



THE OLD TAUNTONIANS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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June 2025

Letter from the Chairman

Welcome to the latest edition of the OTA Newsletter, and a big thank you to all who responded to our request for articles. The response was excellent, so good that we cannot include all in this edition due to lack of space! Those excluded this time will be in the next edition or posted on our website. Please keep your stories coming!

Speaking of our website, this is kindly looked after by Bob Newell, our former Secretary who now resides in Exeter. Bob suggested a reminder to all about the website and the OT Photograph Gallery. With the latter, Bob is happy to add more photos - as long as they contain details of what they are about!

The links are:

www.ota-southampton.org.uk

<https://otassoc.smugmug.com/>

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Summer Reunion Lunch on **Thursday 17th July** at Ampfield Golf Club

Roger Parsons

Dr H. M. King's Poem

This is a poem written and recited by Dr H M King, Spranger Head and later an MP and Speaker of the House in Parliament. I remember the last two lines verbatim, but had to reconstruct the rest of it, hopefully close to the original but far from the expertise of the original writer.

*At his very first service, a budding young priest,
Launched into his sermon with passion unceased.
He prided himself on his oratorical powers
And intended his sermon go on for hours,
But as evening advanced to the depth of night
The churchgoers senses there was no end in sight
They quietly crept out of the door at the side
Trying their best their movements to hide.
And when the last one had taken his leave
The priest felt a tug on the end of his sleeve
He glanced down to face the caretaker's head
The latter looked up at the priest and just said
'You're the only one here, old son of a gun
Just switch off the light and lock up when you're done'.*

I can still visualise Dr King reciting the above with such enthusiasm.

Laurence Bishop (1934 - 1939)



Southampton and Tauntons Revisited

In August 2024, grandson Dan offered to take me to Southampton, as I had expressed an interest in re-visiting the town, having not been for many years. His parents decided to come too. We planned a programme - Taunton's School, Highfield, in the morning and Swaythling, where I had lived as a child, and Hedge End, where my wife and I had our first home, in the afternoon. Having decided to go on the scenic route from Clevedon rather than the motorway our plans were somewhat thwarted by the road closures and diversions across both the Mendips and Salisbury Plain, so that, although we were on our way by 9 a.m., it was nearly one o'clock before we reached Highfield. We ate our sandwiches hastily on a seat by the footpath between Omdurman Road and the Avenue.

Although the school is now part of the university we decided that we would go into the reception area and ask if we could look around. As we made our way to the door on the southern side I recognised my old form room at the front of the school.

There were very few students about, of course, but there were a number of people in the foyer, lecturers and administrative staff, I imagine, and teachers running summer courses. My daughter approached one and explained that I had been at school in that building from 1932 till 1939, and now at 103, would like to see it again. The whole group was most welcoming and plied me with questions, and "Yes, do walk round. Go wherever you like!" We strolled along the corridor which used to house the Music Room - I could almost hear the scraping of violins - and the Lower School form rooms. The rooms were instantly recognisable - the same doors and windows and massive radiators; only the floors and walls had been renovated; the whole building looked impressive. The quadrangle, however, was greatly altered: it had been paved and gravelled over and furnished with tables and benches where the students could eat their lunches. In my day it was an area of grass and the only time I saw anyone on it in seven years, was the occasion of a chess match between two masters - chess (not school) masters! - with boys, suitably garbed, acting as the pieces. Otherwise, the quad was never used!

I would have liked to have gone up to the second floor to the balcony overlooking the hall - the scene of the memorable story about Norris (I witnessed the event) - to see what had happened to the Library, then to have turned along the Science corridor, and also to have gone out to revisit the playing fields, but we had run out of time.

We made our way to our next objective, Swaythling School, by way of Bassett Cross Roads, Burgess Road and Woodcote Road (past my old home which looked very different!) to Mayfield Road where we stopped for a few minutes outside a building that, as far as I could see, looked just the same as it did in 1926 when I started my education there. Next through West End, where we passed the ground that Hampshire C.C.C. had moved to from the Northlands Road ground, where I had spent many happy hours. (In the first county game I ever saw the two captains were Lord Tennyson - Hampshire - and V.W.C. Jupp - Northants). I recalled that in those days the Amateurs - the Gentlemen - had a separate dressing room from the Professionals - the Players - and even entered the field of play through a different gate!).

So on to Wildern Lane in Hedge End. Both the school where I started teaching and our first home were there, about a quarter of a mile apart. However, both were hugely changed. The secondary school, an attractive single-storey white brick building around a quadrangle, was now the village primary school, and the large detached house with a big garden and some central heating (bought in 1948 for £2,000!) was no longer a domestic property, but with small additional buildings at front and back, had become a veterinary surgery; the large garden had been gravelled over to become the Practice car park. We went in, explained, were made welcome by the receptionist, and explored some of the much-changed building. It was time to think about the return journey.

On the way, we made a brief stop in Coombe Bisset, a small village a few miles west of Salisbury, where my father had grown up and always claimed that he had been to the University of Coombe Bisset. And so back to the West Country, avoiding the diverted and closed roads, since we now knew where they were. It was a sometimes frustrating but also enjoyable and memorable day!

Arthur Spencer (1932 – 1940)

Time of Change

During my time at Tauntons there were huge changes. Long serving staff retired, principally Harry Spooner and Mr Challacombe; the Grammar School became a Sixth Form College and school uniform disappeared.

The enforced change to a Sixth Form College was not well received by parents, pupils or staff. As a Grammar School I was about to join '5 Advanced' before going onto Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth. As a Sixth Form College '5 Advanced' became Lower Sixth going on to Middle Sixth and Upper Sixth.

In my final year, 1970, I was School Captain. The Echo gleefully reported on disinterested sixth formers under the new arrangements which I felt unfair and said so.

As we prepared to leave, Upper Sixth challenged the staff to a skittles match at the Mill Arms in Dunbridge. Teachers and pupils socialising in the pub, whatever next! The picture shows 'Dog' Collar bowling.

The picture below shows my Upper Sixth friends (I am front row, right) Uniformless while Messrs. Colenutt and Caffrey continued to wear their cloaks.

Geoff Knappett (1963 - 1970)



A Truly Gifted Cricketer

I am contacting you on behalf of Timothy Binks an O.T. and my husband since he doesn't do computers etc and also has vascular dementia. Tim and his brother Martin were at Tauntons in the late 1950s/1960s. They have a younger sister Hilary who celebrated her 80th birthday in Chesterfield last year and we met up with a friend of hers who was also an O.T. - Nick Houghton who brought with him an old photo of himself, his brother Stephen Houghton and Tim and the team walking off the cricket field after a match, being applauded off the cricket field by the opposition. Despite his memory issues Tim spent a long time reminiscing with Nick about "happy days" at Tauntons, reliving every ball bowled and every run/boundary Scored. Tim sends best wishes to anyone who remembers him from the old days.



Chris Binks on behalf of **Timothy Binks (1955 - 1960)**

Note from the Chairman - Tim was an outstanding cricketer, probably the best batsman in the OT's side which dominated Hampshire Club cricket in the late 1960s/early 1970s.

Reminiscences by 'an Old Man'

I doubt that former pupils of Taunton's College really want to read the ramblings of someone in his late eighties who attended Taunton's in the early 1950s when it was a Grammar School. However, I'm writing this because I still look back on my time at Taunton's School (1949-1956) with enormous satisfaction and appreciation for the kind of education provided. For my family it was rather expensive going to Basticks in the town centre to buy the required school uniform including the cap which had to be worn going to and from school. Living in Shirley I rode to school by bicycle each day across Southampton Common.

In the first year I was placed in the third stream, class IBI. In those days IBI and IB2, i.e. third and fourth stream pupils, were not deemed suitable (or intelligent enough?) for Latin lessons but at least I was able to study German under Mr Don Gray which proved an advantage in later life. I stayed in the third stream until the end of my fourth year. At this point streaming ended and I went into 5 Advanced where students started on their A Levels alongside working for basic GCE qualifications. This was a really innovative approach by the school giving three years for maturation during A level study. Taunton's provided a high quality education and enabled me, as a rather late developer, to make good progress and gain four A levels, enough to be offered places to read Geography at the London School of Economics and at Birmingham University. I chose the latter.

The education I received at Taunton's encouraged personal initiative in studying especially in history under Messrs McMullan and Lock where the teaching could be somewhat discursive and instilled the need to read extensively around the subject. In Geography it was the enthusiasm and pleasant manner of the teacher, Ted Colenutt, that helped to arouse my interest in the subject. In my seventies on a trip to Southampton I went to visit Ted, by then a retired widower. I went feeling somewhat apprehensive - was I imposing? Would he even remember me?

He was so welcoming, he did remember me and we had a great time together. A year or two later my wife and I were able to take him out to lunch which for me was a very special occasion. To go and see my old Geography teacher after over fifty years perhaps says something about the influence he might have had on me and my career.

I don't recall much need for discipline at Taunton's. The staff were well-qualified, enthusiastic and friendly and the traditions of the school were well maintained and extra-curriculum activities were organised for me with four A level subjects to cover many hours were spent in Southampton Reference Library exploring sources and this experience and taking responsibility for one's own learning have stayed with me throughout my academic life. There was personal attention, too. My fourth A level, Economic History, was taken in just one year. There were only two of us in the group and we would study in the library with Mr A. S. M. Clarke who would sometimes start the proceedings by placing a pile of sweets on the table for us to share! Today, no doubt, it would be deemed an inefficient use of resources although I think it was an effort to get the subject into the curriculum. Sport was encouraged at the school and although not very good I played hockey in particular including a spell for my house team and the Old Boys 4th Eleven! Other beneficial activities at school included a film club and speech lessons. The latter is unlikely to be on any curriculum today but in my old age how I wish some of our current TV actors had such lessons!

My school experience is a lifetime away but it is still with me. I may have started in the third stream but I'll be for ever grateful for the Taunton's experience which I believe was crucial in enabling me to gain a PhD and end up lecturing in the university sector. Looking back we didn't have the internet to aid study – but on the other hand we did not have the pressures of social media. But I feel I had almost the equivalent of a public school education at no expense. And then on leaving Taunton's university experience came with a maintenance grant and no fees to pay. How things have changed and how privileged I was!

Maxwell Johnson (1949 - 1956)

The 100 Club

Recent Winners

November 2024	£50
<i>Brian Carter 1950 - 1958</i>	
November 2024	£100
<i>John Russell 1955 - 1963</i>	
November 2024	£250
<i>Jeff Hayden 1955 - 1960</i>	
December 2024	£20
<i>Arthur Spencer 1932 - 1940</i>	
January 2025	£20
<i>Roger Parsons 1964 - 1966</i>	
February 2025	£20
<i>Roger Gibbon 1954 - 1959</i>	
March 2025	£20
<i>Ron Sizer 1948 - 1953</i>	
April 2025	£20
<i>John Russell 1955 - 1963</i>	

Deaths

Robin Ashdown Carr 1956-1961
Bob Davenport 1957-1964
John Martin 1944-1950