

INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN SMITH ABOUT HIS TIME AT EXMOUTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

I spoke to Robin Smith to find out what the school was like and how it has changed in comparison to my education there as it is known now as Exmouth Community College.

Today Exmouth Community College is one of the biggest schools in the country. Over 2000 pupils attend the school up to a level standard. I attended the school from 1995-2002. Now I look back at my days there fondly although at the time I couldn't wait to get out! Robin attended the school from 1955- 1962. He has set up his own website www.smith-robin@supanet.com about 2 years ago with information about the school at the time.

Robin told me,

“At the time the school had just 500 pupils; there were two schools then, a secondary modern and a grammar school.”

Robin was a bright pupil so went to the grammar school. The subjects he studied were restricted to a set few and differences did occur as he studied Latin, which isn't in the curriculum today, and botany, which I hadn't even heard of but was attached to biology! He only had a choice between Latin and chemistry and he choose Latin because he was good at it. Media wasn't in the curriculum it had barely been invented! I had to laugh when he said,

“I wanted to be a Journalist but became an engineer because my father said I had to do a proper job!”

It seems parents had a great deal more influence over what their children did and Robin agreed. Exams were every term and very competitive as results were published and people wanted to be in the best position. But in the grammar school people wanted to learn, according to Robin so it may have been very different in the secondary modern. There, was however a divide between the two schools as I can see a stigma being attached to those who weren't good enough for the grammar school.

Robin told me that detention, lines and standing outside the headmaster's office were the punishments used. Detentions could also be on Saturdays and the cane was used on boys as a final solution. Robin seemed to know very little about caning and he told me it was because he was a good boy! In fact he actually became a prefect; they are not used in the school anymore but had some disciplinary powers over students. It (caning) seems it wasn't spoken about much in the playground and wasn't as widely used as I thought. He told me it wasn't too strict which surprised me as I thought it would have been and by today's standards it is! He found it hard to recall what the kids usually got punished for but told me they used to cut down bushes, cheek back to staff and steal from the tuck shop - not much change there! He also recalled the scandals of the few teenage pregnancies at the time. Robin got no formal sex education, what he did get was a few classes in botany mostly related to animals! He told me with a smile.

“You found out from the playground and in practice!”

Robin told me about all the sports and clubs available at the time, there was so much more then and kids seemed to participate in after school clubs so much more. I suppose children now prefer to play computer games and watch television! Robin played in the rugby colt's

team 1958-1959; a picture of the team is on the website. There was a lot more competition between teams and Robin told me rugby was much more popular than soccer and that it was dropped because there weren't enough teams to play with. I had to laugh when he mentioned a bee-keeping club that was taken by teacher Johnny Walker who Robin remembers fondly. Believe it or not he said there was also a model railway club as well; Robin didn't do either of these clubs. He recalled the headmaster being a very friendly man and remembers seeing him often when riding his bike to school as he lived not far from him.

He told me about Exmouthiansis, a school magazine published 2-4 times a year until 1960. Copies can still be seen in the old Grange building that used to house the headmaster's office but now is used mostly for administration.

He told me about the Exmouth Grammar School reunions that meet every few years. Robin attended the last one on 4th October 2003 at the Manor Hotel in Exmouth. He told me,

“I visited the school and was sad to see all the playing fields that there used to be gone!”

Robin obviously has fond memories of his school years and talked about them animatedly to me. He has been in contact with a few people from that time most have now left Exmouth. This he puts down to lack of opportunities in the area and the same can be said now. Many of his friends at the grammar school went on to further education; technical colleges at the time and so did Robin to learn engineering. The education and the school have changed quite a bit since I was there. Education seems more diverse now; I think there is less division than the grammar and secondary modern school system created. But I don't think either of us had a better education it has just changed as society has. The school has recently reverted back to the Tie and Blazer uniform Robin used to wear so it seems some things don't change at all!

(From a telephone interview by Hayley Uphill carried out in November 2004; with some minor editing by Robin Smith.)