

Recollections of the school staff from 1941-1948 by John Powell

These are John's recollections. He sent them to me (Peter Higgins) from his home in New South Wales, Australia, in 2007 and I have edited them – I hope without losing any of the essential elements and without changing John's style or intended messages. They form a part of a wider document that John had evidently written about his life and times. It is evident to me that John had many friends from his schooldays right up until the time when, sadly, he died in August 2008 (*see also, John's evacuation recollections (Events/Evacuation) and the "Where are they now" article(People section) about John written by Roger Watts*).

French was taught by **Messrs Tilney and Hitchins** who were both very good teachers but despite studying the language for seven years I never achieved any consistency in reading or writing it although I could read it tolerably well. Mr Hitchins had placed a copy of his MA thesis in the sixth form common room in order, I suppose, to extend our horizons and lead us into thinking about further education. Mr Tilney, always known as "Tish" was also my House Master and like many other members of staff he spent a great deal of time assisting with extra-curricular activities. One of his interests was the Athenaeum, the school debating society, in which I became heavily involved; I always enjoyed arguing with people especially when I knew nothing about the subject under discussion. Mr Tilney also held regular lunchtime meetings for about half a dozen sixth formers, which I also attended, at which we would discuss a wide range of subjects including religion. He was an outstanding example of a dedicated teacher who gave himself unsparingly to the welfare of the boys.

English was taught by **Dr K.M.Lobb**, who later took up an appointment at Southampton University. English was my favourite subject and the one at which I considered myself to be best. His doctoral thesis had been on Gothic novels and he sometimes read to us extracts from Aphra Behn and similar authors but it was to be some years later before I got round to reading any of them. Dr Lobb took an interest in me and was always very encouraging and supportive. I owe him a considerable debt. He threw a great deal of energy into promoting the production of plays in which staff and students took part and this led to a growing interest on my part in performing on stage.

History was taught by **Mr J. Thomas** who did not attempt to conceal his left-wing political views and undoubtedly influenced my own thinking. He tried to make my writing more objective and often drew attention to the need to avoid drafting "purple passages", a practice to which I was somewhat addicted at that time. He also encouraged me to read more widely rather than simply concentrating on the textbooks.

Although I was no longer taught by him, I had developed a fond respect for **Mr Shackleton** and continued to see him after he retired. He was a graduate of Manchester University and never lost his northern accent. Although he never spoke about the Great War it was widely known that he had been in the Royal Flying Corps and had been shot down over Holland and had sustained quite serious injuries as a result. I once visited his house and there was a large wooden propeller in the hallway. He had a distinctive sense of humour and a number of stock expressions which were repeated at frequent intervals. "We shall be here again at this time next week God willing and Hitler permitting"; "That smells like the bottom of a seven story parrot cage"; "Quelle fromage"; "Speak it not in Gath, spread it not on the streets of Askalon". When speaking of a town in the Midlands known for its dye works he would say "They dyed to live". Astonishingly, what inconsequential things one is able to recall but he must have been a very good teacher as I always came top in chemistry despite being near the bottom in most other subjects.

When I entered the sixth form I was the only student studying geography. **Dr King** taught this subject in a classroom set aside for the purpose. While I studied the textbooks and drew maps, occasionally consulting with him, he worked away at a draftsman's table designing motor torpedo boats! (**Ed:** he "taught" me as well, years later, and I fully recognise the scenario). It was said that he had spent the war years working as a designer.

Mr Stan Davies taught me maths but I never got on with him. On one occasion when I must have annoyed him he said “You are not fit to sweep up in the dockyard”. I responded by spitting on the floor when he turned to write on the board. We later appeared in school plays together – he was quite an accomplished actor – but I never forgave him for that remark.

John Powell (2006) [and edited by Peter Higgins]