

Mr Fixit – a Master recalls the Corps trucks

Barry Maynard-Smith, who taught at Epsom from 1965 to 1969, has fond memories of Corps trucks – and often getting under the bonnet to fix them!

I was very interested to see the article in about the Corps truck in the the 2010 OE magazine and it brought back many memories of my four years at Epsom.

I joined the staff in September 1965 to teach Maths and my arrival coincided with the handover of the Command of the CCF from Rex Goddard to Chris Trehwella. I came from the Framlingham College CCF with the rank of 1st Lieutenant and was promptly enlisted in the Epsom contingent. The supply of new Masters with National Service experience was drying up so there was no problem in my getting on the Epsom strength.

My interest in the various forms of road and rail transport quickly led to my taking over both the road and rail societies from Derek Fenner and, in the CCF, it seemed natural that the responsibility of the CCF truck should pass to me as well. At that time, the vehicle concerned was a Bedford 3-Ton 4X2 General Duty truck. It certainly did live in an old shed to the right of the path that led down from the Headmaster's house and was, if I remember correctly, alongside the miniature rifle range. The vehicle was nearing the end of its life but was still performing sterling service.

I am not sure if it was used by other College societies, as was its successor, but it did do one very valuable job for me and for Chris Gaman in August 1966. Chris had been living in No 3 Heron Court (opposite the College) and was moving out into his retirement home in Alexandra Road one year ahead of his retirement from the staff



Barry Maynard-Smith
in a photo taken in 1963

in 1967. I was the lucky person who, with my wife and family, was moving into No 3 following Chris Gaman's move. We had both booked the same man to do our removals. My move was rather longer than Chris's as we had lived in Banstead for my first year at Epsom. Fortunately, neither Chris nor I had paid the man any cash in advance as, when the move day came, we found to our distress that there was no sign of him. A visit to his home showed us that it was now completely empty and we found no trace of him then or later.

Chris came up with the idea that he and his two strong teenage sons, Andrew and Iain, would get the old Bedford and do the move themselves. Both Chris and I were insured to drive it (though not, I suspect, to use it for house removal) and between them they moved all their furniture out on the one day. As they had owned the new house for some time, most of the smaller items had already been moved. I had left my family in Devon with my wife's parents, so I thought that I would also use the truck to move the bulky items from Banstead to Heron Court on the following day.

Iain and Andrew very kindly offered to help and without their superb efforts, there

was no way that I could have managed. The truck was not designed for this kind of work and all the furniture had to be lifted to a height of some four or five feet without any tailboard to ease the lift. What is more, No 3 Heron Court is on the first floor, up some 25 stairs. It took us four double journeys to shift all the heavy stuff. I left anything that would get into my car to be moved on the next few days. It was quite a performance and left me with a very soft spot for the old truck.

Sometime later, I cannot remember quite when, Chris Trewhella decided to retire the Bedford and he and Rex Goddard went to find a suitable replacement and came back with a Fordson Thames 3-ton lorry which had previously been owned by Wimpey, the building firm. This was a diesel with a comfortable cab and a synchromesh gearbox as against the Bedford's crashbox. However, there its good features ended.

It must have had a very hard life with Wimpey as it was in very rough condition. The batteries were almost dead and had to be replaced at once and the rear tyres were badly worn and looked decidedly flat. This was not surprising as, although the recommended pressure in each tyre was something in the region of 40-50 psi, when I checked the four wheels I found that the pressures, reading across the truck from right to left were: 17, 0, 0, 14. No wonder they looked flat!

The Fordson was painted a bright, dirty looking yellow with a large black rectangle on each side of the box area covering up, rather crudely, the name 'Wimpey'. The sheet metal sides should have been attached to the wooden framework with screws, but constant vibration over the truck's working life had enlarged the holes so that the metal pulled away over the

screw head and flapped alarmingly. We did manage to solve this by removing the screws and refitting them with large washers to hold the thing together. It did not present a very pretty picture!

The internal flooring was wood planks, which had become so worn that there were large gaps between the planks, which allowed fumes from the exhaust to enter the body and was a constant source of complaint from those lads unfortunate enough to have to travel in it. Of course, because of its previous work, it was devoid of any form of seating in the back. Not surprisingly, its colour led to its being known as 'The Yellow Peril'.

It was available to any College society needing transport and was in use virtually every weekend. Almost as soon as we acquired it, it began to show its major persistent fault, which was to break down – always some distance from College. As master in charge of it, I was always the one called to get my car and go out to try and get it going again. The recurring fault was the ingress of air into the fuel system, which can be pretty deadly in a diesel engine, and rectifying it involved the removal of various valves and bleeding the system to eliminate the airlock.

Very foolishly, I remained the only person who had been shown exactly how this was done, so it was very rare for me to have any weekend which was not interrupted by my receiving a phone call with a plea for help, which then meant having to go out to fix the vehicle. I lost count of the number of times that it was taken to the Ford dealers who tested it and, every time, could find no fault. It was well over a year before it was finally discovered that, when the vehicle was fully laden and passing over a rough bit of road, the chassis flexed and the fuel

supply pipe twisted slightly, allowing air to get in through a tiny pin hole in the system that only opened up under those particular conditions.

This was the vehicle that was still in use by the College when I left in 1969 to join the staff of Sedbergh School and, in my 'Valet' in The Epsomian, I did receive mention of my efforts to look after the

famous 'Yellow Peril'. Some years later, I was green with envy to read in The Epsomian that the College had then acquired an ex-London Transport RF Class AEC Regent IV coach. I would have loved to have had that to be responsible for. I saw a photograph of it after it had been repainted blue and was carrying the Epsom crest.
