



The Old Mancunian

December 2005

The 'Manchester Mafia'

Apologies for 'capping' my friend Humphrey Wynn's 'Manchester Mafia' in the 1940s. A few years later the Permanent Under Secretary of the Air Ministry, Sir James Barnes, was an Old Mancunian; so was his Private Secretary, Frank Cooper; so was the Private Secretary to the Chief of Air Staff, Robert Haynes; and so was I, Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Air. Now that really was a Manchester Mafia, and at the seat of air power.

Peter Batterley's reminiscences of Bert Toft reminded me of Bert and Hubert (Haffie) Field post-breakfast on the 1935 Mont Blanc trek. Bert is singing within easy earshot of Haffie, 'The Bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling for Hubert [you but] not for me! All the more fun since Bert had a very distinctively devilish countenance and Haffie was the MGS Saint.

As for 'Swimming Naked' - Michael Cohen, anyone who had the grisly experience of the swimming pool in Long Millgate regarded the pristine pool and nakedness at the new School as wholly liberating. Down in the basement at Long Millgate; water only drained and renewed over the weekend, hand-out bathing slips that were revoltingly slimy - for me, condemned to a swimming period on Friday for two years, by which time the water was the colour and consistency of pea soup, Fallowfield was heaven. I would not, however, rule out the possibility that the Long Millgate bath inoculated me against all water-borne diseases. That nakedness has now been done away with, is perhaps saying something significant about the pre-war and post-war society. **TCG James (1928-37)**
4 The Granary Hadleigh
Suffolk IP7` Tel 01473 558
And to think in 1953 I was a lowly National Service 'sprog' at Padgate! Ed.

Swimming Naked at MGS

I was interested by Michael Cohen's piece about Naked Swimming. I am surprised that this natural practice should ever have been an 'issue'. In 1931, I moved from a small Cheshire grammar school directly into Maths VI. For my first weekly swimming period, I may have arrived with trunks but immediately learned that this was not deemed correct. I never heard of any rule about nudity but soon appreciated the greater comfort of the practice.

During my three MGS years, I cannot recall any swimming-bath impropriety by a teacher or a boy, though I suppose that there may have been an occasional coarse comment. I remember the dash for the shower enclosure one day when a mixed group of visitors arrived to admire the swimming bath.

To this day, I prefer to swim in the nude in the sea, river, or lake. Is it improper to enjoy the sensation of fresh water on the whole body? I have little swimming skill, but in many parts of the world and on a quiet beach I have entered the sea wearing trunks and when well immersed have removed them and slung them around my neck until I was returning to shore!

David J. Finney (1931/1934)
[david.finney@freeuk.com]

May I say how pleased I always am to receive the Newsletter. Apropos the naked swimming piece by Michael Cohen, do boys at school still swim naked? I hope so. **(No they don't! Ed.)**

David Crabtree 1951/1958
[gmcs@btinternet.com]

Michael Cohen (edition 19) enquired as to the origin of the custom of naked swimming at MGS and whether it still continued.

He received no answer to the second point and, with due respect to the Editor, the suggestion that the custom might be connected with wool trunks generating fluff and requiring clothing coupons has no

relevance to Dr Cohen's time at MGS (1964-70) - or mine for that matter. Perhaps others have ideas, but meanwhile the other question could be answered directly.

Michael Venis (1949-55)
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I stand corrected. It does not continue, and a few of the possible ideas are shown below, and continued on page 2 Ed.

I received a phone call from Arthur Pearson a Foundation Scholar who came to Rusholme in 1931, having had three years at the Prep in Sale and one year at Long Millgate.. He suggested that it was due to problems with lost costumes and boys forgetting them, which led to the decision to swim naked.

Arthur Joseph Pearson (1930/33)
35 Willow tree Road
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WA14 2EQ

With reference to Dr. Cohen's query - When we went swimming in the bath in the basement of the old school in Long Millgate we were issued on each occasion with dark blue cotton 'slips' to wear and I always assumed that these were laundered after use. When we moved to the new school, however, we were told that these 'slips' would no longer be issued and that we would swim naked. No explanation was offered, but we guessed that it was an economy measure and simply accepted it as yet another of the school's whimsical decisions!

Geoffrey Stone (1929/36)

Regarding the naked swimming, I should have thought that this practice was almost universal at boys' schools, and other all-boys situations such as scout camps, until at least 1945. Perhaps it is surprising that it continued so long at MGS, but I never objected to it. Those woollen swimming trunks were very uncomfortable.

Jeffrey Darlington
[Jeffrey@bossa.ndo.co.uk]

Literary & Debating Society

Edition 21

I write in response to a short, supposedly amusing, comment in James Corke-Webster's article on the Literary and Debating Society in Edition 20 of the Old Mancunian. Whilst initially impressed at the topics chosen for debate by this society, I was annoyed at James' conclusion on the debate about whether homosexual marriage should be legalised, namely; "I forget...".

His apparent discomfort with the issue of homosexuality suggests to me that MGS has failed to equip even their School Captain with a balanced, compassionate attitude towards other people.

Thirty years ago at MGS, a homophobic atmosphere seemed to be accepted. The insidious damage that this probably inflicted on a significant proportion of the school's pupils may not have been appreciated then. Nowadays, however, I feel that it should not be considered acceptable to make dismissive jokes about other peoples' sexual orientation.

Gary Waterall BVM&S,
MRCVS (1969-75)
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A Right of Reply

Of course I apologise for any offence that has been caused with regard to the article.

When I said I forgot, I meant simply that I forgot. There was no discomfort with the topic - if I was uncomfortable I wouldn't have chosen, organised and chaired the debate in the first place! It does however, seem slightly judgmental to conclude that I don't have a 'balanced, compassionate attitude towards other people' from a neutral seven letter phrase.

James Corke-Webster (School Captain 2004-2005)

Naked Swimming:

(Cont from page 1)

I don't know the origins of naked swimming at MGS, but suspect the practice was widespread at boys' schools with their own swimming resources - as also in the armed forces. Indeed it was widely known in the Isle of Wight in the 1930s that the headmaster of Bembridge School had received a letter from a lady demanding he stop his boys swimming naked in the sea as she could see them through her telescope!

David Green

Rhyd yr Harding, Castle Morris, Nr Haverfordwest, SA62 5EJ

Further to the comments about naked swimming that practice had thankfully died out by my time at MGS. However, there was a possibly worse practice in its place, one which probably still exists: the "skeg bin". This was a large plastic bin full of lost and discarded trunks, all wet and festering for months on end. If you forgot your trunks, you had to pick a pair out and try not to gag as you put them on.

Stephen Whittaker (1996-2003)

**Keble College, Oxford
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The first suggestion you made seems far-fetched about wool blocking the drains and the second will not do at all, because clothing was not rationed until 1940 or 41! The decision to swim nude appears to have been taken at the time of transfer from Long Millgate. So far as I know there was no swimming bath there (the Irwell? Not Likely!) No the reason is surely that there would have been no way of drying costumes and to have provided something so expensive when the School was being financially stretched would have been out of the question.

On a different point, Bert Toft wasn't just a front row player; he was the hooker and the captain. He had shoulders like a short horn bull, and his

head was permanently on one side with scrumming. He taught evening classes at Owens College and was reputed to have said something like "If it's a rough house you want, let me know, and I'll be there!" This was to a class having a bit of a punch-up when Bert Toft arrived; his words brought peace.

**John Holiday (1935/41)
Scott Court, Cefn Cred Road
Cardiff CF23 6AQ**

I don't suppose that many of your readers will remember the small swimming pool in the basement at Long Millgate, but I gained my Bronze Medal of the National Life Saving Society in February 1931. This entitled me to free entry into all the public baths in Manchester and Salford.

I remember my delight when I first saw the wonderful full length pool at the 'new' School. Several of us used to swim nearly every day at lunch time and afterwards we were served a special lunch in the refectory.

We always swam naked, except for swimming matches and that was a long time before clothing coupons. I would suggest it was just a matter of time. The routine was a very quick dip after gym when one simply dropped one's shorts and jumped in the water. There was no time to mess about with costumes and anyway what would one have done with a wringing wet costume for the rest of the day?

We swam under the eye of dear old Mr Crawshaw - I say old as he appeared really ancient to us, but I reckon he could have been only about 65 at the time.

**Ian Callan, Winilan Talsarn
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Toby Cantrell

I wrote some time ago to see if there were other OM survivors, besides myself, who stayed at the El Minza Hotel in Tangiers and also visited Gibraltar with Toby Cantrell? Also there was a later trip to Switzerland.

I also asked about the origin of the annual visit to the Kingsway Cinema (not now existing).

I noted with interest the question headed Swimming Naked by Dr Michael D. Cohen. As a new pupil in a new school building I assumed it was due to lack of provision for wet swim suits. Full length costumes were the norm for men and women if you were swimming in a public pool, trunks were some years ahead. Wet swim suits would have been difficult to deal with in class room lockers, or under desk tops.

As a matter of interest, Harrow Schoolboys used to swim naked in their own pool outside. I do not know if they still do.

C G Hilton (1933/40)

**Whitegates, 14 Tower Rd
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HA5 4SJ**

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My senile recollection is that costumes were optional during our swimming periods when R.A. Crawshaw was the teacher. This was at a time when they were what girls nowadays would call "one-piece". However, at the end of gym lessons the teachers would sometimes allow us the last ten minutes of the period to shed our shorts, do a couple, or three lengths in the pool, and get dressed for departure. On reflection I think we were allowed to swim naked partly to cut down on changing time and partly because bringing swimming costumes as well as gym gear was not an option with the book load we were carrying to and from home.

I still have the faded fabric owl badge which was awarded to those of us who reached some level of achievement in the pool. Would someone please remind me what this was called?

**John Wightman. (1929-35)
99-c Eighth Ave, Tauranga,
New Zealand**

Dicky Radford

I was not surprised by Brian Berry's tribute to Dicky Radford in the last "Old Mancunian". The presence of the choir singing lustily certainly enhanced morning assembly and, until my voice broke, I was as proud as my family to sing at Founders' Day in Manchester

Cathedral (though my mother had to remind me I was not wearing a hassock, but a cassock).

But there was another side to Dicky - while other masters wielded the gym-shoe, Dicky had a cane which didn't 'alf 'urt -- and he seemed to enjoy using it. On the subject of canes, it was rumoured that when he had to deal with REALLY bad boys, Eric James called in Cuthbert Seton for a special caning - can anyone substantiate my memory?

Mike Broadbent (1944-50)

Literary & Debating Soc.

I was greatly interested in what James Corke-Webster wrote. It is great that it is still there and clearly flourishing. Fifty or so years ago, it was a much weaker society, in terms of numbers at least. We met after school and we did not normally have the girls of MHS present. But I do recall that we arranged one such joint meeting - in spring 1951, I think. Was this the first time that the two schools debated together, I wonder?

As for James's reference to strict time-keeping in order to allow the maximum number of contributions from the floor, this is certainly the Council's practice in the London Borough of Brent. Three minutes is the limit for the latter; and it concentrates the mind wonderfully! The proposer and seconder are given a little more latitude, but not much. With a council of 65 members, it has to be thus.

So the Lit and Deb is still providing not only good entertainment, but excellent practice for the future, I guess.
**Cllr Dr Noel Thompson
nbwt@waitrose.com**

Apologia

**Professor Peter Forrester
Peter writes to remind me he
was at School 1930 to 1935 not
in the 1950 to 1955 as reported
in the last edition.**

The Old Boys Dinner

The 201st Annual Dinner was held at the Freemasons Hall Manchester on Saturday 12th of November. The excellent meal was well attended, including a good representation from the School with Carole Pemberton, Secretary of the OMA, Carol Ray the High Master's wife, the School Captain and three Vice Captains.

There were three excellent, lively after dinner speeches, from the Senior Steward Dr Robert Shields, the Junior Steward Mr Guy Robson, and the High Master Dr Christopher Ray. The Recorder Paul Rose is to be congratulated for organising the event that ran so smoothly it finished on time!

OMA AGM

Phil Loynes was elected as a new member of the Executive following the death of Brian Kitson and the resignation of Paul Sutton

The accounts were approved for the period to March 31st 2005. The principal change was to approve the winding up of the Life Members' Fund and additional donations, transferring the residual values to the main reserves. This fund was exhausted some years ago, but the accounts now reflect that position.

The new constitution as applicable to the Sections was unanimously accepted. The principal objective is to continue to strengthen the ties between the OMA and MGS.

London & South East Section

22 OMs gathered at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese for the AGM where John Hamer (1950-58) was elected Chairman. John outlined a comprehensive package of events for 2006 involving: visits to the Tower of London and Hampton Court, pub evenings, Beating Retreat, Golf Day and Annual Dinner. New members and guests are assured of a warm welcome and should contact the Secretary,

Nick Gartside
nicholas.gartside@schrodgers.com

Midlands Section

The Annual Luncheon and Annual General Meeting were held at The Forest Hotel Dorridge in Solihull on November 19th. The High Master and Mrs Ray with Tim Hall and Mrs Hall were guests of the Section. After Luncheon the High Master spoke and reported on the progress of the

Bursary Fund. He also

referred to ten outstanding events during the past year ranging from sport to music. The Hugh Oldham Lecture had been established and links to other schools had been strengthened.

At the AGM which followed the meeting it was agreed to send a donation to the School. The Committee and Hon Auditor were also re-elected to serve for another year.

Dan Binnion, Hon Secretary
Tel 01902 756894.)

South West Section

Our latest event took place on 12th November at Bristol Harbour. We were able to explore the SS Great Britain, its Museum and a replica of The Matthew - John Cabot's 15th century ship. Also a special conducted tour of the recently refurbished Ocean Liner was arranged for our group, which added to the appreciation of such impressive engineering. We then caught a ferry across the harbour to have a much-praised lunch in a floating restaurant. The occasion took place in glorious autumn sunshine and was greatly enjoyed by all.

Ed Bridge, Hon Secretary
ed@edbridge.co.uk
Tel 01934 834521

OM Masonic Lodge

This coming year sees the Centenary celebrations of the Old Mancunians Lodge. Founded in February 1906, the Lodge has formed a link between the school and the Masonic fraternity throughout the last century and now into the new millennium.

Former masters and pupils alike have been members of this rare group (as very few schools can boast their own associated Lodge) which has flourished over the years and currently has many notable members.

Upholding the traditions of the school and providing a rewarding and enjoyable experience in Freemasonry are the twin functions of the Lodge and new members are always welcome.

Details can be obtained by contacting the Secretary and any current Masons wishing to attend the Centenary meeting in March 2006 are requested to get in touch.

Call Matthew Walton
Tel 01565 654839 or email
matthew.walton@winningline.com

Bert Parnaby

Walking through Christ's Pieces in the centre of Cambridge I noticed a bench bearing a plaque "In memory of Bert and Jane Parnaby". Bert

will be remembered as a master by many in the 1950's era. He subsequently appeared from

time-to-time on television as an actor.

Stephen Buckley

I have just received the September issue of The Old Mancunian, and been shocked to read of the death of Stephen Buckley. Stephen's years at MGS coincided almost exactly with my own as a pupil. He was my first French teacher in 1J. More than 30 years on, I can vividly recall the way Stephen would burst into the classroom with such vigour and infectious enthusiasm, demonstrating his evident love for his subject and determination that his passion should be shared by his pupils.

Stephen certainly inspired in me a love of the French language, culture and people, which I still retain. I took a degree in the subject and have subsequently lived in France and worked extensively with the French-speaking world, sparked by those first lessons in the 'state of the art' (at the time) Language Lab at the top of the staircase (Room 20?) 25 years after leaving School, on the occasion of the 70s reunion last year, I was particularly pleased to have had the opportunity to meet Stephen again and to be able to let him know what an inspirational teacher he had been to me. Typically, he accepted the compliment with great modesty.

I will remember him with great affection and esteem, and I am sure my contemporaries will join me in sending their sincere condolences to Stephen's family.

Roger Doxey (1972 /79)

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Winchmore Hill
London N21 2NS

I enjoy receiving The Old Mancunian; thank you. [I taught Modern Languages at MGS 1973-1980) before moving on to a post in Cambridge. Two events this Summer, one of them very sad, brought M.G.S. to the front of my mind and provoked thoughts of my time at the school in the 70's. The first, of course, was the sudden death of Stephen Buckley, which I learned about while I was in Madrid thanks to an email from Richard Simpson. I worked with Steve, as he was known in those days, throughout my time at the school and shared a flat with him for a while before his marriage. He was a fine teacher of both French and German, a gifted linguist with a genuine love of literature, especially theatre. I remember Steve also as a very good friend and a very sane colleague in what seemed at times a somewhat

intense, slightly crazy place and also as one of those Friday night tennis players who was always ready to go on afterwards for a spot to eat and drink. He had many friends and will be missed.

The second event was much more pleasant and happened in Edinburgh in August. The production of "Sink the Belgrano" that I saw said so much about the school. First of all, the boldness of the choice of this play, just a bit out-dated now, perhaps, but still wonderfully hard-edged in its expression and committed in its focus. Secondly, the sharpness of the production and the quality of the acting, which brought back many happy memories of excellent drama seen during my time at M.G.S., including the first thing I ever saw, I think, an English Department production of "The Importance of Being Earnest" with all parts played by members of the [all male] department. It is very good to know that the school's commitment to first rate theatre is being maintained and I'd like to offer a public word of congratulations to Peter Baylis and his team on the show I saw in Edinburgh.

I currently live in Westchester County, just north of Manhattan, and would be happy to hear from anyone planning to visit New York who may like to be in touch.

Danny Lawrence, 293,
Benedict Avenue, Tarrytown,
NY 10591.

dannylawrence@aol.com

OMA Ties

Peter Byrom, who went to North first, and then MGS, phoned to say he had two ties with different stripes. Top right to bottom left has no owls, and he believes this was a war-time tie. He came back to School a year ago when his grandson who goes to Adams G S Newport was playing MGS at rugby. It also coincided with a Saturday 'Open Day' and traffic was being very strictly controlled. When he showed his ties he was beckoned on into the main quad to park in style!

He will photograph these two ties and send copies on for the archive, but he does not want to part with them!

Peter Byrom (1939/43)
Tel 0161 790 6766

Obituaries

Peter Gillibrand MA Oxon (1946/2005)

Peter joined MGS in 1945. He was a keen runner who went up to Oxford University where he obtained a Masters Degree. He dedicated his life to teaching as a Classics Master.

Norman Stocks (1937/40)

On 20th September. Norman, a Chartered Secretary, went to Great Universal Stores Plc as the Company Secretary until his retirement in 1987. He was Treasurer and Secretary of a number of local charities in Bramhall. His son Simon (1979/85) was ordained on June 26th and is a Curate at St John the Evangelist, Coulsdon.

His address is:

8 Waddington Avenue,
Coulsdon, Surrey
CR5 1QE

Kenneth C Turpin (1926-33)

Kenneth went up to Oriol College, Oxford. He became Vice Chancellor of Oxford University. From 1943-45 he served as assistant private secretary to Clement Attlee.

A Leslie Yoxall (1925-33)

Leslie returned to the Common Room as a Maths Master 1939-41 having read mathematics at Cambridge. During the War he had a distinguished career working at Bletchley Park on the decryption of the German Naval Enigma machine transferring to GCHQ in 1953. Following retirement in 1974 Leslie returned to first career as teacher of mathematics.

2006 Reunion

The Reunion for the joiners 1960-69 will be held on Saturday 6th May 2006. Please make a note in your new diary now. An active organising committee is essential to the continuing success of these gatherings. To volunteer please contact

Carole Pemberton telephone 0161 224 7201 Ext 241

Bert Toft

Re. Professor Forrester's letter and Bert Toft, was Bert really back at the school in 1950's as is implied or was it a misprint for 1930's?

December 2005

H.B.Toft who was my form master (Science 3b) in 1936, left the school at the end of that year to become headmaster of a school in Somerset. In 1947 when I happened to be in Bath on business I spotted him on the other side of the street that burly form and broken nose being unmistakable. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to attract his attention.

Bert was, indeed, a gentle soul though that may not have been obvious to opponents on the rugby field where he represented England and Waterloo as hooker. He was almost fanatically opposed to professionalism in sport and would have been appalled by the current Rugby Union.

The only time I saw him lose his cool was on the occasion of the annual swimming sports held at High Street baths. He asked who was going to attend and when a mere half-dozen raised their hands he stormed out of the room and didn't reappear for the balance of the period. At the next period all was normal and the incident wasn't mentioned.

I recall that when the weed-ridden state of the playing fields came to his notice he announced that if every boy in the school were to pick up ten weeds a day the problem would be solved. As his personal storm troops Sc.3b was expected to set an example despite a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. Fortunately, the project was short lived. But Bert was an all round good guy.

Could I ask when the house system (instituted ca. 1935) was abandoned? I was allotted to de Quincey, and believe that the others were Ainsworth, Bradford and Lockwood. An ill-starred venture, it was unpopular from the start because it artificially split forms up without providing any means of building the clan loyalties that living together in a boarding school system promotes.

Bob Anderson (1934-38)

[bobanderson4v@btinternet.com]

Quite right 1930, not 1950, I can't get away with anything! With nearly 10,000 proof readers round the world there is nearly always something I have to crave pardon for!

It was Eric James in 1945 who abolished the House system. Ed. Sinister Ties!

In the late 1800s it occurred to The War Office that bright red military uniform made soldiers conspicuous, so the green drab uniform was created. Regiments, anxious to have some distinctive mark, designed their own striped neckties for social wear. The stripes always ran "from the heart" downwards towards the right hand. Shortly after, the USA took the same path but their stripes ran the other way.

Today this difference is perpetuated. Europe, including Russia, follows the British. Once you learn this fact, your life will never be the same - you look at every tie you see. There does not seem to be a technical reason for the difference involving "warp" and "weft" (or "woof" in the USA).

Readers beware - Although "Sinister means "left", heraldic descriptions are always written from the viewpoint of the wearer behind the shield so "Bend Sinister", (denoting bastardy), is actually in the direction of the English tie, not the American.

For many years, Henry Barrie in St Ann's Square Manchester was the MGS uniform shop who policed the eligibility of purchasers. Thirty years ago, a UK relative tried to buy me an OM tie for Christmas and was given a hard time because she could not give proof of my eligibility and non habeas corpus. However, she prevailed and on Christmas day, I awoke to find a non-bastardy tie - surprise - had the CIA "dirty tricks Department infiltrated St Ann's Square?

I don't want to see Ian Thorpe up to his neck in donated ties. If he does not receive one by Christmas, he can e-mail me his

address and I will surrender mine for posterity.

Geoffrey Clarke (1948/55) Naples, Florida

Ian is grateful for the gift of a tie from Jonathan Fistein & offers from others.

"A Disastrous History of Britain", ISBN 0-7509-3865-X, has just been published by Sutton Books. It is in all good bookshops, and hopefully, some bad ones too, says John! **John Withington (1958-65)** [ac01516529_4@blueyonder.co.uk]

Editorial

There was a record post bag mainly arising from Dr Michael Cohen's article in September on 'Naked Swimming'. *The Old Mancunian* was mentioned in the *Sunday Times*, and one correspondent (who forwarded a copy of the article) was deeply upset by the subject being brought up again. To him I apologise most sincerely, and also in advance, for further airing the subject in response to the post. The vast majority of correspondents were in favour of nude swimming. I would also assure him I am not a teacher, and have never been a member of academic staff at MGS.

The Old Mancunian is produced by an OM, for OM's, and an advance copy is shown to the School only to check for liability, and as far as possible to verify facts. I would welcome an Assistant with a view to providing continuity when I retire! A sense of fun, and email essential! Any offers?

Please address all correspondence to Mrs Carole Pemberton c.m.pemberton@mgs.org
Or, Don Isherwood, Editor Tel 0161-483 7214
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