

John Stevens' memories

(Crawfurd 1943-49)

Since I know only one other OE in Tasmania with whom I have lost touch with in recent years, we scarcely rate as a Chapter – the best I can offer is a footnote.

My nearest Chapter is in that other, larger island across Bass Strait that separates us from Mainland Oz whose number includes Bob Newman (Wilson 1943-46), a contemporary I met some years ago in this little town in his capacity as Timber Guru to the Australian industry, not to mention his contribution to OE festivities down under.

My wife and I spent a happy weekend on the Mornington Peninsula with the Melbourne Chapter who mostly turned out to be younger and far more eminent than I. I am ashamed to admit that I failed to witness any of the matches of the visiting girls' hockey tour described in your pages in a recent issue. My only excuse is that neither girls nor hockey were part of the curriculum in my time.

I am however very much in touch with:

Robert McCormick (Carr) who laid the foundations of the prowess of the Rifle Shooting team. He and his wife Jackie live in a remote and beautiful spot on the New South Wales/Queensland border on some hundred-plus acres of bush land together with five horses, innumerable wallabies, possums and the occasional Koala and a resident python. After many years of medical practice, he now divides his time between superb cabinet-making (he built his own house), painting in both watercolour and oil – skills implanted in his school days by Denis Barnham, then Art Master. Robert and I and our wives make a point of holidaying once a year and when inevitably the conversation, suitably lubricated, turns to reminiscence the ladies drift off to bed and leave us to dredge our memories for names and incidents of those far off days.

Paul Bunday (Rosebery) Batsman of note-the first century at school for years, wing three-quarter of such dash that he sacrificed his two front teeth playing for the 1st XV who subsequently abandoned Mathematics for the Anglican ministry which he still serves, albeit in retirement.

Our occasional returns to the old country are built around at least a week together in some unspoilt and beautiful corner of the countryside we left behind us.

Mike Alderson (Granville) now tragically deceased, who qualified with George Fulford and I from Guys in 1954, who was destined for international standing in Public Health and the Statistical analysis thereof and served in the same capacity for the British Government until sacked by the then PM (a lady you may call to mind) for refusing to manipulate numbers or gloss over unpalatable truths and thereafter took the Chair of Public Health at Southampton University until his retirement and untimely accidental death.

As to myself I followed in the footsteps of my elder brother Michael Leonard Stevens (Crawfurd) who became head of the House and left the College in 1940 or thereabouts to take a commission in the Royal Engineers and was later killed in action on the Anzio beachhead in 1944. Among his contemporaries I recall Alan Parks who I think had a ▶

◀ surgical career and Dick Kendall who was decorated for his part in a successful mini-submarine attack of the German battleship Tirpitz

I in turn eventually became head of the House and with George Fulford (Carr) and the Mike Alderson, qualified from Guys in 1954. After the usual House jobs I did a three-year stint in the RAF and eventually settled into general practice in Kent until 1963 whence I fled the NHS and migrated with, wife, three small children and a widowed mother-to this happy isle – taking my brass plate down in 1994.

I always enjoy the OE magazine and the occasional appearances amongst its photographs of classmates, fellow rugby players like Louis Renner, that Prince of wing forwards, notables like David Ofomata, of briefly international fame, Roy Calne, of enduring renown in surgical fields, and the aforesaid Mike Alderson. There are many more like Artie Shaw (Holman) with whom I have been in touch and that other Shaw (was it R.C. Shaw (Carr)?) who I happened on in Malta and who nearly made it to the top in the RAMC.

It also refreshes my memories of those Masters whose influence shaped my future and are with me still. Men like ‘brute’ Wallis, who opened the world of letters and literature and directed the Mermaid Tavern’s annual production, ‘Foxy’ Phair, who encouraged my fumbling attempts at writing, ‘Bill’ Ashurst and ‘Jerry’ Facer who patiently did the same for the physical sciences, ‘Chunks’ Parson’s insights into History and the awesome Henry – ‘bloody’, some said – Franklin, who in my final years, leavened the drudgery of pre-medical studies with Homer translated and declaimed in the original with a verve and gusto that still lingers in the memory long after Fleming’s Right hand rule (whatever it was) has slipped away.

I look forward to your further issues and the chance to renew old friendships.