

CAOKS
NEWS

ISSUE NO. 88 | WINTER 2024

Ladies Day Chester Races



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**CAOKS 158th
Annual Dinner**

Sat 22nd March, 2025
King's School



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Introduction and Contents



Celebrating former Headmaster Roger Wickson's 84th birthday earlier this year at the Shroppie Fly.



From The Editor *Steve Williams*

Welcome to the Winter edition of the CAOKS newsletter.

It's difficult to believe that we are in November once again as I write these words, and more likely December by the time you read this issue. Christmas is almost upon us and the shops have been telling us since September. Oh, for the days when Christmas wasn't just about sales and late-night shopping. Or maybe I'm just getting old and, consequently, nostalgic.

I lived in Rhosllanerchrugog for most of my childhood, so Wrexham was the nearest shopping destination. I can remember when late night shopping first arrived on a Thursday evening. How exciting it seemed back then – wandering the streets with my parents and listening to the Salvation Army band playing carols and smelling the roasted chestnuts being sold by a street vendor. Happy days indeed.

This issue we have a number of features and articles that I hope you will find interesting. Some OKS met up with former Headmaster Roger Wickson in Shropshire to celebrate his 84th birthday for example, along with part one of an article by CAOKS committee member A.D Jones (1990) about the time he swam the English Channel. I remember Andy being a good swimmer (coming from a guy who never learnt to swim for a number of reasons) but had no idea he had done something quite so significant.

We also continue with "Ten for Now and Then" which debuted last issue. The feedback to this new feature has been excellent and a number of people have submitted their own versions for future issues.

Happy Holidays to you all and all the very best for 2025!

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President and Officers' Messages



From the
President

Mark Thorp



From the
Secretary

Peter Bernie

Surely not another message encouraging you to come to an event 😊

Well yes – if you are looking at coming to an event, please think about choosing something convenient and where you've arranged to meet a few old mates, because it's likely to be more enjoyable chatting to them than talking to me.

The good news is that numbers attending are increasing, with 75 at the recent quiz and we've already got 26 signed up for the Snooker evening on November 8th and more than 70 for King's in the Capital at Lord's cricket ground on November 21st.

Curry & Quiz Night

In September, 75 alumni and parents in a packed Sixth Form Centre enjoyed their choice of one of two or three delicious curries and a few drinks, followed by an entertaining quiz expertly written and hosted by Dr Ravi Jayaram (OKS 1985).

The questions were set at just the right level for the twelve teams, so the winners scored 52/60, with the wooden-spooners trailing in with a respectable 35/60.

My team are already looking forward to next year (by which time we plan to have revised our 1970's and 1980's pop music).

PB

Summer seems to have passed by largely unnoticed this year. It's now early October and the rain has already been coming down for weeks – its looking like a long winter!

The country is of course under new management – in most walks of life this apparently has had little or no effect, certainly until the Budget is unveiled at the end of October. Independent Schools are one of the few areas already in the firing line with the forthcoming imposition of VAT on fees. The School has survived significant changes to its financing on many occasions in the past and I'm sure will come through relatively unscathed this time.

November will see the Kings in the Capital event at Lord's, the Home of Cricket. So many King's alumni live and work in and around London and this is the ideal opportunity for them to get together. The venue is very special, not just to the many of us interested in Cricket and it promises to be a memorable evening.

The 2025 Association Annual dinner will be held on 22 March 2025 at The School. Robin Hardi's message outlines the changes we have made to the format of the evening. Hopefully we will have struck the right balance between the traditions of the event and the need to modernise in some areas. Please support the dinner if you can – it's a great reason to meet up with friends from school days and stay in touch.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to wish all CAOKS members and the Kings community a Merry Christmas and a very happy year in 2025.

MT



Officers' Messages



From the
Dinner
Secretary

Robin Hardi

Annual Dinner Menu 2025

Starters

*Ham Hock and Pea Terrine,
pickled baby vegetables, spiced plum jam*

*Goats cheese and wild mushroom croquette,
pickled baby vegetables, truffle aioli*



Main Courses

*Slow Braised Daube of beef,
horseradish creamed potato,
honey roast chantonay carrot, savoy cabbage,
crispy bacon bits glazed silver skin onions.*

Butternut, chestnut sage and blue cheese risotto



Dessert

*Individual rhubarb crumble tart,
poached rhubarb, crème patisserie*



You are cordially invited to the CAOKS 158th Annual Dinner on Saturday 22nd March at the Kings School, from 6.30pm.

The Annual Dinner has always been a key social event in the alumni calendar as an opportunity to bring alumni and their guests together for an enjoyable evening.

The school has kindly agreed to host the event and the catering team has proposed an excellent menu, details of which can be found here (right) and on the ticket website.

The dress code remains black tie but don't let that put you off, smart attire is also acceptable.

There is also an option to partake in a tour of the school buildings. Please state when booking tickets if you would be interested in the school tour.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Regards

Robin Hardi

Link to tickets below:

<https://www.kingschester.co.uk/caoks-158th-annual-dinner/>



Headmaster's Message



From the
Headmaster

*George
Hartley*

Dear all,

I start this introduction with the terribly sad news that, as many of you will have already heard, we lost an outstanding Removes pupil called Evan Rothwell in a road accident outside school earlier in the term. Fun-loving, ebullient and, as an Entry Scholar, extremely bright and academically curious, Evan lit up the world of all around him at King's despite his short time with us having joined from St Werburgh's & St Columba's Primary School in September. I have no doubt that a young man of such potential would have gone on to excel in every regard at the school and at this time, our thoughts are very much with his family. It has naturally been a sombre and reflective time, though we have drawn great strength from the many messages of support from the broader community and from the countless tributes to Evan. We hope to work with Evan's family to create a lasting legacy to him at King's, that will always remind us of such a superb pupil.

The latest in our flurry of building developments over recent years has been the redevelopment and rejuvenation of The Wickson Library which now provides a magnificent, state-of-the-art facility for the students to support their reading, research and as a highly effective and welcoming space to work. The library also accommodates a new 'Careers@ Kings' area to support the students with this essential part of our educational provision. I would like to thank all of you who have supported careers events over recent years, such as the Careers Fairs and the Friday Careers Breakfasts, and likewise encourage anyone who would like to promote or talk about their careers, to volunteer yourself for a future event. With the rapidly changing modern world so full of challenges and also opportunities, it's

more important than ever that our students are inspired to follow careers that will provide self-fulfilment and satisfaction.

In my last introduction I mentioned the political and economic headwinds that were coming down the track for independent schools and it's fair to say that these are now gusting up for what will be quite a storm in the new year. We are fortunate to be in a relatively strong position as a school with decent finances and healthy pupil numbers, but we are not and never have been a wealthy school and will need to navigate these challenges with great care and attention over the next few years. As such, support for our bursary programme, which allows children from low-income backgrounds in the area to attend King's, has never been so important and we do rely on the generosity of others to maintain such transformational opportunities for young people. If there is anyone who feels they benefitted from King's and would like to support a local boy or girl today with the same opportunity (this can be done easily and in different ways), please don't hesitate to contact me at the email address below.

Having recently enjoyed a mini-CAOKS reunion in Manchester (the latest in a series of regional CAOKS events around the country), we are looking forward to our major alumni events next term, including welcoming back to school all those who left in a year ending in '5' and, of course, the annual CAOKS dinner with its new date in March. As ever, I encourage you to attend these events if possible, it's always great to have a healthy turn out, and this year as an extra incentive, there will be an opportunity to say goodbye to the legendary Steve Downey who has decided to retire after a remarkable 37 years of outstanding service to the school. I look forward to seeing many of you at one of these events soon.

George Hartley

hm@kingschester.co.uk



Letter to the Editor

Possibly a one/off feature this one. I was delighted to receive an email from former King's School member of staff Mr. Norman Hallas who taught Geography and Economics back in my day. He was also one of the members of staff who gave up many Saturdays to officiate in school sporting fixtures. Having checked with Norman first, I decided to publish his letter for our readers as I'm sure many will remember him well.

Dear Mr Editor,

I hope you accept this rather late response to a CAOKS Newsletter you were kind enough to send me some time ago. As an octogenarian carer, it takes some time to put pen to paper.

I am writing in response to your obituary column and partly because my name was mentioned, and I am trying to avoid this response becoming my obituary.

First, I was astonished to hear of the death of Reg Read. I was in the seventh week of that awful 100-day 'flu' and the news rather knocked me back somewhat, particularly as I had taken early retirement on health grounds whereas I regarded Reg as something of an "Iron Man ". Readers may not know that our paths crossed several times.

I went with Reg to School Camp near Abersoch, we seemed to take it in turns to monitor the accounts of several school productions and presiding over the annual Times Newspaper regional final at the Grosvenor Hotel in Chester. The big difference was that Reg always knew what he was doing. I still do that crossword and I think he would be bemused that I actually do manage to finish it on occasion. He was kind enough to select me to play for staff cricket and football teams and I did manage to score a winning goal against Chester Nomads to his bemusement.

Peter Bernie mentions my reading the register. I wonder if he recalls my doing so in the Junior School on one occasion, in the manner of a popular children's tv programme of the time, viz "Pugh, Pugh, Barney

McGrew,,etc". I think I was the only teacher to teach the then VIIth Form at one end of the school and then rush to the far end to the Junior School, frequently missing lunch.

Another name I could mention is Chris Moore. He died a while back but he and I joined King's at the same time. Our families were very close and we holidayed together. Yes, you've guessed it, to Abersoch.

May I mention that I've heard from several old boys, all of whom had only kind words, for example Chris Woolfe and Sir Robin Spencer. The latter was able to remind me of the names on a 3rd XI photo we both have. The years came flooding back.

Finally, I'll mention my good friend Adrian Wilson (English). Time passes and he has recently retired from the post he moved to in Kent. He and I were folk club aficionados. We even tried "jamming " in our kitchen. I'm pleased to say that Adrian is still pursuing his virtuosity in fiddle and mandolin.

Just a final thought. I've had several phone calls but, in the best modern manner, my smart phone doesn't accept them unless an identifying voicemail is left. Or you may come across my daughter who has legal connections with the King's School and frequently meets many Old Boys.

Kind Regards

Norman Hallas



BATY Overseas VS Award

Margot Melville (OKS 2024) is the latest recipient of the BATY Overseas Voluntary Service Award, which is sponsored by CAOKS. We always ask the recipient to write a few words ahead of their trip. Here's what Margot had to say.

On January 4th 2025 I will be travelling to Sri Lanka for 5 weeks to complete my volunteering programme, thanks to the contribution from the BATY award scheme. I will be working with the charitable organisation known as The Mighty Roar, which provides placement opportunities for volunteers to work with local communities to support such projects as animal conservation, education, childcare and many more.

My choice of selecting the location of Sri Lanka was primarily due to the existence of poorly provisioned and understaffed schools within a country where education is valued hugely. This developed my interest of volunteering in a place where I knew I could work alongside local teachers and other volunteers from around the world to support local children and their love of learning. Moreover, due to the low staffing levels, these preschools often rely on volunteers to provide time and attention to the children to enable them to thrive and develop lifelong skills, particularly in their acquisition of the English language.



For my specific volunteering programme, I have chosen the childcare option, primarily contributing to the care and education of young children in one of two preschools, in either a preschool called Happy Kids in a

village called Akurala on the south coast which was devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Alternatively, I may be placed in Sasmita Pre School, regarded as the largest preschool in the area, providing one on one attention and support to children who are taught in generally overcrowded classrooms.



My role as a volunteer is to encourage the children I interact with in an energetic and creative manner to inspire their learning and to also boost their confidence. This would involve my daily routine of working Monday to Friday, between 7.30am and 11.30am firstly preparing the classroom to ensure a productive learning environment, before assisting the class with teaching basic English. Within the afternoon, my role becomes more collaborative with the other volunteers, where we will plan activities for the next day, as well as having the opportunity to get involved with wider community teaching classes for older children, aged 6-10 years old.



When I am there, I will be based between the two villages of Hikkaduwa and Ambalangoda, both rich in culture and Buddhist history, providing me with the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the



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environment I will be living in. During my weekends off, I will be able to further explore Sri Lanka more widely with The Mighty Roar’s exploration scheme with trips to the ancient fort of Galle and using the famous Nine Arches Bridge.



We look forward to hearing more about the trip when Margot returns.

Ladies Day Chester Races



On Friday, 10th May, we revisited Chester Racecourse for our second annual ladies’ day event for female alumnae. Our guests were greeted in the Final Furlong hospitality tent with a refreshing glass of fizz before being escorted to the King’s School tables.

Each guest received a race day essentials bag, thoughtfully provided by the Alumni office. Packed with items including plasters, hair grips, mints, and comfy flip flops to ease the strain on their feet after a day in heels, they were well-prepared for the event!

A delightful four-course grand buffet lunch was enjoyed by all, with drinks flowing freely as former students caught up and reminisced with old friends. Trackside, the vibrant atmosphere was enhanced by the sunny weather as we cheered on the horses and celebrated the victorious moments! The thrill and camaraderie heightened as the races unfolded throughout the day; the air was filled with laughter and cheers as the ladies placed their bets and supported their chosen horses, creating an infectious and lively ambience.

Harriet Fisher (OKS 2016) was delighted to be back at the event.

She said: “After attending the inaugural event in 2023, we were eager to join again and have been looking forward to it all year. It has been like our own Christmas countdown on the anticipation scale! We all had such a great time last year, and this year has been just as amazing!”



As the sun set, the ladies left Chester Racecourse with a sense of shared happiness and contentment. The event was a resounding success.

With the event already a firm fixture in their diaries, it is a tradition that this year’s guests will enjoy for years to come. We are already looking forward to the third annual ladies’ day and you can register your interest for next year’s event [here](#) or via the King’s website.



CAOKS Golf Day 2024

The Annual CAOKS Golf Day took place at Helsby Golf Club on July 12th, organised by Nigel Cunniffe and Rob MacKenzie. I caught up with Nigel via email to get his thoughts on how the day went.



Nigel Cunniffe and Nigel Evans OBE

“We had a super day. I think we had 16 golfers , and I had the pleasure of playing with Nigel Evans, OBE and an ex King’s boy who knows my father and brother very well. Also Mike Hurleston who was a footballer like me from a few years ahead (he has aged rather better than I have!).



Mike Hurleston and Mikey Moore

Mikey Moore won the day and the trophy, and we had a jolly nice day. The only one who didn’t dress appropriately for dinner was (CAOKS President) Mark, but he is such a nice chap we forgave him.”

Christmas Message

I consider it a distinct privilege to be asked to write for the CAOKS newsletter. I am not an alumnus, but I am a parent at Kings. I have two boys who continue to flourish and grow. We chose Kings in part because of its pastoral shape and it’s servant leadership. We are deeply indebted to Kings and the many people who work, serve and support the school either financially or in time and volunteering. So may I take this

opportunity to say thank you to all of you. One day, both my boys will be joining you in the rich heritage of being King’s Alumni.

I had written a piece before the tragic accident that Mr Hartley refers to in his welcome. In light of this awful loss, I have re-written my reflection. My previous piece focussed on the resilience that is developed through a robust commute to school. There will be another time to reflect on this. However, we as parents, alumni, staff and all those who care for children desperately want our children’s journey to school to be as safe as it can be. If you have not yet signed the petition to reduce the speed limit outside of King-s, please may I encourage you to do it now -

<https://www.change.org/p/wrexham-road-roman-crescent-junction>

Light in the darkness

King’s has a pastoral shape which cares deeply for the students whilst keeping a high level of focus on hard work and academic achievement. It is a good school that when a tragedy happens the staff aren’t just professional and provide care but also feel the deep emotions of good people who care for other people. This should never be under appreciated especially at a time like this. There is a deep, universal grief in Kings at present. The loss of a Removes pupil is heart breaking. Many of us knew Evan. He was a bright, joy filled and fun-loving boy who brought light wherever he went.

As a family, we have recently discovered that Evan loved Christmas lights. Christmas lights shine in the darkness. They draw the eyes. They cheer our hearts. Christmas is not an easy time for many. There are many things that make this time of year difficult. Finance. Loss. Loneliness. And for many – darkness.

Darkness is not bad. It helps us sleep. It can be very peaceful. Beautiful even. But without light, darkness is not really darkness – it is more like nothingness. For too many at this time of year there is a feeling of nothingness. A deep dull ache. However, when even the smallest light appears in nothingness, the darkness starts to move, take shape. The light becomes the thing that is prominent. It draws the eyes and wakes up the sleepy mind. It stirs joy within us. It gives hope that there is more to see. One of the most emotionally powerful types of light is a small light in a dark place. A



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candle perhaps. It becomes so very beautiful to look at. For some of us, we could look at it for long periods of time without looking away.

We can be light in people's darkness. Your smile. Your encouragement. Your presence. For so many the world is such a dark place and they desperately need light. Jesus said that He was the light of the world. What a claim! But how did He show us that He was the light of the world?

He loved the unlovely.
He spent time with the sick.
He gave status to the outcast.
He comforted those who mourn.

He subtly but powerfully stood up to abusive power and brought about societal change.

He gave up his life for the world and taught his disciples to live lives doing the same.

At this Christmas time, we are reminded that God in the flesh, Emmanuel, Jesus, did not step into the world as a burning raging fire, but as a gentle, loving light. God raised Jesus from the dead and promised to all the hope of eternal life. A life of light and hope where He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things will have passed away.

Jesus claimed He was the light of the world. He sends his followers out as light bearers to bring comfort and joy in this Christmas season. With the world in turmoil, so many people displaced and so much loss, may I encourage you to be a light bearer this Christmas season.

Rev Jonathan Phillips (St. Peter's at the Cross)

Cathedral Carol Service 2023

Every year during December I plan a trip to Aberystwyth to visit my parents for a few days and do the present drop as many of us do who can't be with family at Christmas time. So last year I thought I'd tie this trip in with attending the School Carol Service at Chester Cathedral. The last time I attended such a service would have been 1989 if memory serves.

I actually travelled up to Chester on the 14th and stayed the night at The Mill Hotel and Spa, which is just a 5-minute stroll into town. Having checked in I had a good wander around town that evening, taking in the Christmas lights and seeing how so many things had changed since I was regularly out and about in Chester. I think this was only the 4th time I had been back since leaving school in 1990.

Of course, so many of the shops I remember were long gone but it was enjoyable to walk about town and along the rows where I can remember hanging out back in the 80's. Despite 34 years of change, there was still a certain familiarity about the place. The only downside of the trip was that I ended up with a horrendous cold, which led to a trip to Boots before the service to stock up.

On arriving at the Cathedral, I met up with fellow CAOKS committee member and fellow Class of 1990 "reprobate" AD Jones. It quickly became evident that I wasn't the only one struggling with the lurgy as Andy was full of a cold too. This didn't dampen our spirits and we both enjoyed the service despite the coughing and sniffing. It's very good that the school reserve some seats for CAOKS members near the front of the cathedral as the event really is standing room only otherwise.

Whilst there I also met up with other CAOKS committee members Peter Bernie (Secretary) and Mark Thorp (President) along with Gemma Carvell from the Alumni Office and the Headmaster himself. It was a thoroughly enjoyable morning and I hope to be able to attend many more in the coming years, despite currently living near Southampton.

Following the service, I said my goodbyes and jumped in the car – destination Aberystwyth. The drive was not an enjoyable one due to the cold, which had gotten much worse. I only stayed briefly with my parents as I did not want to pass on the lurgy to them of course.

I don't get to visit Chester as often as I would like but the Christmas Carol Service is a big draw for me, maybe due to my Dad being a Vicar but if you are attending the service and you happen to see me about – please come over and say hello. It's always great to catch up. (Ed)



Alumni and School News

Calendar of Events

If you would like to book onto an event, please visit
www.kingschester.co.uk/alumni/alumni-events/ or call Gemma on 01244 689492

- **2024 Leavers Catch Up**

Thurs 2nd Jan, 2025 – The Ship Inn, Handbridge

King's are hosting a catch up for this year's leavers on Thursday 2nd January at The Ship Inn in Handbridge from 6.30pm.

It's a great opportunity to catch up with friends you haven't seen for a while and let Mr Carter and other teachers know what you've been up to.

- **1995/05/15 Reunions**

Sat 8th Feb, 2025 – King's School 2:30pm

- **2000/01/10/11 Reunions**

Sat 8th Mar, 2025 – King's School 2:30pm

Due to covid we were unable to host a reunion in 2020 for our 2000 and 2010 leavers and again in 2021 for our 2001 and 2011 leavers, so we would like to put things right.

- **CAOKS 158th Annual Dinner**

Sat 22nd March, 2025 – King's School

All alumni spanning the decades are invited to join us for what promises to be a fabulous evening of great food, good wine and camaraderie! See menu details elsewhere in this issue.

- **1955/65/75/85 Reunion**

Sat 26th April, 2025 – King's School 11:30am

- **Ladies Day – Chester Races**

Fri 9th May, 2025

After the success of the past 2 years join us for our very own Ladies Day at Chester Races. Tickets are £80.00 per person, RRP over £400.00! This is the perfect opportunity for our female leavers to connect and enjoy time together within the Festival Village, at the Boodles May Festival. A highlight of the racing calendar.

- **CAOKS Cricket v School**

Fri 20th June, 2025 – King's School

Looking forward to this one as it had to be cancelled this year. If you are interested in playing for the CAOKS XI then please get in touch

- **Henley Tea Party**

July, 2025

Date TBC for this popular event in the diary

- **CAOKS Golf Day**

July 2025

Date and venue TBC. Please get in touch with Nigel Cunniffe or Rob MacKenzie regarding this one.

- **Rowing v School**

July 2025

Date TBC. 2024 event was unable to take place due to the river being too high.

- **Bangor National Hunt**

Will Lamb is organising another edition of the ever-popular alumni event. Date TBC.



Features

King's Rowing in 1950

Michael wrote to me some time ago now wanting to submit his piece on King's rowing in 1950. It's one of the most enjoyable parts of this role when you receive an email from an OKS and immediately conversation is struck up. Can't beat that in my opinion.

Sorry it's taken a little while for the article to feature in the newsletter, but all's well that ends well and here we are finally. Over to Michael...(Ed)

I was delighted to read of the success of King's Rowing a couple of issues back. It was very different in 1950. (Michael attended King's between 1942-1952 with years 1942-45 spent at Arnold House.)

I joined the Rowing Club in 1949, partly because I had already decided to join the Royal Navy and I thought that Rowing would look good on my "CV" to get into Dartmouth (not that a CV was a concept in those days). At the time the Rowing Club had two fours, pre-war hand-me downs from the Grosvenor Rowing Club, whose clubhouse we used. These were just sufficient for interhouse competitions, and I was soon put in the Lindans' four. The school first and second fours were selected from the house fours and practised against each other before the Chester Regatta. I don't think there were any other representative races.

We had very little training before starting to practise as a crew, and I remember once catching a terrible crab which tore the rowlock stays off the gun whale with the oar trapping me against the seat. The boat was out of action for a while undergoing repairs, reducing training capacity by 50%. I was not popular with the master who ran Rowing nor the Captain of Rowing, Ken Powell. However, the following year the master (whose name, regrettably, I have forgotten) asked me to be the Club Treasurer. Ask meant told, but the financial duties were not onerous; I had to collect a small subscription (half a crown, I think) each season from the members (which required some arm-twisting of impecunious school fellows) and hand it over to the master. What happened to it then I do not know, except possibly to contribute towards the club's annual hot-pot supper. This was a popular event as we were also allowed to drink beer.



Royal Navy Cutter 1952

In 1952, I having passed the navy written examination, I went to Dartmouth for the Admiralty Interview, a gruelling couple of days which included physical tests and several interviews. To my surprise, the admiral leading the board interview was unimpressed in the course in which I had done well at the Aberdovey (Aberdyfi to me Ed) Outward Bound Sea School in late 1951 but seemed genuinely interested that I was the treasurer of the King's Chester Rowing Club. None of the board members were young enough to have been at Dartmouth when it moved to Eaton Hall in



Features

the war years – and rowed and sailed in naval boats on the Dee - so I have always assumed that there was some reflected glory from the Treasurers of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Clubs.

Whatever the reason, it helped me pass the interview to embark on a rewarding career, so I am very grateful.

In the Royal Navy, rowing was known as “Pulling” and was very different, the boats had to be larger and heavier to be seaworthy workboats. I did plenty of that of course, but did manage occasionally to get back into a shell with other shipmates who had rowed at school or university - on one occasion in a scratch event against the Christiania Roklub in Oslo Fjord, quite different to the Dee.

Michael Ellis (OKS 1952)

“It Lurked Beneath The Surface Pt 1”

Well, I believe this will be a first for the CAOKS newsletter – a two-part article. Yes, tune in next time and all that jazz haha! Let me explain.....

Andy Jones (OKS 1990) who is now a CAOKS committee member was always a strong swimmer at school, but I had no idea he had taken on the English Channel. As soon as he mentioned this to me a few months back, I thought this would make a great feature.

The next issue will complete the story of the event itself. So, without further ado – over to AD.

It lurked just beneath the surface, utterly invisible in the darkness and chop. Unlike the bioluminescence sparkling along my arms, it didn't glow. While they brought me joy in a cold dark world it was going to bring pain. The venomous, multi-tentacled snot-like blob heavily bumped off my elbow and nonchalantly stroked my exposed flesh. It got me good. Better than any species of jellyfish had ever done before. The pain was breathtaking. Imagine a bear slashing you open with his claws in one long stroke from your elbow, through your armpit to the tops of your feet. Now imagine salt, vinegar and a Carolina Reaper chilli rubbed into those open wounds. That's what it felt like for nearly 8 hours before fading.

On the Pilot's boat my support crew knew nothing of the self-doubt I was struggling with. The cold? Probably. The nausea from the confused chop? Possibly. That I'd swum into a bad jellyfish? No mistaking it. The yell and subsequent prolific expletives were audible over the engine even with 98% of it screamed into the water.

10 minutes later I swam into another.

I loathe the creatures, but oddly the stings helped as the pain utterly distracted me from the daunting task ahead and halted my downward spiral of self-doubt. I was forced to live in the moment and keep on swimming if I wanted to stay alive, three strokes breathe, three strokes breathe. Get it under control, no anaphylaxis, you're still functioning.

I'd only been swimming for a few minutes and getting stung is almost a rite of passage for an English Channel swimmer. But stung this badly? I couldn't quit so soon into the swim. Eventually there was light up to my right where my crew illuminated a whiteboard. All it said was “30[mins]” but mentally it was a warm hug, and, in that moment, I resolved just to get to my first feed at 2 hours. I wouldn't be able to hear my crew with my ear plugs, but it wouldn't matter, it would be human contact.



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I had been told that in difficult periods on long distance swims you truly just swim from one point of human contact to the next. Now I realized how superficial my appreciation of that statement was. So human contact to human contact is how it progressed. Feed at 2 hours, feed at 3 hours and then... then I was enjoying it. I was swimming across the English Channel. Solo. Bucket list top item.

Why? (Why? Why? & Why?)



“You’re so good you’ll swim the Channel one day” the swim teacher said when I graduated from her class and into squad swimming. Coincidentally around the same time I started at King’s as a Remove. I would never forget what she said. It sat in my brain, gnawing at me for over 30 years until I decided to exorcise that demon. At the time my wife and I, and our two boys, lived on the Atlantic coast just outside Boston, USA. I was stepping down from the engineering consultancy I had co-founded and I had just undergone a shoulder surgery. I needed a goal to keep me rehabilitate and transition away from an intense career. What better than attempting the world’s most iconic swim I thought?

Except for a 14-year hiatus due to the travelling lifestyle of a consultant I’d been a swimmer since I graduated from arm bands at the relatively late age of 9 yrs. While at King’s I took motivation from the Honours Board that watched over where we used to have lunch, it had the names of all the students who had gone to Oxford or Cambridge and earned a Blue. I could see rowing, football, boxing, athletics, chess (!?) but not swimming so I resolved to change that. I was one of seven from the 1990 leavers that had the good fortune to go to Cambridge and I kept my promise earning a Full Blue each of the 4 years I was there.

How arduous is it?

There’s a quote that “Channel swimming is 80% mental and 20% everything else”. I think that’s quite accurate, and there’s a lot in that 20%. The Channel is known as “The Mount Everest of swimming” but interestingly 6,664 people have summited Mt Everest in the 70 years since it was first climbed, whereas only 1,881 swimmers have successfully swum the Channel in the 150 years since it was first swum in 1875 by Captain Matthew Webb. (Figures as of January 2024)

It’s 21 miles from England to France (E2F) as the crow flies from Samphire Hoe beach to the tip of Cap Gris Nez. But this fictional crow does not have to deal with wind, waves, jellyfish, salt water, cold, currents, tides, shipping, debris etc. A successful swimmer will swim closer to 27 miles due to varying in direction, and physically can travel well over 40 miles due to the currents. Nautically it’s split into 5 zones: British In-shore Waters, The Southwest Shipping Lane, Separation Zone, The Northeast Shipping Lane and then if you are lucky, it is French In-shore Waters.

The French banned Channel Swimming 30 years ago but due to a quirk in the international laws of the sea they can’t stop you swimming over from England. The French authority’s displeasure was evident when I crewed for a friend



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and could hear the radio traffic, the English Coastguard checked on progress, wished the swimmer good luck, and advised shipping to move to the other side of the Southwest shipping lane accordingly. Once in the French controlled Northwest shipping lane the Pilot repeatedly radioed the French Coastguard to alert them and after the 7 attempts came "Yeah, I 'ear you but I don't care. Be quiet". Maybe we smelt of elderberries!?

Not long after we were nearly run over by an oil tanker that altered course mere seconds before the Pilot fired his emergency flares and we dragged the swimmer out. The French ban has increased the cachet of the swim as swimming from France is much easier given currents. Times were routinely 5 or 6 hours quicker than swimming from England.

You must book a Coastguard registered Pilot, pass a medical and successfully complete a 6-hour qualifying swim in water below 16°C before you can be considered for a licence for your attempt. Every 24 hours around 600 commercial ships transit the Channel with 80-100 cross Channel ferry journeys to add to that.

Summer water temperature varies from 11 to 18°C depending on when you swim, where you are in the Channel (it's warmer at France), the weather and how busy the shipping lanes are (big ships pull up the cold water from deep down). Wetsuits are not permitted, nor is any form of physical support, buoyancy aid or a neoprene cap. Just a standard swimsuit, goggles and a latex or silicone swim cap. Some anti chafing grease is used as saltwater chafes, but no one covers themselves in gobs of goose fat.

Without adequate preparation, a Pilot, highly competent crew, and good weather your chances of making it across are zero. Much of the preparation therefore focuses on minimizing the risks not just the ability to swim the distance. Despite the precautions there have been 5 fatalities in the last 15 years and unfortunately Douglas Waymark lost his life not far from me during my own swim.

The biggest killer is SIPE (Swimming Induced Pulmonary Edema) and every year there are several near misses resulting in rescue and hospitalization, sometimes hours after a successful crossing. It's an insidious event where your lungs slowly fill with your own body fluid. By the time you notice you are short of breath you need oxygen and medical assistance PDQ, unfortunately some keep pushing, or are encouraged to do so by their crew, a decision that has proven to be fatal.

The currents off Cap Gris Nez are notoriously unpredictable and so swift that anchored buoys create white breakers. This dooms many a swimmer within touching distance of France. Capt. Webb himself was stuck here for 5 hours before being swept up the coast to Calais.

How do you train for it?

Please watch this hugely entertaining video by Max Beer! Search for "Want to swim the English Channel? Here's how to start!" or go to <https://vimeo.com/177445546>

Pilots book up 2 years out and that's when the training starts. I ramped up from 4 ½ hours of high intensity interval training (HIIT) in the pool per week to 18 hours of HIIT in the pool plus 6 hours of weightlifting before transitioning to cold water acclimatization with 4 months to go.

Cold water starts with 2 x 15 min swims in water at about 10°C and builds to back-to-back 7-hour swims on consecutive days a few weeks later by which time the water has hopefully warmed to 14°C. No warm showers or external heat after the swims, you want to avoid shock and train your body to warm from within.



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In parallel to this you are:

Eating like a horse to keep up with training needs and to put on a layer of 'bioprene'. I added 10kg of muscle and blubber. Trialling different pre and intra swim feeds and feed strategies. What seems good on land often doesn't work in rough cold water and many times involuntarily fed the fish following me. Preparing your crew to look after you. Checking for hypothermia, SIPE and exhaustion. Supplying feeds (& the occasional treat), medications for pain and nausea, and passing messages on.

Selecting your swim gear. The wrong suit will chafe badly. Swim cap needs to stay on despite sunscreen and grease. Goggles must cope with different light conditions, be comfortable for hours whilst tight enough not to dislodge in waves, and you do not want them to fog up!

Did anything go wrong?



To have time to adapt to events life might throw at me I started training 2 years before my window. Sure enough I tore my knee cartilage and required surgery 15 months before my swim, but the wheels really fell off when my hip failed with a year to go. I went to my qualifying swim on crutches and painkillers and dragged myself around jellyfish infested cold water for 6 hours. The hardest thing I've ever done. Total hip replacement was required but the surgery, 10 months before my window, went wrong. I needed emergency revision surgery, and the resulting loss of blood and physical trauma kept me out of the water until with 6 months to go I restarted with a single 25-yard swim.



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Roger Wickson's 84th Birthday



Former Headmaster Roger Wickson emailed Peter Bernie, CAOKS Hon Sec, earlier this year and expressed his regret at not being able to attend the CAOKS functions in Chester. He raised the possibility of a get together at his local, The Shroppie Fly in Audlem.





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After discussions with various CAOKS members, Peter proposed Saturday 11 May 2024, and Roger accepted, pointing out was a lovely choice, falling on his 84th birthday.



The informal event, organised by CAOKS, brought together around 15 Old King's Scholars.

Andrew Hobson (OKS 1997), who was present, described the event as "an amazing get together". He went on to say: "Roger was on top form and everyone was in high spirits. Everyone enjoyed Roger's impromptu speech after we sang Happy Birthday"

During the gathering, Headmaster George Hartley showcased the new CAOKS tie, which received admiration from those in attendance who were keen to support the Old King's Scholars Association with a purchase. Ties can also be purchased online [here](#).



The event provided a heart-warming scene as old friends reconnected, shared memories, and reminisced about their school days. The camaraderie and nostalgic atmosphere resonated with everyone present. As the evening ended, many expressed gratitude to Roger and his wife Susan for hosting the wonderful event, with unanimous agreement that it should happen again soon.

The gathering embodied the enduring friendships and shared bond within the King's Scholars community and we look forward to the 85th birthday lunch in 20



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“Ten for Now and Then” - Saul Marks (OKS 1998)

“Ten from Now and Then” puts the following questions to a different former student each issue. We would love to hear from anyone who would like to take part in this new feature. Whether you left the school 5 years ago or 75 years ago, it doesn’t matter. If you fancy taking part, you can drop me line at the usual address. Editor@caoks.co.uk



1. When did you begin your journey at King's and do you recall your initial impressions?

I started at King’s in Removes in September 1991, having come from four wonderful years at Kingsmead

School in Hoylake. Both were thanks to the government’s assisted places scheme and parents who made huge sacrifices for both myself and my late sister.

My parents – my dad in particular – had made me aware of how lucky I was to attend such a historic and reputable school, and the smell of the freshly oiled main wooden corridor and the image of Mr Leyshon and other senior, greying teachers gliding down it in black robes certainly made it feel like a privileged and ancient seat of education!

2. What was/were your favourite subject(s)?

I always enjoyed maths, languages and history, for a variety of reasons.

3. Who was your favourite teacher and why?

I can’t just choose one! I think the best teacher I had was Catherine Hill, who taught in Room 5. Unusually for me, I found myself in the lower of the two maths sets for GCSE in 4th & 5th Form. We had Mrs Hill, while the higher set had Mr Higgins. Mrs Hill was so skilful, she made everything so simple and we all understood it. In the 4th Form end-of-year exams, which served as GCSE mocks, our set averaged a higher grade than the higher set, which was testament to Mrs Hill’s teaching. I went

on to do maths at A-Level, so she taught me for four years in total.

Another stand-out teacher was Seb Neal, who joined in my second year. He didn’t teach me history till 6th Form, when I discovered his passionate, high-octane teaching style. I’ll never forget him jumping on the desks in our first term in L6, yelling “Six-three! Six-three!” to demonstrate Mirabeau riling up the crowds in the French Revolution, by referencing Man United’s recent 6-3 loss to Southampton. I had a lot of dealings with Seb through cricket too (see below).

One more is Richard Elmore, who arrived as a supply teacher when “Api” Johnson broke down irreparably around my fourth year. His wry sense of humour made biology bearable until I could give it up after GCSE.

Any finally, I can’t not mention Mike Fox, who initially refused to teach me German in 3rd Year because I’d only got AAB in my Shell end-of-year language exams and German was only available if you’d got three As. After my parents wrote to Mr Wickson, he relented. It was his last year before retirement and he proved to be an incredible teacher. Now, at 44, I can still chant ending tables, the definite article tables and the four preposition lists from memory! He was simply that good.

4. Did you take part in any organised sports at King's?

I was a very enthusiastic footballer but never quite a good enough one. My pinnacle was as 3rd XI captain in 1996/97, in which Steve Downey kept subbing me off at half-time, to my deep frustration!

However, I was also asked to coach the U13 ‘B’ team the following year, which was great fun and a responsibility I took very seriously. We had a good squad, including



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Danny Thompson, Cam McGimpsey, Cei Sanderson, Alex Bohdanowicz, Pryderi Thomas and the late Tom "Toca" Arnold. Our highlight was going to Manchester Grammar and beating them 5-1.

But cricket scoring was my main thing. Having stepped into the breach at 24 hours notice for the first U15 game of the season in 1995, I became well known as a very enthusiastic scorer, although concentration in those days was sometimes a problem. One example was in an incredibly exciting finish at the Colts Festival at Liverpool College later that season, when all three results were possible on the final ball against a QEGS side containing several Lancashire players. "How many do they need?" was the question I was asked. "Four to win," I shouted back. Our players pad the boundary, their batsmen run two, we celebrate. Then, afterwards, on checking, it transpired they only needed two to win, which they had obviously got. Imagine having to break this news to a jubilant dressing room...! Thankfully, staff member in charge, Graham Barnes (short-serving physics teacher) did some checking of his own and concluded the scores were, in fact, tied, and we'd won by virtue of fewer wickets lost! Luckily, such disasters were pretty rare, but therefore all the more memorable!

I spent two seasons in the 2nd XI in the shadow of the great James Chapman. In the second, I was generously allowed to go to the Senior Festival at Aldenham School as a second scorer, because the following year we'd be hosting and they wanted to give me the experience of an away festival. Our strategy was simple: win the toss, bat first, score at three-an-over till lunch, then send Steve Barlow in as the next batsman to take the bowling apart. Played three, won three, job done!

I finally inherited the mantle of 1st XI scorer in my last term at King's and became the first person ever awarded full colours for cricket scoring at King's. Mr Neal's comedy fines system, now sadly a victim of society's progression, was an absolute highlight throughout!

I still score every year for the CAOKS match against the school and have been Sefton Park's Sunday XI scorer for all bar two of the last 17 seasons.

I should say here that I find it very disappointing that school teams (or indeed adult ones) don't include scorers these days. The undignified sight of masters at

school cricket matches standing in shorts at square leg wrestling with scorebook and pencil in mid-air and doing half the job is not how it was done in my day! Bring back proper scorers who, like me, weren't good enough to play in the team but love the sport and who benefit enormously from a chance to partake of the team camaraderie, which they might not otherwise have.

5. Did you take part in any of the musical activities at King's? (Choir/Orchestra etc)

Having been in my previous school choir, I was excited to find that the school's 450th birthday was going to be celebrated in my very first term with a combined seven-school choral and orchestral performance at the Royal Albert Hall in front of The Queen. It was the most incredible experience, being part of a choir of 700 (!) conducted by Sir David Wilcocks in that magnificent building. As I've got older, it's become one of my favourite childhood experiences. "Zadok The Priest" will forever give me goosebumps (and has, just writing these words!)

After much persuading from my parents, I finally agreed to be in a Gilbert & Sullivan production in L6. That year was *Patience*, starring Oliver Hingston, Ceri Richards and others, and was a great success, with two performances either side of Tony Blair's first election victory. The following year we did *Guys & Dolls*, directed by the late Carol Ruston and starring the brilliant Sarah Proudlove, Tom Hodder et al. Sam Rosen and I played the comedy gangsters, although they had to dumb the dance routine right down to "just walk round in a circle consisting of eight steps" because I couldn't dance! In my year out, I was (somehow?) allowed to be in *Iolanthe*, Roger Wickson's last G&S production, starring the Sarahs Proudlove and Lister and the incredible Mark Swinton.

6. When did you leave King's and where did you attend University?

Nothing is ever simple for me! The 1998 A-Level cohort suffered from a huge (perhaps national?) marking scandal, in which many of us failed to achieve predicted grades, myself included. After starting to re-take some modules of history and geography (in which I encountered the first ever girls at King's!) I reapplied to different universities and received an unconditional



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offer from the University of Durham's Stockton Campus for 1999. I therefore left King's, rather bizarrely, at Christmas 1998.

I had a year out, in which I worked at school as administrator for the Rick Johnstone Swim School, who hired the pool, before reading Applied Psychology at Stockton from 1999-2002. I started and quit a PGCE at Newcastle the following term, before doing three night-school-type courses in genealogy at Sunderland (although taught in the same building in Newcastle, confusingly). Just for good measure, I did a postgrad in Archives and Records Management at Liverpool in 2005-06.

7. Do you still live in, or have family in the Chester area?

Having had five years in the north-east and then 11 in Liverpool, I finally came home to my beloved Wirral when my family and I moved to Wallasey in 2015.

8. Have you kept in contact with any of your former classmates and attended any Alumni or CAOKS events?

I'm in touch with some of my close friends from school, like Matt Warnock and Phil Crompton, and through Phil, Nick Buckle, who I never really mixed with at school. I've recently reconnected with Sameep Nankani, which is exciting. But the person I see most of is Sanjoy Banerjee, who I met on the bus home from school and has, in the last couple of years, become my informal part-time chess coach and general adviser on the local chess scene.

The only CAOKS event I go to is the cricket match, as above.

9. What would you regard as your career highlight to date?

Either appearing in 34 episodes of the BBC series "Heir Hunters" or setting up my own probate genealogy firm in 2019.

10. What would you say were the main benefits of attending a school like King's?

Ok, I have to write this answer without crying. When I was at school, I didn't fully appreciate the standard of education and the values that I was receiving. I understood it intellectually, not least because my parents would remind me after every (awful) parents' evening, but I didn't really appreciate it.

Then, aged 26, on a plane above the Atlantic, it just hit me. Thanks to my education and my parents' sacrifices, I can do things that other people can't. I can achieve things that other people can't. I'm comfortable in situations where other people can't. I can succeed where other people aren't. And so much of this is because I've been given, by my schools and by my dear late parents (who of course chose those schools), the confidence to seek out what I want and plot a path to achieve it. How to critically evaluate, whether that be situations or people. And how to use intelligence and privilege in the right way, without condescending or belittling others, or ever forgetting my very modest background.





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King's in the Capital

This year's *King's in the Capital* was hosted at the iconic Lord's Cricket Ground where we had the pleasure of welcoming more than 100 Old King's Scholars to the sold-out event.

On a particularly cold evening, our guests enjoyed a warm welcome drink of hot winter Pimm's before a much-anticipated tour of the Home of Cricket.

Expert guides led excited cricket fans through notable areas of the ground, including the Grade 2-listed Victorian Pavilion, the players' dressing rooms and the MCC Museum, home to cricket's most famous trophy, the Ashes Urn.

Our guest speaker was Kate Coppack (OKS 2012) who plays cricket for Middlesex, Sunrisers and Welsh Fire, entertained fellow alumni with her own cricketing tales.



Kate went from making King's history as the first female cricketer to play for the school's first XI to playing at Lord's in the final of the 2024 Hundred in front of the UK's largest ever crowd at a domestic women's cricket match.

Kate, who has also represented Peru in international cricket, works full-time as a lawyer in London, so we were particularly grateful that she was able to find the time to speak at this year's event.

Head of Sixth Form, Josh Carter, noted how many more university students and recent graduates now attend the King's in the Capital event.

He said: "I have really enjoyed catching up so many brilliant young people this evening, many of whom I had the pleasure of teaching.

"In recent years, we have seen an increasing number of recent leavers at this event. The extensive alumni network is one of the huge benefits of King's and it makes me very happy to know that the younger generation is using it to make contacts, get valuable advice, and further their own careers."

He added "The atmosphere at this year's event was fantastic and I know that many of tonight's guests will be keen to book again for next year."

As the night drew to a close, guests commented on how the event highlighted the shared history amongst the Old King's Scholars, both old and young, showcasing the vibrant community that continues to thrive beyond the school grounds.

Development Officer Gemma Carvell thanked so many Old King's Scholars for attending.

She said: "Events like this are a great opportunity to celebrate the achievements of alumni like Kate Coppack but also they also reinforce the importance of maintaining connections and supporting one another in our professional and personal endeavors."

The next Alumni event will be the 158th CAOKS Annual Dinner to be held at King's. Tickets can be purchased here.

If any Old King's Scholars are interested in being a guest speaker at any of our future events, please reach out to Gemma in the Alumni office alumniteam@kingschester.co.uk





Obituaries

David Howard Naden OKS (1950)



David attended King's between 1941 and 1950. His daughter, Cathy, got in touch to inform us about the below piece being written and asked if we could provide any information that would be helpful.

In addition to his academic record, David was awarded school colours in 1950 for his contributions to First XI football and cricket. Only 3 other pupils achieved this in 1950. David was clearly an accomplished sportsman during his time at King's.

This obituary was written by Martin Smith and originally published in The Guardian newspaper on May 27th 2024.

My friend David Naden, who has died aged 91, was a Bafta award-winning film editor who made his breakthrough by editing John Irvin's 1963 documentary about the Durham miners, *Gala Day*.

It was made with a £750 grant from the British Film Institute, and David cut the film with the help of fellow graduates from the London School of Film Technique (now London Film School), Jane Wood and Dai Vaughan.

After *Gala Day* was transmitted by the BBC in 1964, the trio of editors established David Naden Associates, and the DNA collective became the base for some of the best British documentaries.

Born in Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, David was the only child of Mabel (nee West), who worked as a village postmistress after separating from his father, Gerald Naden, a factory worker and trade unionist.

David boarded at the King's school, Chester. On leaving he did his national service in the signal corps, then won a place to study metallurgy at Sheffield University. He left after two years, in 1956, to study then lecture at the newly established London School of Film Technique in Brixton, south London.

In 1960, he married Jennifer Smith, a children's TV presenter. They had three children, Jon, Mo and Jess, and lived in Crystal Palace, south-east London.

Between 1965 and 1981, David cut a wide range of films, including an episode of Michael Darlow's TV series *Cities at War*, *The Hero City: Leningrad* (1968); four dramas for the director Michael Apted, including the 1972 TV play *Another Sunday and Sweet FA*; and the feature film *The Shadow Line* (1976) by the Polish director Andrzej Wajda.

In 1978, David won a Bafta for his editing of Bamber Gascoigne's Granada documentary series *The Christians*. David also edited three of Michael Grigsby's extraordinary documentaries commissioned by Granada: *Deep South* (1968), about the impact of the US's new civil rights laws, *If the Village Dies* (1969), commissioned to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, and *I Was a Soldier* (1970), a portrait of three young Vietnam veterans.

An avowed socialist and humanist, David worked on Labour party political broadcasts until the mid-1970s. He did this through DNA, with which I got my break into film production and directing.

His marriage to Jennifer ended in divorce, and in the early 80s David moved to the Midlands to work as a series producer on *England Their England*, a long-running series of half-hour film documentaries about the Midlands produced by ATV and Central TV.

In 1986 he helped set up the film production company *Waterside Productions*, where he continued to support emerging film-makers hone their craft. David's editing credo was: "Always be true to the rushes."



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In 1983 he married Dżidka Wiorkowska, a film editor, and they had a son, Tomek. Dżidka died of cancer in 1995, and David focused on raising Tomek while continuing to work as a producer and director in Birmingham.

Returning to London in 2010, David kept active by going regularly to the cinema, visiting the Frontline club and following Crystal Palace.

He is survived by his children and by seven grandchildren.

David Wear OKS (1961)

David was born in Liverpool and spent his early years there before his family moved to Bebington on the Wirral. He travelled to King's Grammar School in Chester by train and spent many happy years there. He then moved on to Sheffield University where he was a much-appreciated member of Sheffield University Speological Society, and had kept in contact with many of his friends until his death.

David worked in small engineering firms in the Birmingham area where his family had moved to before he moved to Bristol. He joined the Marine Radio General Class in September 1973 and he was awarded a scholarship with BP. He joined their ships in 1975 and went to sea on oil tankers as a radio officer. After several years he went to Plymouth to do a Marine Electronic Diploma.

His first job after leaving the sea was as a radio technician in Oman, where even his good nature helped him become friendly with the Crown Prince who financed a Radio Society Station in the country. He stayed in contact with the radio club every week after leaving Oman and communicated in Morse Code which was his favourite way of communicating.

Returning to Bristol he had several jobs over the years with electronics and communication where he became a specialist in the licenced radio field. During this time, he joined the Shirehampton Radio Club which he enjoyed and made many friends. He taught Morse Code to members of the Club.

Learning languages was something else he enjoyed and went to evening classes, loved Italian, and went on holiday twice with the group to Ruvo di Puglia and Sicily. He married in 1985.

Retiring to Exmouth he joined a couple of waking groups walking each week in Exmouth and monthly in the surrounding countryside. He and his wife went on many cruises round Europe and enjoyed places as far north as Spitsbergen and east to Southern Greece.

David Wear – 1944-2024

John P. Birchall OKS (1958)



King's School alumnus (1950-58) John Birchall died on 5th July 2023 aged 84 years. All of us who knew him in various capacities have had time to reflect on the life of an extraordinary person. In addition, John has left us with something special. Over the years he built up a written record of his life and recorded this on his remarkable website - <https://www.themeister.co.uk>. It chronicles his life from his schooldays right up to his passing in 2023.

He was wonderful company, a joy to be with. He had the quality of being greatly interested in the people he met. He treated everyone with respect, and he had a genuine belief that all people have something interesting to offer. John in return was wonderfully interesting to be with. He built up a treasure trove of experience and knowledge through his appetite for learning, discussing, and observing. He lit up the lives of family, friends, and colleagues. It transpires from looking at his website that literally hundreds of us enjoyed this privilege.

Because he recorded in detail his journey through life, it means that we can re-live our part in that journey and that we can learn many new things about John



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even though he is no longer with us. Furthermore, this opus can be accessed by others of all ages and stages. John has left us a rare chronicle of one person's journey over eight momentous decades. The website is both an historical record and a wealth of interesting stories, observations, and links to a treasure trove of facts and opinions.

John's wishes were clear - he wanted there to be "No fuss" at the time of his passing. His family, of course, respected this wish but also recognised that they together with friends, colleagues and acquaintances would like to remember him in their own personal way. Consequently, an online Book of Remembrance has been set up by his family. To date 50 contributors have submitted their own personal recollections to this book that will be published online in due course. The result will be an unusually comprehensive written record of a life lived over 84 years of great change. It refreshes our treasured memories, is a source of thoughtful wisdom and provides material of immense value for students of modern history.

John was born in 1938 and almost immediately his parents were faced with the horrors of World War II. He started his King's School education in 1950/51 and continued to 1957/58. Today's students on the Wrexham Road will hardly recognise how the school was then. The Main School was in the building adjoining the Cathedral opposite the Town Hall, subsequently used by Barclays Bank, its entrance was via Abbey Square, the school playground being the area currently the Bank car park. Other school activities were spread across the city. Science labs, art room and dinner facilities were a few hundred yards away in the Bluecoat building in Northgate Street. The school gymnasium was further quarter of mile away off Parkgate Road. The school playing fields were a bus ride away outside the city down Lache Lane. The sporting picture was completed by rowing on the River Dee. Despite these fragmented facilities the King's School had a record of enthusiastic sporting activity.

Academically the post-war years were certainly "interesting". The school attracted teachers of high academic quality but, because of war time influences, teaching quality varied. This laid the ground for John's journey of lifetime learning. At school, gaps had to be filled by self-motivated sourcing to supplement what was taught by teachers. John often stated that he learned much from his peers who would always be prepared to help fill in the gaps. This ethos of kind,

friendly, helpful interaction between fellow pupils was a feature of King's School life in those days and hopefully the same ethos maintains to this day.

Outside school the 1950s were a time of austerity; fuel and food shortages, food and clothes rationing up to 1954 and limited choice of food, sweets and consumer goods thereafter. Uniquely our generation lived through this period knowing no better. Close friendships were forged, and we made most of our own entertainment. John retained friendships he made at school for the rest of his life and his participation in sports, especially cricket became of lasting importance. Times may have been quite hard, but we escaped the dangers of armed conflict and just missed National Service. We were lucky to have received a good education, often supported by sacrifices made by our parents for our benefit.

John ended his school years in good shape, thanks in equal measure to the school and his own efforts. His positive attitude carried on for the rest of his life and his unspoken motto could well have been "if it is to be it is up to me". Off he went to Glasgow University to study Chemical Engineering. This coincided with the transition from 1950s austerity to the dramatically different "Swinging 60s", the era of young people with modest disposable income for the first time. Jobs were easy to find, university grants plus vacation jobs for the lucky few and prices still relatively low. Pint of beer less than 2/0d (10p), an Elvis record 3/6d (18p), bag of chips 6d (2 1/2p), shops full of trendy clothes, disposable income of £3 (300p) went a long way.

As undergraduates we had a great time, dispersed to the four corners of the UK and back to Cheshire in the vacations. John was able to pursue his great sporting pastime, CRICKET, so important during his 1st XI Captain schooldays and carried on with newly formed OKS team, Chester Crossbatters and subsequently at a higher level with Chester Boughton Hall in the Merseyside Competition. The full extent of John's cricket activities is comprehensively covered by him in themeister.co.uk. Be prepared, he has written volumes on this topic alone and his peer group and future generations will recognise many names.

The fun of the early 1960s led to momentous events in the mid-1960s. John met and married Carole who was to be his partner for the rest of his life. It was quickly apparent that this union was going to be something special. They were so at ease with each and each other's friends. They tackled life with gusto,



Obituaries

supporting and respecting each other. Their children Jonathan, and Sally were much loved, and the family unit thrived happily leading to the arrival of grandchildren. Enjoyment of sport by all members of the family created a bond: John and Jonathan's cricket, Carole's hockey, Sally's international level rowing. John and Carole had their own individual interests as well, notably John's Jazz saxophone playing and Carole's expert Bridge playing.

Round about that time, John had joined Unilever, a decision that led to a successful career over a period of thirty years. He was very impressed with the history of the business. The founding Lever brothers had the inspired idea of supplying soap of good quality at affordable prices to a mass market. This was a brilliant idea at the time as it was just becoming apparent that the resulting cleanliness was a massive contribution to public health. Lever Brothers did the job better than its competitors as well as demonstrating enlightened attitudes to the welfare of its employees. It was an example of capitalism at its very best, something that John appreciated. Profits were used wisely and ethically to build the great multinational that we know today. John progressed through the technical ranks, eventually to important achievements in factory building and management in the UK, Nigeria and Malawi, culminating in the building of a state-of-the-art facility back in the UK. Details are described in detail on his website.

After nigh on 30 years with Unilever, John felt moved to retire. This was not retirement as we would know it. It started with a 1st class degree in Economics from the Open University, delving into the intricacies of Evolutionary Economics. In parallel he undertook in-depth study of the history of Dixieland Jazz.

He devotes a fascinating section of his website to his relationship between cricket, beer and a wide and varied social life. The number of lifelong friendships collected along the way is truly mind-boggling. His memories are intertwined with interesting facts on the history of beer-drinking. He refers regularly to his revered "convivial pint", identifying beer as a means of fostering friendship and fellowship. He did this most successfully with his treasured pint being a benevolent friend. He never allowed alcohol to become the dangerous enemy that some of us allowed it to become. John's example is a model for enjoying this friend while staying away from the dark side of alcohol consumption.

Open University and Economics opened the rich world that is evolution, economics and philosophy.

Throughout his retirement John read voraciously on these subjects, summarising the work of the greats like Charles Darwin, Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, Karl Marx, Richard Dawkins et al. John had plenty of observations and questions of his own to add. It all adds up to a learned introduction to this complex but fascinating world that he enjoyed so much.

Some of his website carries material that is of a depth that you would expect from someone with a First Class Honours Degree but there is plenty of interest for those of us who appreciate learning a little extra about the world around us. For today's King's School sixth-formers there is a valuable peek at what interest the study of economics and philosophy can hold.

John's command of engineering, soap making, industrial management, cricket and other sports, family life, economics, evolutionary science, philosophy, and the rest was phenomenal. His achievements were staggering but that was not all - he found the time to write it all down. But wait, there's more. Dixieland jazz captured his interest early in life and so he proceeded to understand its origins and importance in developing enjoyment for millions. He explains the significance of great exponents like Louis Armstrong and his contemporaries. He provides guidelines on how potential exponents can set about learning to aspire to being jazz musicians. He practised what he preaches by becoming a competent jazz saxophonist himself and gained great enjoyment by playing with a group of musician friends for decades into his early eighties. This group, The Smithy Lane Stompers, were serious about their "Toons". They accumulated a songbook of 220 jazz classics. The spirit was willing right up to the end, with the flesh only taking its toll near the end.

His family and his many, many friends miss him terribly of course. We treasure our joyous memories and are grateful that he recorded these memories in his prodigious website. He has left us a chronicle of 84 years of his life history plus his own extra contribution of relevant facts, observations, fun and related history. It's a treasure trove that makes the reader feel that John is in the room with us, joining in the fun.

What a joy and privilege for so many of us to have had John Birchall in our lives.

John Faulkner (OKS 1952-1961)



The Final Word



So here we are again at the end of another edition of the CAOKS newsletter and the end of another year and one that certainly seemed to fly by even quicker than usual. It's also the end of my first full year as editor of this newsletter. Do I get another year? Have you had enough? Answers on a postcard!

You can catch up with all the latest school news via the website. I thought it was better to try and come up with original content for the newsletter rather than duplicating information that is already out there.

Don't forget to drop me a line if you have a piece you would like included in an upcoming issue or if you would like to take part in "Ten for Now and Then". You don't have to write a million words. These articles can be as long or short as you wish. Please email me at Editor@caoks.co.uk

I have a new column in the pipeline called "Memory Lane" where I'll be asking people to write in with their memories of a specific event during their school life. It could be a sporting fixture that you played a part in, it could be a trip abroad with the school. I didn't get to go on many school trips, so I've written a piece about a specific cricket match in 1988 that I was heavily involved in. I may include that in the next issue.

Back in September I happened to be in the Trefeddian Hotel in Aberdyfi with my parents, my sister and her husband. We were there celebrating my Dad's 89th birthday. As we sat drinking tea and eating cakes, a couple walked in and sat a table at the other end of the room. I had a look over and thought to myself "That's Mr and Mrs Leyshon".

I'm sure many of you will remember Mr Leyshon as Deputy Headmaster during the time I was at King's and will probably have met him and his wife at CAOKS events. Needless to say, I went over and introduced myself and we had a nice little chat for a few minutes before it was time to make tracks for Aberystwyth. It's a small world sometimes, that's for sure.

2025 will be full of CAOKS and Alumni related events as ever. The Annual Dinner will take place on March 22nd rather than in January which will be better for those who need to travel to attend. I'm certainly in that boat myself being down on the South Coast. We had a great night at the Annual Dinner earlier this year and I look forward to seeing who will be signing up for the 2025 edition.

We always want to hear your thoughts on these matters, so that the events can be tailored to what people would like or prefer and so that we can keep moving forward into the second quarter of the 21st century and beyond

Whatever your faith or belief system may be, we wish you all Happy Holidays and a prosperous and healthy New Year.

All the best

Steve "Taff" Williams (Editor)

Look out for the concluding part of "It lurked beneath the surface" in the next issue





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