

# Memories of Kingsholm Secondary School

By Mario Mager. October 2006

## FORWARD

I don't know about you, but I have found that as one gets older, the past seems to be more important. Many would disagree with me, (especially my wife!) but it is an unavoidable fact, that events that happened way back in the past have a direct bearing on your life in the present and future. One only has to study History to realise this. Since loosing both of my parents in death, I began to think and reminisce even more about the past. Over the years I have half heartedly tried to contact old friends from my schooldays, with not much success. With the advent of the Internet though, and with a renewed interest in the past, I tried once again. In September of 2006 I e-mailed the Gloucestershire Archives Office (formerly The Gloucester Records Office). I was amazed to hear that they were organising a school reunion for my old school (Kingsholm Secondary for boys), which closed in 1973. (For those of you who do not already know, the Archives Office is actually situated in the old school building in Alvin Street)

The reunion was a great success, and by far surpassed the expectations of the organisers, namely, Kate Maisey and the archives Office staff, the Gloucester Citizen, and those who attended. Who would have thought that hundreds of people would turn up for such an event? I helped out best I could with publicising this event, and I am really glad that it turned out so well. My only disappointment was that there were only four people apart from myself in attendances that were from my old class. Perhaps like me, many have moved out of the area, and were unaware of the event? If it were not for the Internet, I certainly would have been oblivious to these plans! Despite this setback, and due to the Kate Maisey's uplifting and encouraging words, I decided that I would compile a series of short stores to pay tribute to the old school and to the teachers that I remember. I must point out, that this is only scratching the surface, as there were many other teachers who I did not come to know, as they taught classes in other 'streams'. Not only that, I am accessing grey cells that go back 36 years! At the time (when we were *IN* school) we probably hated the place, and were counting the days we had left until we could leave. Now many years later, looking back through the eyes of an adult, I would like to think that things were not that bad, and that the teachers of that yesteryear, did in fact try very hard to give us a good education, and a good start to life. I am hoping that this will inspire other ex-pupils to put pen to paper, and make a 'memory contribution' to the past that we all shared. Mario Mager

## Part ONE

Mr.Stangroom: It was so nice to see Mr.Stangroom at the Kingsholm school reunion. Mr.Stangroom was one of two Geography teachers as I remember.(The other was a Mr.Brown) He was a very popular teacher with most pupils. Mr.Stangroom was the only ex-teacher in attendance at the reunion event (October 14<sup>th</sup> 2006). He and his wife looked very well for 81! He was what I would describe as a 'gentleman Jim' type. He was well spoken, polite whilst being firm, I don't remember him ever needing to threaten the class with the dap or cane, but one of my old school friends Rob Lewis reckons he used to use a rugby ball case! Mr.Stangroom just LOVED to mess around with electrical gadgets and wires. Every desk in his class was wired up for sound! He could pipe an audio lesson from his reel-to-reel tape recorder to the entire class with a the click of switch to the headphones on each desk. They were the sort of headphones that you see radio operators using on old war films. What Mr..Stangroom had created back there in 1966 was in fact a very basic network. In 2006, if you look in a modern school, you will see networks of computers in many classrooms. These are used for audio and visual education. So what Mr.Stangroom had built then, was a foretaste of the future. He was way ahead of his time!

One day, he needed to replace one of the headphone jack sockets on one of the desks. He called Richard (Dickie) Durston to his desk, put a microphone in his hand, along with a 10 bob note. He said "Durston. I want you to go up to Mitchell's in Northgate St and get me a microphone jack socket that will fit the jack plug on the end of this microphone. Take someone else with you." I was very pleased that Dickie selected ME to accompany him on this errand. So off we set up Worcester St. What Mr. Stangroom didn't know, was that Dickie was always a one to have a laugh, and play about given the opportunity. Mind you so was I! When we two got larking around together, just about anything could happen! Dickie insisted that we go into his favourite cake shop in Northgate St first. I soon saw why it was his favourite. At the far end of the counter, there was a section where all the stale cakes were for sale at half the normal price. So for 4d (four old pence) we came out with not one but TWO dripping cakes!

After we scoffed them, Dickie said "Lets have a bit of fun before we go into Mitchell's!" He brought the microphone that Mr. Stangroom gave him out of his pocket, and pushed the plug end of the wire into his shirt pocket. I was not sure what he was up to at the time, so I just stayed close, to see what he would do. When an elderly gent approached he said to him "Excuse me Sir, we are doing some research for a school project. Would you mind speaking into this microphone, and telling us what you think of Gloucester please?" The old gent spoke into the microphone and shared his thoughts with us about Gloucester. I found it very hard to keep a straight face, as the poor old chap had no idea that Dickie did NOT have a tape recorder ANYWHERE on his person! He stopped one or two more elderly people as we worked our way up Mitchell's. I asked him "Why are you only asking old people Rich?" He replied, "Because if they realise that I don't have a tape recorder, and that I am playing a joke on them, they WONT be able to chase after us!" So, after having had our fill of food and fun, we went into Mitchell's and bought the part Mr. Stangroom sent us out for.

When we returned to the class, Mr. Stangroom had no idea what mischief we had been up to! He was just pleased that we returned with the correct part. So when I met Mr. Stangroom at the reunion, I said to him, "You won't remember me, but when I was in your class, I remember you used to like your electrical gadgets, and had every desk in the class wired up for sound. You don't by any chance remember sending two boys up to Mitchell's (now Hudson's sportswear) to get you a headphone socket do you?" "No, he said, why do you ask?" So after nearly 40 years, I thought it was now time to get this off my chest, and related to him an abbreviated version of the story that I have just related to you. Mr. Stangroom simply smiled and said "Oh well, boys *will* be boys!"

## Part TWO

Mr. Anthony taught PE (Physical Exercise as we called it in those days, later to be called PT; Physical Training) and was our form teacher in my final year in Kingsholm. He wasn't very tall, but he certainly appeared to be a quite a tough guy! He was very fit, and when he conducted PE lessons, he would never ask a pupil to do something that he could not do himself! Mr. Anthony liked to use a Dap to keep us pupils shivering with fear in our seats! Mr. Anthony used to demonstrate to the class what would happen to anyone who misbehaved. He would pick up a piece of chalk and draw an 'X' on the side of the nearest cupboard. He then whacked the cupboard with the Dap, and then would proudly show the class the sole of the Dap. Imprinted on the sole was a chalky 'X' mark! He then warned the class that, if he had any trouble, the 'X' would be drawn on the backside of the offending pupil, and the 'X' mark would be transferred using the method he just demonstrated! I only ever did see this actually demonstrated once on a live target, so perhaps his scare tactics really did work? Despite appearing to be a tough guy, he was always willing to sit down beside you, and have a one-to-one chat and collect input from individual pupils in his class. Sadly, I discovered some years ago when I met up an old school mate, Glyn Meek,

that Mr. Anthony after a long period of depression committed suicide. I don't know exactly when this sad event occurred, but I can't but help ask myself, did it happen after 1973 when Kingsholm School closed? Did he move on to teach elsewhere? What exactly caused his demise? Whatever the answers are to these questions, I do think that Mr. Anthony, although not liked by many pupils, was born to teach, and I can't imagine him in any other profession. Teaching fitted him like a glove, or perhaps I should I say, fitted like a Dap?

### Part THREE

Mr. (Jim) Ward was my class teacher when I was in class 3A (1968) and taught Mathematics. Mr. Ward was an ex RAF pilot, and was 'old school' in more ways than one. He was the only teacher in the entire school to resist progress and modernisation. He insisted that we use real ink pens, and therefore it was the only class in the entire school that had inkwells and an ink monitor! If you are thinking of fountain pens, then you are thinking about the wrong sort of pen. Mr. Ward's class pens were like bits of wood with nibs on! I am left handed, so I always had to ask for a pen with a 'left-handed nib'. If by any chance you wanted to improve the situation by purchasing your own fountain pen, it was forbidden for you to fill your personal fountain pen out of the inkwell on the desk! Blue ink stained fingers, pink blotting paper, those were truly messy days! There were times when we thought that Mr. Ward was a magician, because sometimes, when we made a mistake in our ink stained workbook, he would produce out of his desk an eye droplet bottle, and put a spot of clear fluid on your mistake or smudge, and the ink would disappear! What was this magic fluid we all wondered? Then one day his magic fluid ran out. He shouted out "Dix, (It was customary in those days to address pupils by their surnames.) You only live down the road don't you?" "Yes Sir!" replied Dix. "Then take this bottle, and ask your Mum if she would be so kind as to fill this bottle with BLEACH please." So at last, the secret of Mr. Ward's magic was out!

It wasn't long before a few of us had a bottle of magic fluid in our pockets for our own for personal emergencies. Mr. Ward always appeared to be a bit of a cool guy, never showing any emotion. One day he said to one of the pupils sat at the front "Holdgate, how is your father? I hear he has been ill." Richard tearfully replied, "He died Sir." You could hear a pin drop, Mr. Ward was the only one that was unaware of this sad fact, and you could detect that he was truly sorry for 'putting his foot in it'. I think that Mr. Ward never forgot that moment, and had no way of forgiving himself.

Mr. Ward used to also favour the cane (we called it the stick) when needed. One of his (unfair in my opinion) rules was this, when we were doing Geometry, we were all handed HB & HH pencils. Mr. Ward would point out, that the lead in an HH pencil is very fragile, and that if one was dropped on the floor, the lead would break 'inside' the pencil. "If you drop an HH pencil on the floor" he would say "Go out into the corridor, and wait there for me to give you the stick!" This ensured that we were VERY careful handling them. However, as Mr. Ward had the old style sloping desks with inkpots, which only had one shallow groove at the top for resting your pencils, it was only a matter of time before a pencil would escape to the floor.

Once in a Geometry lesson, we heard a pencil drop. No one got up and went outside, as per Mr. Ward's standing instructions. It was poor old Richard Crompton-Holgate who had dropped the **HH** pencil. The poor kid had frozen up from fear! "Go and wait for me in the corridor!" Mr. Ward shouted. Richard went outside, followed shortly by Mr. Ward. The class fell silent as we listened out for that distinctive 'whack' sound of the cane striking an outstretched hand. Richard came back into the class in a flood of tears. We all thought that it was very unfair that the only kid in the class who had recently lost his father should fall victim to this 'over the top' rule. Later that day, as all the classes were in the playground at break time, we learned something from a 4B pupil, who happened to be in the corridor running an errand when Richard got the stick. He said that Mr. Ward actually struck the WALL and not Richard's hand! This audible charade that was carried

out in the corridor was a very clever move by Mr.Ward, because we were fooled into thinking Richard had the stick, which put the fear of God into us, whilst also letting Richard off the hook! So perhaps this was Mr.Ward's way of saying, 'Sorry kid I didn't mean to upset you the other day'? This proved to me, that despite his apparent cool exterior, Mr.Ward did in fact have feelings and possibly a warm character.

#### Part FOUR

Mr.(Jock) Ross was my form teacher when I was in 4A, (1969) and taught us English. Mr.Ross was another strict teacher who used to punctuate his authority by using the cane. You just did NOT mess around in Mr.Ross' class! Quite often, he would leave the class, and threaten us with the cane if we misbehaved in his absence. It was the opinion of virtually every pupil in the class, that he had a fancy for Mrs.Stone, and that his leaving the class coincided with Mrs.Stone's free lessons. It was during such a time, when he was out of the class, when I had finished my work, and was getting bored. Idle hands are the devil's workshop, they say don't they?

I was trying to think up some harmless prank that I could play on one of my fellow classmates. I pulled out an old and very large BLACK felt marker pen from my pencil case. Although it had ran out of ink I found that the sponge inside was still inky enough to make your fingers black! I carefully removed the felt innards, and dropped it into Rob Lewis's (who sat in front of me) jacket pocket. Rob then put his hand in his pocket, and started to play with the various items in his pocket. He eventually pulled his hand out and was amazed to find his fingers covered in black ink! I really struggled to keep a straight face, because a smiling face usually revealed a prankster's identity. He decided to 'pass it on' to someone else. He dropped it into Phil (Horace) Hunt's pocket. Then when Phil put his hand in his pocket, he too came out with black inky fingers!

Phil though, saw me earlier dismantling the felt pen, so he immediately thought that it was I who put the felt in his pocket. He shouted "Mager! (Surnames were always used in those days) YOU did this didn't you?" "No!" I cried. Phil came up to me and used the inky felt to draw a big black mark across my face! (Meanwhile Rob was laughing his socks off!) My childish prank had backfired on me! So what was I to do? Just as soon as Jock Ross came back into the class, it would be obvious by the long black mark across my face that I had been up to no good! I had to work out what I could do about the situation. Should I just sit there, or should I just pop out to the cloakroom and wash the ink off my face? I chose the latter, only to bump into Mr.Ross in the corridor! Now one of Mr.Ross' favourite rules was "NEVER leave the class without permission". I, of course tried to explain why I felt the need to go to the washroom in a hurry, but Jock would not have any of it! So guess WHO had the stick that day? Oh well, that is one of the risks you must take if you want to mess around in class!

#### Part FIVE

Mr.Hopkins was our Deputy Head and taught Science and Mathematics. Mr.Hopkins was a very clever person. Not only did he teach Mathematics, he also was an author of Mathematic textbooks! He used to really enjoy trying out his new books on us! We always used to wonder just how many other schools and pupils were also suffering his 'super-hard' textbooks? Unlike his Maths lessons, which we found arduous and boring, Mr.Hopkins was a different person when teaching Science! I always used to feel that we never had enough double Physics lessons as they appeared to fly by! We used to have a two-week timetable, so we only had a double Science lesson every two weeks. I always used to ask myself "Why is it we don't get enough interesting lessons like Science, Art and Woodwork, and too many of the boring lessons like Maths, Geography and English literature?"

One day in our final (5<sup>th</sup>) year Mr.Hopkins brought in the Careers Officer to assist us in finding a job when we left school. It was a real anticlimax, as all he did was to hand out application forms for large local industries in the area such as Dowty Rotol and ICI. When it was my turn to ask him a question, I told him that I wanted to be an electrician. He claimed that there were NO such vacancies in the entire city of Gloucester! A few days later my pal Bill Williams (Billy Whizz) said that he got himself a job! I asked how he managed this, and he said that he simply walked into a shop and asked, "Have you got any jobs?" I decided to try this unusual but direct method. I walked into a firm at 49 Westgate St, called Parsons of Gloucester, Electrical Engineers. I asked "Have you got any vacancies for apprentice electricians?" I was taken upstairs to see Mr.Owen Parsons who asked me a few questions, and concluded by asking me to bring in my report book.

My report book, like most kids, was not particularly good! I used to hate taking mine home to show my parents, as I always thought it was inaccurate, as I often saw teachers copying over comments from previous entries. A few days later, Mr.Hopkins summoned me to his office. "I wonder what he wants I thought?" Mr.Hopkins informed me that he had a Mr.Parsons on the phone wanting to know more about me. Mr.Hopkins said that as my 'O' level results were much better than he expected, he felt that he owed me a favour, and that my achievement was not really supported by the remarks in my report. He told me that with this fact in mind, that he felt it only fair that he gave Mr.Parsons a good character reference which might help me get the job, and not to let him down if I did get the job.

Later that week I had a letter from Parsons asking me to come and see them again. They told me that as Mr.Hopkins spoke so highly of me, they had decided to offer me an apprenticeship! So my fondest memory of Mr.Hopkins, is that he helped me onto the first step on the staircase of life that leads from childhood to manhood, and that he played a very important part in helping me get my first job! So THANK YOU Mr.Hopkins!

## Part SIX

Mr.Wyatt was our Woodwork teacher. Although this was his only official subject, he also taught us a few 'extras' that was no part of the curriculum. He was very keen chess player, so he made sure that every class he taught was also taught how to play chess! Well, chess sets are made of wood aren't they? So perhaps he could argue it was a wood handling exercise? At the far end of the Woodwork workshop was a small room that Mr.Wyatt allowed the pupils to use as a tuck shop. The outside window was opened up and used as a counter to the pupils in the playground. At break time, the tuck shop sold goodies such as dripping cakes and crisps. These were simply sold through the window. Obviously this tuck shop could only operate with Mr.Wyatt's permission and oversight. Looking back, I wonder if this is why pupils never seemed to misbehave very often in Mr.Wyatt's class? After all, who would want to upset Mr.Wyatt and risk having the tuck shop closed down? The tuck shop was the only way to purchase such things once you were at school. There were no such thing as vending machines in those days AND you were not allowed out of the school premises at lunch break unless you went home for dinner. I would hazard a guess that about 95% of Kingsholm pupils lived too far away from Kingsholm to go home for lunch, even if you had a bicycle! We did not have school buses or parents running us to school in those days. If you didn't have a bike, you had to walk! Only on extremely rare occasions did Mr.Wyatt have to deal with naughty pupils. On such rare occasions, Mr.Wyatt did not use a dap, or a cane, but a steel rule! So if you broke the rules, you got the rule! Mr.Wyatt did a lot more for the school and the pupils than most. He would 'go that extra mile' as they would say. "How so?" you many wonder. Well, one day, when we were all arriving at school, there were loads of old fashioned school desks cluttering up the bottom playground. At first we thought that Mr.Ward had at last had to give up his ancient desks for new ones! When the bell rang we all piled inside, only so see

much to our disappointment, that Mr.Ward's old desks were still there! So where had all the old desks in the yard come from?

The first Woodwork class of the day soon found out. When they went to Mr.Wyatt's for their Woodwork lesson, he gave them a lesson they never expected. Pupils were supplied with screwdrivers, pliers and spanners, and were instructed to dismantle the desks in the yard. What had in fact had happened was that a Gloucester school, Hatherley Road I think, had closed down, and the pupils were moved onto other schools. Somehow, Mr.Wyatt managed to organise it, so that all the old desks were delivered to Kingsholm. Here was the interesting twist. He did not obtain them for using in the school, as this would have been a retrograde step, as they were as old if not older than Mr.Ward's desks. He obtained them for raw material, as those old desks were made of pure and solid OAK! Once these desks were stripped, all the oak wooden parts were stored away in the woodwork storeroom, whilst the metal frames were sold for scrap. From then on, we made all sorts of items in our Woodwork lessons out of the oak salvaged from these desks. I seem to remember wooden stools were one of the most popular items we made out of this timber. This is recycling at its best! Mr.Wyatt was yet another teacher who was way ahead of his time!

One of the things I clearly remember about Mr.Wyatt's lessons was the glue that he used to use. It was a super strong special mixture containing bone meal. It was so tough it had to be heated up on a gas ring before you could use it. When it was cold, it was hard as toffee. Once heated, it could be easily applied with a thick brush. This magic goo was applied to all the joints of all the woodwork items that were made in Mr.Wyatt's class. Mr.Wyatt used to often tell us "If you glue a joint together with this glue, it will never come apart! It might break somewhere else, but the joint will never fail!" I am sure that there are still many Woodwork class items that were made in Mr.Wyatt's lessons that are still in existence today out there somewhere. I know that the coffee table I made using Mr.Wyatt's glue, and oak from old Hatherley Road school desks is still in use to this day in my parent's house, and it is as strong as the day it was made. I doubt if any modern furniture will be around in 40 years time! Mr.Wyatt taught us something that is missing in this modern world. In contrast with today's 'throw away' world, Mr.Wyatt showed us how to reduce, waste, costs, to recycle and to make something that will last a very long time!

## Part SEVEN

Mr.(Basil ) Fowler. I have to admit, that Mr.Fowler was my favourite teacher. I just don't know what it was about him, he was more of a father figure than a teacher. He was always friendly, and showed a lot of patience when you did not get things right. He taught Metalwork and Technical Drawing. I just wish I paid more attention in those Metalwork lessons, as in later years, and to date, I like to renovate motorcycles, so a good knowledge of metalworking is a great advantage. I was very keen on Art, and one day I decided that Technical Drawing was, after all, Art with straight lines! One day I put every effort into my Technical Drawing project. I was very envious of Anthony King who always seemed to get 10 out of 10 for his work! No matter how hard I tried, I never could break the 9 out of 10 barrier! One day as I presented my work for marking to Mr.Fowler, he said, "Well done son. We will make a draughtsman out of you yet!" This inspired me to always try my best in Technical Drawing lessons. I never did ever get 10 out of 10 or beat Anthony King, but this encouragement meant that I joined a select few who were particularly interested in Technical Drawing that attended Mr.Fowler's evening classes. It was a foretaste to college really, as you were there to learn and better yourself. The loafers and wasters of our class did not attend the evening classes, as they were just not interested! Mr.Fowler treated us as young men, and not kids. As we were all then over 16 years of age, some of us used to turn up on our scooters and motorcycles. Ian Kay used to come on his Lamberetta, Nigel Harris his Honda Benley, and I on an old Vespa.

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I used to have this problem with the Vespa. The cooling fan used to fall off on a regular basis. Mr.Fowler offered to fix it for me one lunch break. He tapped new threads into the flywheel for me, and provided new bolts! Now do you see what I mean about being a father figure? I don't think you would find a teacher like Mr.Fowler in this day and age. The climax for me in my attempts to do better in Technical Drawing was when the school had the results for all the (O level) exams we sat in our final year. Apparently, I had the highest exam pass in Technical Drawing out of the entire school, **the entire school!** I am sure, that if it were not for Mr.Fowler's encouraging comments and tuition, I would have never been able to achieve this goal!

## EPILOGUE

As I have mentioned earlier, there were many more teachers, pupils and events that could be mentioned. I just wanted to put a few memories into print so that others could enjoy them, and maybe bring to mind a few memories for other ex-pupils of Kingsholm Secondary School. Perhaps others may like committing their memories into print as a tribute to the old school, teachers and fellow pupils of those days, which still appear to most of us as a recent memory.

In memory of all our friends and teachers who sadly are no longer with us.  
Sam Peck and Geoff Wilkins passed away in their prime. Others too have not made it to any significant age, such as our friend Glyn Meek who recently passed away on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2007.

We will miss you all, but will still keep you in our fondest memories.

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