

Memories of Otterton and Exmouth Grammar School

I received an email message from a John Clements in March, earlier this year. John attended Exmouth Grammar School (EGS) during the years 1940 to 1945, when he lived in Otterton as an evacuee. This was of particular interest to me as my father's family lived in Otterton and some of the names of people/families that John has mentioned in further correspondence are familiar to me.

There are a lot of names John has mentioned which will only be of interest to those who have/had families or friends who lived in Otterton. John lived with his mother and siblings mainly in the post office (PO) as lodgers of Henry Genge and did a baker's round for Arthur Payne. He recalls my grandmother, Bessie Smith who ran a greengrocers and remembers the Otter family, one of whom, Ken went to EGS later and who I recall created a youth club in Otterton of which I was a much younger member (I didn't live in Otterton). Other names mentioned were a Bob Carter, whom John's son met a few years back when looking to his roots, a Harry Manns, who lived in the PO with his uncle, and his brother, Wilf Manns, took over the PO after the death of Henry Genge.

John had a girlfriend, Mollie Otter, older sister of Ken, and bosom pal of Iris Hawk, both of whom attended EGS, whom Harry later married.

Other names mentioned by John are Harold and Ernie Payne, his wife Iris (nee Hawk), Cicily Till (married name Pantol), a close friend of John's sister, Kathleen in the 1940s.

Those who are my contemporaries may remember a Janet Till and Wendy Pile who went to EGS in the 1950s.

Another name that came up was that of Dennis Cozens, a class mate of John's. Dennis later wrote a book that is mentioned in my first Notebook entry below, that recalls a letter from Edna Barlow, sister of Phyllis Bardens. We traced a copy of the book and John borrowed it but found it rather disappointing as it mentions little of EGS.

In one of his earliest email messages, John recalls some names of teachers and their subjects: -

"Bullo Heath - French; Prae Earp - Geography; Rosemary Grater - Geography; Phyllis Bardens - History; Miss Lee - Scripture; Johnnie Walker - Physics; Capt Grey RM - Maths; Doreen Morgan - Botany; Miss Bedford - Latin; Connie Timms - music; an Ex RM Bandsman, name forgotten; Benny Goodman - unsure; Harry Bampfoeld - Carpentry; Arthur Amos - Art; Pop Civil - Maths/games; Chemistry - forgotten; English - forgotten; D'Arcy Hughes - Head; Dot Fleming - French."

"In the first years the school was shared by a school from London Called Beaufoy College so we had to go two full days and three half days each week. Travel to school was by bus but a few (Eric Sage & Ken Bowles) cycled from Knowle sometimes using the suction from behind the bus going up Knowle Hill. In later years I joined the cyclists from Otterton (7 miles)."

"Others on the bus included Derek Davey and Colin Hart, Mollie Otter & Iris Hawke (Otterton), Gerald Troake (East Budleigh)."

"To start with we had house shoes which we had to change into going into school in the old house."

"Other memories are of Marcus Beer from Topsham who played the Bombardon, and Cooney Chanter also from Tottenham who played the trumpet."

"From the village I recall Sunday mornings when villagers would carry a prepared roast dinner to the bakery to be cooked while they went on to church, collecting it on the way home afterwards. (There was an) informal boys' club in the post office store room where there was a small snooker table. Moving sometimes to the house where Harry Manns and his uncle would in effect 'host' a card or table games evening in the winter months. The village boys organised a football team in the summer to challenge other nearby village teams. Most of the boys were in the village scouts who managed themselves while the Scoutmaster was away in the RAF."

Robin Smith & John Clements – August 2012