to fill the space with big bold drawings and colourful painting. She was at her best when involving children in group projects like the Little Missenden church paper collage or the infamous felt clad King Kong. Each year before Sports Day she would spend hours preparing work for the annual exhibition of the boys' artwork. Parents were able to see how Beacon boys' work won selection for national competitions every year and Pauline's record of success was, I suspect, unmatched by any other art teacher. But she had many other qualities as well as being a supreme teacher. She was a listening ear for boys, she picked up on those who might be having problems and, because she allowed the Art Room to be a hotbed of school gossip, she knew exactly what was going on in the school. Carefully sifting and not bothering with the trivial she would quietly inform me of anything I ought to know concerning the difficulties of boys or staff. She was totally discreet once she had passed on information and she made my job so much easier – particularly in the early days when she could relay which staff members were rumbling about changes I was making. Left wing in her political views she was a stimulant to staff room discussion and an iconoclast in the nicest possible

way. She was my confidante as well as the boys' and the staffs' listening ear and she was a central pillar of the school community. She commuted from Beaconsfield every morning, donned her painting smock, settled herself on a stool in the art room and always did all that was asked of her and more. She was very proud of her twin daughters, one of whom, Paula, was a highly successful TV playwright, but never crowed about their success. Self-effacing but highly intelligent and very talented, art at The Beacon was never quite the same after her departure in the summer.

Also leaving was Bill Foley who had been a very good addition to the staff. When I appointed him to teach Science seven years before he was not my ideal candidate for the job. I was hoping for someone younger and Bill was nearly at retirement age then but he proved his worth as a teacher of Science and despite coming from a state school where the end of the teaching day marked the end of staff duties he happily took on extra activities in the evenings and became the leader of IAPS cruise parties for Beacon boys. He was also a fine addition to our Christmas choir at carol service time. Completely dependable, always calm and an excellent influence within the staff common room, Bill and his wife Diana were much involved with Little Missenden Church with its lively and innovative vicar, Rev Roberts. After he left The Beacon, Bill continued to ensure that the school's links with the church remained strong.

Bill was replaced by the enthusiastic and capable George Sanchez and it was a pleasure for me to write in the newsletter that 'with the advent of energetic, young but already experienced teachers the school is left with a well balanced staff, blending the wisdom of experience with the vigour of youth.' It had taken some time to achieve that balance but in the early '80s The Beacon, Winterbourn and the Nursery had very strong and capable common rooms.



*George Sanchez*

In the summer, on the academic front I once again listed the scholarship results and the CE passes - the latter once again reflecting 100% success rate. One of the CE passers was Mark Davies Jones who was moving on to Radley. Being a son of the Headmaster in a school is never an easy path to tread but Mark had survived the journey and made a number of good friends along the way. We were grateful for the quality of education he had received and delighted that Chris Copeman had been such an inspiration to him.

One of the other leavers was Chris Dawson who won top scholarship to Berkhamsted. Brothers Andrew and Chris Dawson both shone academically and the former, as Head Prefect, read the final lesson of the Carol Service – the tricky one from St John’s gospel – with great aplomb, giving meaning to every word. Our friendly vicar at St Mary’s, Rev Nicholas Molony, remarked that he had never heard the passage better read. Nick Molony was a good friend to The Beacon and often refereed 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby matches for us in the spring term.

The other theme of my summer newsletter was the need to prepare for The Beacon Golden Jubilee (which eclipsed even the Queen’s Silver Jubilee that had been marked in 1977!), and all sorts of events were being planned, including a Ball when we hoped to entertain 600 people with a double ticket priced at £30. The Jubilee celebrations were to be launched with a drinks party at school in September to which all parents would be invited. Also in gestation were plans for another new building to be sited on the main road side of the old Hall. Once again a Guildway construction was to be designed for the purpose and this time it was planned to include a new Science laboratory and two more subject rooms. This would mean that there would be none of the old 1972 classrooms in use any more and all the boys, from Winterbourn to the top of The Beacon, would now be taught in purpose built classrooms. Size of room no longer dictated numbers in each class, all subjects had a base and the younger children all had comfortable form rooms with space to store all that their teachers needed. The new building was to be built by Alan Jones, the local builder who constructed our previous Guildway block, and it was to be financed mainly out of income, although we organised a low key Appeal to help defray costs. Once again stunning originality was shown in naming our new facility – it was to be called The Jubilee Building. Because we had quietly increased class sizes the main school numbers had now risen to over 200.

One historical note is comment about the Falklands War. Boys had been following events with interest and wanted to do their bit to help. Peter Hanley and Jason Baggaley completed a 12 mile sponsored run during half term raising £143 and four of the younger boys, Michael Meighan, Matthew Neale, William Sutton and Bruce Tolmie-Thomson undertook a 20 mile bike ride raising £107 – all contributions from these two laudable events being donated to the South Atlantic Fund.



<b>1982 – 83</b>
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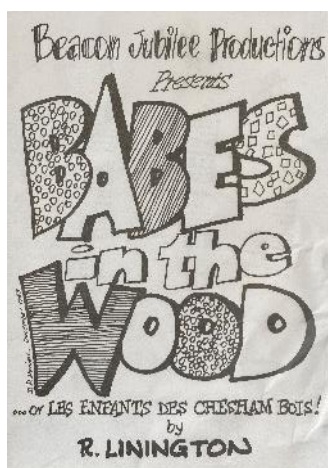
## **Autumn term 1982**

By the time of the Autumn newsletter work on the Jubilee Building had begun and I took the opportunity to remind the parents of the tax benefits of giving by Covenant. I have no memory of how much we raised in this Appeal but I do remember that financing the new block was never a problem.

I celebrated the staff's devotion to further training, noting that after the end of term Chris Copeman and John Cross were attending a Computer Course at Malvern and George Sanchez, our new Head of Science, was attending a Science Course at the same venue. In a short holiday, giving up four days for extra study was over and above the call of duty.

The term had been successful for our teams. The 1<sup>st</sup> XI went unbeaten for two months and the Colts too had a good season even winning away in their annual fixture against Clifton College Prep.

The rugby season was started at the beginning of December because we knew that there were likely to be cancellations of matches due to poor weather in the Spring term. Our Mini rugby teams were always strong although year after year we had epic battles against Caldicott, probably the leading rugby playing Prep school at that time.



One new departure was a request for parental volunteers to act in a play, written and produced by parent Richard Linington. In February of the next year he promised to perform with a cast of parents who it later turned out clearly had secret ambitions to be comic actors and were expert with pantomime humour.

We were doing our best to keep up with the start of the computer revolution. In early November Sarah attended a one-day course at Harrow School on the subject of introducing the use of computers at Prep school level. She came back full of ideas that were discussed with the staff. During the term Sean Overend and Martin Sandbach, two very supportive parents, had taken a Computer Club on Friday evenings and this had proved so popular that they offered a one day Course on December 29 for those less

expert than the boys who had attended the Friday evening sessions. The school now owned a Commodore Pet computer (relying on a cassette tape, unbelievably slow by modern standards) and an Apple Computer 'with dual disk drive'! Shortly we were about to take delivery of a BBC computer courtesy of a government initiative. It was early days but The Beacon was keeping pace with the rapid developments in the computer world.

### Spring term 1983

Having launched into the Jubilee year with the Parents Drinks Party other events followed thick and fast. The culmination of the year was scheduled for July with the Ball, complete with hired marquee on the back field but, before that we had a Medieval dinner in the Dining Hall in February. This had a suitable menu to match the elaborate Medieval dress that all wore for the occasion. Tudor fashions were favourites and if bones were not thrown over shoulders as the meat was consumed it was a very convivial affair but not designed for vegans. Other Jubilee events were musical – a concert in the Hall which was far more ambitious than most musical events had been in the past – and a Fete in the summer which involved all sorts of sideshows, including the popular one of throwing wet sponges at a pillory anchored headmaster. Parents did a great deal of the organising but no event could take place without the necessary involvement of HM and wife since we were the ones who knew where the keys were, where the pipes ran, where the nearest power point was, where the necessary tools were kept, where the extra plates were stored, where the spare loo rolls were etc. etc. It was a very busy time and there was a school to run as well!



*HDJ in Medieval costume ... and in the stocks*



I looked forward to the occupation of the new building in the summer term – two new classrooms and a purpose built Science room, allowing the old lab (hand built by PLM for a different era) to be used as a workshop. The clothes shop, operated by Sarah, now stocked all items of uniform, new and secondhand, so it had grown and we were able to rehouse it in the old building. That building now housed the Ballard Library and in the classroom opposite we sited our growing numbers of computers. Kris Rose's office

remained strategically placed next to the library with my study still being across the passage from her room. The staff Common Room, now not large enough for the number of staff employed, remained at the back of the building.

I noted that an Antiques Fair would be held on the first Saturday of the summer term (much to the delight of Beacon boys since it meant no school on that morning). We charged stall holders for attendance and put the money raised in the Amenities Fund, a useful 'bank' which had prospered over the years from newspaper collections, Heinz label returns, dances and sundry other events which kept it topped up nicely, allowing us to buy unbudgeted 'luxury' items for the school.

Writing in newsletters now I was only too happy to share sports results with parents because results had improved so much, thanks to the likes of Nick Webb, Mike Brigden and Andrew Adamson. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rugby teams only lost once and the Mini rugby players won a 16 school tournament at Long Close and beat Caldicott, always a triumph. The Under 10s and Under 9s played 19 matches in all, winning 16, scoring 334 points and conceding just 34. The gymnastics team, now well established as a force in the local area and further afield, won their way to the National IAPS Finals and at the end of my piece about sporting triumphs I recorded that we had in the school one County Champion swimmer, one County Champion squash player, two representatives in the County squad at tennis and another who represented the County at squash.

### **Summer term 1983**

In the summer I continued the practice I had started in the previous year of listing all scholarship and CE results. Andrew Mayhew and Colin Freund won major scholarships to Merchant Taylors and Mark Chitty won a Continuation scholarship to St Edward's (Oundle's innovation was now being copied by other schools). Once again boarding schools predominated but there were some new schools on the list, Reuben Godden going to Bedales and Rupert Whewell to Clifton.

On the staff side I announced the retirement (or semi-retirement as it turned out!) of Hugh Osborne, Maths teacher at the school for 21 years. Hugh was one of the staff members I had 'inherited' from PLM and unlike some of his

*Hugh Osborne*



then colleagues he was adaptable, ready to change and improve his techniques and open to new ideas. He was a good coach of rugby and incredibly keen but he learnt much from Mike Brigden and eventually and reluctantly bowed to the inevitable, allowing Mike to take on the coaching role for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV. In the classroom Hugh was patient, thorough and clear and he was an excellent teacher of Maths, even persuading most boys to believe his propaganda

always written on the board in his classroom, 'Maths is easy'. Maths was one of the subjects I never had to worry about because I knew Hugh would get boys up to standard, a feat made even more remarkable because he suffered from quite a severe stammer. This was very rarely obvious in the classroom but the arrival of a School Inspector in his classroom one day was traumatic for Hugh and the Inspector. Once explanations had been given to the Inspector he understood the situation and went on his way happily. Hugh continued his Beacon connection long after his retirement, coaching boys who needed help with their Maths and appearing on touchlines to support teams. As a bachelor he could have been a lonely figure once his working days were done but I know subsequent Headmasters made sure not only that Hugh was looked after in the family of The Beacon but that he was fed and watered as well! A lovely man!

Also going after nearly ten years was Donald Gillies-Reyburn. He had joined us from Haileybury Junior School and had been instantly popular as a History teacher. History had not been a popular subject before his arrival but Donald brought it to life for the pupils and his fund of stories about historical characters (many of which were the stuff of legend rather than historical fact) was lapped up by eager boys. Donald further enhanced interest in the subject by helping the boys make historical models of old villages, castles and battlefields. For many, Donald lit a spark of interest in a subject that he cared passionately about. Sadly, results in History at CE were rarely impressive because candidates rehashed the stories they had been told and more serious senior school examiners were unimpressed by reading historical fiction! Donald suffered from high blood pressure and unfortunately, not long after he retired from The Beacon, he had a heart attack and died.





*Chris Copeman, Vi Toynton and Kirs Rose judging Winterbourn fancy dress competition 1982*

Vi Toynton who had joined us after retiring from her post as Deputy Head at a local Primary school also retired – again. She had spent four years teaching the younger children at The Beacon and she was a wonderful support to those who were struggling with their early reading or writing. She had a good knowledge of remedial techniques and was invaluable as a Form Teacher. Easy to tease because she took everything said to her at face value, she gave as good as she got and

was a popular grandmotherly figure in the classroom and staff room.

It was a time of many changes because another leaver was John Cross who had been appointed Headmaster of Colston's School in Bristol. John had been at the The Beacon for five years and had revitalised the French department as well as coaching soccer and cricket with enthusiasm and expertise. He had a charm and presence that made his promotion and new appointment unsurprising and he and his wife Carol, residents of Beech Barn South, had been key personnel in the school community. They had always been quick to help when required and as residents on site they lent a hand frequently when we were hosting events. I was delighted when I heard that John was returning to The Beacon as Head after the turmoil of Bob Perkins' brief headship. John was exactly the calm figure needed at that time and of course he was familiar with the school and Beacon parents.



*Jeanne Shirtcliffe*

The Nursery which had thrived in the old Winterbourn building had been led by Jeanne Shirtcliffe who worked in tandem with Betty Kendall, mother of ex Head Prefect, Jonathan. For seven years these two had worked together overseeing a happy and successful school in Oakway, making my life easy because I was able to do

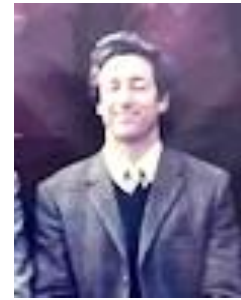
no more than visit once a week and congratulate them on their happy ship. The four year olds had a



*Betty Kendall at 1980 Winterbourn Sports*

settled and stimulating start to their time in the school. When Jeanne retired Betty took over and was joined by Karen Sanchez who was the wife of George, our new Head of Science.

Henry Liebling arrived to take over the Maths and Computing, Richard Wright took over the French department and Sarah Cox arrived to help with a junior form.



*Henry Liebling*

Having had many years of success in the Prep Schools Athletic Championships it was good to record that, largely thanks to our new facilities and some excellent coaching, we had two boys competing in the IAPS National Swimming Championships. Charles Bagot and David Burne were our very first finalists. David's mother, Maura, was a very helpful swimming coach who after assisting at the school unpaid for a long time, earned her way onto the payroll!



*The Saturday morning orchestra*

On the musical side there was now a Beacon Orchestra which played and practised on Saturday mornings with musical parents playing alongside their sons. This initiative was largely parent led, I was merely an enabler and I was able to stand back and approve.

I ended with thanks to all those parents who had helped out in Jubilee Year. It had been very busy but very successful with tremendous goodwill being displayed by parents and further engendered by the various functions at school. I felt we had completed our classroom building and if PLM had built and established the school, I had the satisfaction of rebuilding it! All rooms could now comfortably absorb 20 pupils (although sometimes, under pressure we exceeded this number) and from memory I believe the school had grown to 350 pupils in the three departments. We had new changing rooms and showers, we had a swimming pool, we had three hard tennis courts that also served as a hard playground, Winterbourn had been rehoused and the Nursery had space in the old Oakway building, staff accommodation had been enhanced by flats created at Monks

Barn and above the Nursery and Willsfield now had a pavilion. Maintenance of buildings was minimal with our new builds and the finances were healthy. All the original aims of the Development Plan had been achieved and, as I relaxed, ready for the summer holiday, I remember thinking – what next?

### The Final Year 1983-84



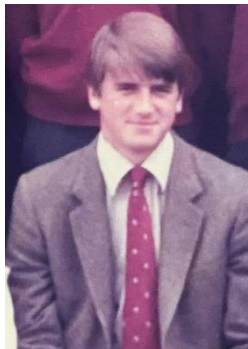
*Simon and Sarah in Ibiza August 1983*

The summer holidays of '83 brought a tragedy which had repercussions at The Beacon as well as in our family life. Our third son Simon died after a fall at my parents' holiday home in Ibiza. We were just three days from the end of our holiday and were nearing the end of August so that when we returned home a new term was nearly upon us. It was a dreadful time but we were immensely grateful to the whole Beacon community which helped us through some very dark weeks. Parents were sensitive, sympathetic and wonderfully supportive and offered help in practical ways as well as through countless very kind letters written with great care, thought and affection. We were touched by the reaction of the whole school family and that support helped keep us afloat when we were in danger of sinking. I plunged back into work and the business of school life as a way of trying to distance myself from depression but Sarah did not have the same routines as I had and was left alone in her grief while I was forcing myself to keep busy. Very gradually we began to resume some sort of normality but we knew life at our Beacon home would and could never be the same.

### Autumn term 1983

Inevitably I began my termly newsletter with a reflection on what had happened in the previous few months. I quoted the words of Bishop Peter Nott who had officiated at Simon's funeral service. 'The light of reason can never penetrate the darkness of tragedy. But the light of love is more powerful, infinitely more so, and it is a love which enables us to move slowly out of the darkness. Love does not explain away mystery but it does disperse darkness.' I continued in my message to the parents, 'The knowledge that you have supported us with your sympathy and your love has, indeed, begun to disperse the darkness of which Peter Nott spoke.'

Peter Nott had been Rector of Beaconsfield and had sent his son Andrew to The Beacon and we had known him and his wife Betty well as involved and helpful parents. Peter was an enormous support to us at this time and we were very grateful to him for his wise advice, guidance and good sense.



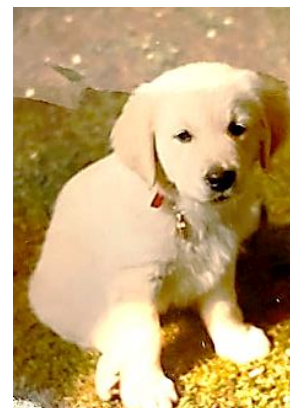
*Andrew Nott returned to The Beacon as a Gap Student in summer 1983*

Andrew, his son, had a very successful Beacon career and when he left went to King's, Taunton as his father had just been made Bishop of Taunton. He graduated from Swansea University and having worked for the Church Commissioners for a while decided that office life was not for him. He consulted me about moving into teaching and with great pleasure I was able to appoint him to St Andrew's Eastbourne where I had moved after The Beacon. Andrew proved to be an outstanding teacher of English and soon I promoted him to be a Houseparent at the Girls' Boarding House, working in tandem with his delightful wife, Sarah. They were very popular and the girls' boarding thrived under their guidance. It was not long before I appointed Andrew as Deputy Head where he was so efficient and effective that it became inevitable that promotion to a Headship would follow. He became Head of Davenies School in Beaconsfield and developed it so much that, for the first time, it became a rival for The Beacon! After a distinguished tenure he moved on to be Head of St Hugh's Prep School and after retiring became Chairman of IAPS.

In the newsletter I also commented on our forthcoming move from The Beacon. We had, even before Simon's death, been discussing a possible move because I had reasoned that to spend the rest of my career at The Beacon would be desirable neither for the school nor for me. We thought that a change of scene and a return to a boarding environment might be a challenge that would divert us from a routine that had become perhaps too familiar. I thought that we had now completed just about all the rebuilding that could be done and that the school would be unlikely to be granted planning permission for further development. (How wrong I was!). Rather than oversee a period at The Beacon which might see stagnation under my continued Headship we had decided that a change might be a good idea. The timing fitted with Mark and Paul both being at Radley – Mark had already moved there in January of 1983 and Paul was due to start in September '84. We decided to keep an eye open to see if a suitable school presented itself and St Andrew's at Eastbourne appeared to be that school so I applied and was appointed. We moved to a very different life which kept us even busier than The Beacon had! It was a



seven day a week routine in a new geographical area and the move meant that we had little chance to dwell too much on the past. We spent 16 happy years at St Andrew's and during that time I was twice Chairman of IAPS while Sarah involved herself in everything, winning the admiration and affection of parents and children as she had at The Beacon. When we moved we took with us a retriever puppy, a gift from the Thompson family who lived in The Leys. One of their sons, Julian, had been Simon's greatest friend and there was a well worn path across the back field where the two boys walked back and forth as they visited one another. The puppy, named Fudge by Julian, became a much loved member of our family over the years and Angela Thompson, Julian's mother, shrewdly knew that the new arrival would be therapeutic in helping our gradual recovery from grief.



*Fudge – the new addition to our family*



*Simon's Playground*

After the reflections in my initial remarks in the newsletter I thanked the parents for their very generous contributions to Simon's Memorial Fund. We wanted to leave a memorial to Simon in the home where he had been so happy and chose to provide some play equipment which we knew he would have enjoyed in his Winterbourn days. So, using the donated money, Simon's Playground was constructed using attractive wooden play equipment and we are pleased to note that it has now developed and been added to over the years.

The term passed in something of a blur but there were two notable if rather different events. The first was a very successful Concert given by Beacon and Winterbourn boys on a Saturday morning. This reflected the increasing musical emphasis in the school, something greatly assisted by a number of keen, musical parents.

The other important event was the arrival of a Pelican pedestrian crossing just down the road from the school. One of the least popular and most dangerous staff duties had been the crossing patrol operated at the start and end of the day. Beacon boys were seen across the main road by staff members but they were contending with increasingly heavy traffic and motorists who seemed to

become more and more impatient. I had tried for years to persuade the Council to provide a crossing but now at last there was to be safe place (by the Catholic Primary school) where a new traffic light controlled Pelican crossing allowed staff to surrender their former duties, much to their relief and mine.

### **Spring term 1984**

In the new year of 1984 I reflected on recent changes at The Beacon. The new Head of Maths, Henry Liebling, who had succeeded Hugh Osborne, was introducing boys to 'micro computers' and I proudly announced that 'all four school micros' were being fully used. Carpentry had been added to the timetabled curriculum for the Lower School, Latin was being started a year later and before boys started learning the language they were introduced to the history of classical civilization. 'I could go on to explain the broadening of the Biology syllabus, the introduction of electronics, the use of video tapes, the growth in geographical field trips, the expanding range of the music department, the development of drama and the linking of ideas across the curriculum from Gym to Art Room to Classroom but time does not allow' ....etc! I went on to explain how Clubs were an important part of the general curriculum and how sporting activities played their part, without dominating too much. 'I believe the range of Clubs offered to boys is unique for a day school' – a claim I made which I suspect still rings true at The Beacon today.

Some good scholarship news was reported – Ben Merrick had won the top Continuation Scholarship to St Edward's and Tim Lattimer was third in the list of Harrow scholars.

On the music side I reported that a set of drums had been purchased and, for the first time, cello lessons were to be introduced at the school.

I reported the death of Jim Hornby, one of the Beacon's original Governors and my former boss when I had taught at Clifton. Jim had been a hard-working Governor and was particularly useful in keeping me up to date and informed from his status as Chairman of the IAPS and subsequently, after his retirement from Clifton Prep school, Secretary of the Association.



*HDJ with Jim Hornby at IAPS Conference*

Reading the newsletter I was intrigued by my paragraph on school trips which in the '60s had been confined to a summer term visit to Lords for the favoured few. Now we could offer two skiing parties, climbing and canoeing in Wales, stays with French families and camping in Brittany while at The Beacon in the holidays there were coaching courses for cricket, soccer and computing.

As usual I flagged up forthcoming events including an Antiques Fair, The Beacon Open Morning, Winterbourn and Nursery Water display and The Beacon Athletics afternoon all to be held on July 14 while on July 21<sup>st</sup> (how



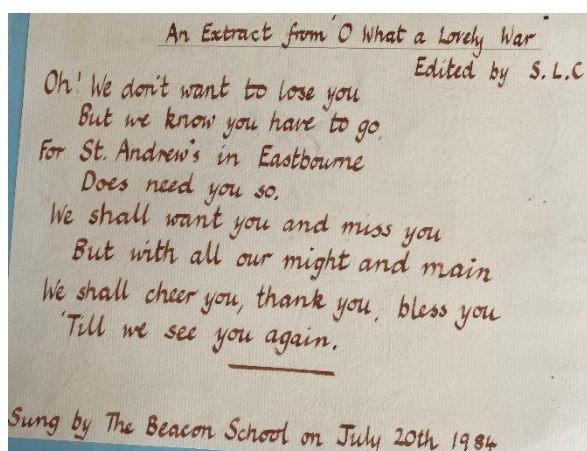
term dates have changed) there was to be a farewell for the departing Davies Jones family with an Ox Roast, Disco and Steel Band (organised by Annie White who was one of the prime helpers in assisting with parental functions).

### Summer term 1984

My final Beacon newsletter for the summer of '84 was both easy and difficult to compose. It was easy to recognise that I needed to thank staff, Governors, parents and pupils for their contribution to the school over the course of the previous 12 years. It was much harder to say a proper farewell to all those who had been so involved in our life at the school. I tried to summarise the achievements of the academic and support staff, the contribution of the Governors and the constructive help of the parents. I outlined the changes in the school facilities (the last addition being the provision of artificial wickets on the back field and at Willsfield). I worked out that 235 boys had passed CE and 37 had won scholarships or exhibitions. I reminded parents of changes in the approach to pupils: Ma and Mi were no longer used to describe older and younger brothers and first names were now used to address the boys rather than surnames; grey suits were an early casualty of uniform changes and eventually even the Beacon cap disappeared as an anachronism. I noted that parents had given over £100,000 to the school to help us develop the facilities and I signed off my opening remarks by observing 'I am sure that the next fifty years of The Beacon's history will see as many improvements as the first fifty'. Writing these memoirs forty years on it seems my expectations have been fulfilled.

Among the news items I sent to parents was one that may puzzle future generations. In congratulating Mike and Lisa Brigden on the birth of Zoe I observed that the initials ZB had provoked comment about her athletic future. The ZB in question was Zola Budd, a former South African middle distance runner who had recently opted to run (barefoot) for Britain. She was an Olympic athlete whose career was mired in some controversy in its later stages.

Frazer Thomas had just joined the staff and Richard Hunter had been engaged to teach French from September.



Otherwise the summer term news followed its usual pattern; lots of exam success (including Paul Davies Jones' CE pass to Radley), mixed success at cricket, notable triumphs for the athletes and swimmers (with good representation at National Finals) and a fine record for the tennis team who very nearly managed an unbeaten season. Inevitably there were many

literary successes and for the fifth time in six years the school was singled out by the judges of the WH Smith literary competition for presenting writing 'of the most consistent merit'.

My final memory of the summer term was the Ox Roast, a farewell party for us organised by the parents. This took place on the Saturday after the end of term on a balmy July evening and was an emotional but hugely enjoyable event. We were presented with wonderfully generous leaving presents and for once, contrary to a tradition of the school never to have formal speeches, there were tributes paid in a speech by Ian White on behalf of the parents. I made a brief reply as we stood on the flat roof of the staff loo (now demolished). I





remember looking out over the quadrangle (the roof was just below the staff common room) at a sea of people whose goodwill towards us was very moving and wondering whether we were doing the right thing! Would anywhere else give us the happiness and satisfaction we had enjoyed at The Beacon?



*The Beacon in 1983*

### Epilogue

The school is now almost unrecognisable from the one that I left in 1984 and it has grown, developed and strengthened in a way that I could not have imagined. Just as PLM encouraged and approved of building developments in my time (many of which destroyed his own handiwork) I applaud the vision and energy of those headmasters and Governors who have done so much in the last forty years. Looking back a huge debt is owed to PLM without whose courage and foresight The Beacon would not have flourished in the way it has.

He bought and renovated the old Bois Farm buildings which remain as the heart of the school and he turned the gardens and grounds into attractive areas for all who came to the school. With limited funds and at a time of general austerity he had the courage to draw up and implement a development plan which ensured that the school would first survive and subsequently thrive. He was a setter of standards and those same standards and values, although they may be achieved differently, now survive to this day. As the first salaried Headmaster of the newly formed Educational Trust I was fortunate to be able to build on Pip's legacy and, once the first few nervous years had gone by and the finances of the school were stabilised, I knew that it was possible to plan for the future with total confidence. From the mid '70s, future entry lists were secure for four years ahead.

Sarah and I worked hard, we expected to and we led lives that few modern Heads would recognise. Sarah was involved in teaching, tutoring, preparing staff evening meals, running the clothes shop, the registration of future pupils and organising and liaising with parents whenever there was an event at the school. In her spare time she also brought up three young children! As Headmaster I was leading the academic side of the school but I was also Bursar, Estates Bursar, occasional extra groundsman and in term time and holidays caretaker with lock up duties morning and evening. PLM and his wife Claud had worked together at the school before our time and we followed their example sustaining the Beacon as a family school, run by one family for a bigger family. We worked six days a week and although there were undoubtedly moments when joy was not unconfined, on balance it was hugely enjoyable and satisfying. We made some good friends, we had some exceptional staff members and there were some great characters among the boys, many of whom I remember very clearly even now.

In rummaging through my papers relating to the Beacon years I discovered two documents written in longhand, the first dated February 1981 entitled 'The Next Five Years' and the second entitled 'The Beacon in 1984'. These were submitted to the Governors and were written in my handwriting because they contained sensitive information which it would not have been appropriate for Kris Rose – who usually typed my Governors' reports – to see. The first document reviewed the current state of the school and plans for the future. In reflecting on school size I suggested that the maximum numbers then existing – Nursery 20, Prep-prep 80 and The Beacon 200 – was appropriate for the facilities as they existed and to increase those numbers would mean embarking on a new development programme. Reviewing buildings, I

remarked on the easy maintenance of the new construction but pointed to the lack of a purpose-built gym and music room. (At this stage I thought there was no chance of successfully applying for planning permission for a Sports Hall although I didn't tell the Governors that!). At the end of the document I wrote, 'I should add that during the next 5 years I may leave The Beacon. We came here in '72 and I think the school may have seen enough of us after 10-15 years. If we are going to move then it will have to be at a time when we are young enough to offer 15 years hard labour elsewhere.' In truth, I think I felt that we had finished all the major schemes we could envisage at The Beacon and there was a danger of coasting. Happily for the school my departure heralded a new era of change and development with innovations that I probably would have failed to introduce - so the eventual parting of the ways was beneficial for both sides.

The second document was intended as a help to the Governors and Bob Perkins, my successor. I genuinely felt we were leaving a flourishing school in good order to our successors so it was very disappointing to find that within a couple of years The Beacon would once again be looking to appoint a new Head. I am sure I should bear some of the blame for this. Perhaps Sarah and I were not great at delegating and because we did so much ourselves and had developed our roles over a 12 year period it was tough for someone new to replicate in a year or two what it had taken us many years to learn. However, the resilience of the institution was shown in the way The Beacon recovered from the hiatus and Chris Copeman piloted a steady course as Acting HM until John Cross took over and fully restored the school's fortunes and reputation.

Any success we enjoyed during our tenure was due to the foundations laid by the Masters family and my own part in it would not have been possible without the help, support and sheer hard work of Sarah. We worked in partnership and we painted every classroom of the school together, we laid plans for the future together, we entertained parents together and we even managed to live happily together with our three boys. They may have suffered the difficulties of being sons of the Headmaster but they also loved the facilities and grounds of the school which formed their extensive playground. Paul's first complete sentence as a very young tot was, 'I want to go to the gym'. Our home in the old Bois Farm building would not be considered lavish by modern standards but we loved the beams and quirkiness of our home – it was a special place for all of us as was The Beacon School itself – a place that holds so many happy memories for us.

One final word: When Pip Masters died in 1999 his funeral was held at Chesham Bois Church and was attended by a large number of former staff, parents and pupils of the school. The address at the service was given by James Mogridge who reminisced fondly about his former Headmaster saying 'He had his quirks. TV and the cinema were two of them. Boys were not allowed to visit the cinema during termtime – even at half-term! 'I tell parents' he'd say, 'to give their boy a workshop, a piano, a canvas and paints – anything but a television'. He added 'In 1953 Pip took over a school of 77 boys in poor accommodation. He left it 20 years later with some breathtakingly beautiful buildings, a pre-prep (Winterbourn), a superb playing field, something around two hundred boys and a long waiting list.' As a family we were touched that The Beacon kindly offered to host a reception after Pip's funeral when many people expressed their gratitude to Pip (and Claud) and the school for all that had been done for their sons at The Beacon. One former parent wrote to Sarah: 'It was your father who laid the foundations for the school as it is today, and was the driving force behind it. Without him, the school would not have flourished as it has done and thousands of children would not have received the fine education they did.'

The next stage for the Davies Jones family – St Andrew's Eastbourne:



*Hugh Davies Jones and Fudge in the Headmaster's study at St Andrew's*

*The Davies Jones family pictured on the front of the St Andrew's school magazine 1984-85*

