



REMINISCENCES OF BALSHAW'S G.S. PART I

Dorothy and I possess quite an extensive collection of BGS memorabilia, thanks to both our mothers, who never dreamt of throwing them into the dustbin! It's only with their deaths within the past eighteen months that many of them have come to light during the clearance of their houses. With all the memories which they evoke there's no way in which I can put seven years of life at Balshaw's into a 10 minute talk! However, here is a selection of memories:

It all began with THAT EXAMINATION – the Scholarship, or the Eleven Plus as it came to be known in later years.* Then came the arrival of THAT LETTER which announced one's success, giving the date and time of your interview with the Headmaster and the date upon which the new term would commence (Wednesday, 7th September, 1949, in our case).

Then came the day of the interview – regarded with some trepidation, I recall! I wonder what your memories are of that visit, and what impressions it made upon you? For me, first of all, it was the iron railings along the frontage and the school's signboard – gold lettering and all; then there were the huge, manicured front lawns with the one to the east of the Boys' Drive serving as the Staff Tennis Court in the summer months, and the huge beech trees. To someone from a little village school the size of the place was totally overwhelming. Why! it was so big that it had corridors!!

First we met the dynamic Miss Moss, School Secretary, and then Mr V.U. Oldland (Vic) the Headmaster: tall, athletic and with a booming Oxford accent. The girls also made their first acquaintance with Miss M.A. Rahill (Mary Ag.), the Senior Mistress. Sorting through the memorabilia in recent times, I became very conscious of the incredible amount of work Miss Moss got through in a year, and with what nowadays would be regarded as the most primitive technology. In this day and age I reckon she would probably have been able to run a world-wide corporation single-handedly – with her pencil stuck behind her ear, of course! At the end of the visit we received a copy of the school's brochure* and, no doubt, a list of clothing and equipment that would be required.

The next step was getting together the new outfit. Suppliers of BGS clothing were Buxton Brothers, and they had shops both on Chapel Brow, close to the Police Station, and on Hough Lane. Items included: a cap for me* (and much later graduating to a Prefect's cap*) while for Dorothy it was a black velour hat with BGS ribbon* and, in summer, a white straw Panama hat with ribbon*. There was a blazer with badge* (and, much later, a Colours blazer with silver piping*); a tie* for both girls and boys (and later a Prefect's tie*); then, in time, a Colours tie* - which was actually introduced during our time at Balshaw's. (Some of us can even remember Miss Whewell's desk in the Art Room being littered with drawings of prototypes.) Everything but everything had to be named, and for clothing this meant a supply of Cash's name tapes* – which were ordered on the day and collected later. There was a school satchel too*, with your name on the inside of the flap. Later on I acquired an Old Boys' tie*, cuff links* and tieclip*, plus a BGS Bicentenary tie*

We came across a list of equipment*, made at the time by Dorothy's mother, which listed the initial outlay on her daughter. The grand total amounted to £30-15-8d. This

was a considerable sum in 1949, particularly for working class families – where many of us came from. It would be more than a little interesting to know what that would equate to in current financial terms and it would put into perspective the sacrifices made by our parents in those difficult post-war years. To the list we have added pen (or biro – quite new then), pencil, coloured pencils, rubber, ruler, a pair of compasses, protractor and set squares, and a Panama hat and sandals (for summer). Have a look and see if you can add any other items to the list!

At some point Division 15 of the Lancashire Education Committee sent us Form S.S.A.30, regarding the Conditions of Admission to Grammar Schools*

And where would we all be coming from? Well, from larger schools such as Leyland's Fox Lane, Farington and Methodist, or Fulwood & Cadley, right down to tiny two-roomed village schools. These could be anywhere from the foot of Beacon Fell (Inglewhite & Whitechapel) southwards to Adlington, Coppull, Wrightington and Appley Bridge; from as far east as Hoghton, Gregson Lane and Brindle over to Croston and Longton in the west. Some had to use two buses on each journey and contracts had to be applied for*. Many, who lived more locally, came to school by bicycle or on foot – pupils AND staff. When we began at BGS I only remember Vic having a motor car, although some may smile at the memory of 'Benny' (Mr Bennison, Deputy Head) appearing one day on a small Corgi motorcycle, and 'Little Bill' Rigby riding his bike (complete with large, flat cap)! I seem to remember seven school buses lining up outside the school gates, mainly heading for Preston and Bamber Bridge. Another – to Ecclestone – was added later.

Not only did the school draw from an extensive catchment area but there could be a wide age-range within one's classmates: some 'forty niners' such as Dorothy, Jim Brennan and Peter Slater were still only ten years old when they started at Balshaw's, with birthdays not only in September but well into October. On the other hand some of our classmates were around twelve years of age, having taken the Scholarship two or three times and having already completed a year in a secondary modern school.

OUR FIRST DAY: singing 'Lord Behold Us With Thy Blessing' at Assembly.

Sitting in rows on the floor at the front of the Hall and craning our necks to look at the Staff members on the platform – all in academic gowns (such a culture shock!). Gazing at the Prefects sitting on chairs at the ends of some of the rows, several rows apart.

Pupils in Years One, Two and Three sitting on the floor, Years Four and Five on chairs to the rear of the Hall, with members of the Lower Sixth and the Upper Sixth in the balcony above.

And oh! those Girl Prefects: goddesses in grey (even though they would prove to be my persecutors for several years to come!)

Then Vic began to intone the names of those who would make up each form (not classes!), beginning with the Upper Vth. For someone who was going to be in 1C there was to be a long, long wait as he went through the lists. Eventually it was our turn and then off we went to our classroom, escorted by Miss Probert – our form teacher (Forms 1B and 1C were housed in the prefabs on the very eastern edge of the school site.), there to go through registration, to write out our timetable on the printed

form provided*, to receive our (printed) homework timetable*, to look furtively around at one's fellow conscripts, wondering if they were feeling as scared as you were, and maybe even to try talking to one or two of them. How I envied those who had come from the same school; it must have been a comfort to have someone they already knew.

It was also impressed upon us that we should have brought with us a Prevention of Infection Illness form*, duly completed. "N.B. The pupil will not be admitted to school until this form has been signed and presented to the Headmaster," was a rejoinder at the foot of the form. Thinking of some of the villains I went on to teach in later life, that would have been as good an excuse as any never to be seen on the premises again!

On another morning early in that first term Vic droned through the School Rules (as he did at the start of every new school year). One rule which still lives in the memory concerned 'dangerous and unusual objects' and a strict exhortation that they should not be poked with a stick. (It was, after all, not very long after the end of the Second World War.) Another forbade us to jump across the brook which meandered through the school grounds. As most of us lived in, or close to, the countryside, jumping across brooks and ditches was a normal part of life: this was like an open invitation to go ahead and do it! Little wonder that my very first Report* shows that I had been in detention three times in my first term – spotted, no doubt, by one of those Goddesses in Grey!

BRIEF MEMORIES OF A FEW MEMBERS OF STAFF:

Miss Probert (later Mrs Ife) who took Girls' P.E. and Games and was our Form Teacher.

Miss Bromley – dear 'Brom' – who introduced us to the French language, had us draw out a triangular Phonetic Vowel Chart on the first page of our exercise books* and had us write out the words of numerous French songs at the back. We assiduously practised the phonetics each lesson and did quite a lot of singing! I still offer up a prayer of thanks each time we go across to France.

Miss Whewell (Art) ruining her table by banging upon it with a large pair of scissors to try to bring order to our unruly mob.

'Slats' Morgan (History) – hands always in pockets, shoulders hunched and threatening detention to anyone misspelling 'Mediterranean'.

Harry Hewartson (Woodwork, Metalwork & Tech. Drawing) always sharpened pencils using a very sharp chisel. Triangular pencils* were popular at the time: present him with one of those to sharpen and he would give you a hard stare. "You know, the chap who invented these is now in Whittingham Hospital," he would announce. (i.e. the very large mental hospital near Preston)

He was often referred to as 'Harry Scrat' on account of a deformed finger-end, reputedly done when he'd been sharpening someone's triangular pencil! He lived in Crawford Avenue, very close to school.

Miss Doherty (English) – the tall, elegant, red-haired Miss Doherty!

Miss Ball (Domestic Science) – not much older than the Sixth Form girls she taught. Star of the staff tennis court and preparer of a rather good line in young wives!

Miss Lewis (Maths) – our Form Teacher in 2B. The joyless Miss Lewis, in my eyes. Detention for three nights, she gave me, simply for putting my foot against the door and keeping her shut out of the Form Room. (Actually I thought it was some of the girls I was keeping out!!)

Mr Bull (English) – known as ‘Bouef’ or ‘Burf’. He would have been better off esconced in a dusty room at Oxford, writing his poetry and doing some very academic research! A contributor to the BBC’s Third Programme (radio). He usually sat on a desk top facing the class, often with his finger tips together, and bumbled away in his dry-as-dust manner before suddenly pointing at someone and exclaiming, “Hmm? Hmm?” – clearly expecting an informed opinion in response. I have to say that rarely did that happen!

‘Squire’ Wilkinson (Maths) had once been great buddies with Burf, apparently, but then they’d fallen out – goodness knows why. From then on they would only communicate with each other via a third person e.g. “Oh! Mr Leathley: would you tell Mr Wilkinson that someone wants to speak to him,” if he answered your knock at the Staff Room door.

‘Squire’ was an elitist: those who could keep up with his frenetic pace of teaching prospered; those who couldn’t.....well.....!!
Had a reputation for coming to school from a different direction each morning!

‘Johnny’ Brown (Boys’ P.E. & Games and some Geography) also lived in Crawford Avenue. A bit of a tartar and didn’t stand any messing about.

Mr Mansfield (English) was as new to the school as we were. We christened him ‘Horace’ for some unknown reason. In the prefabs it could get quite cold and coke-burning stoves had been installed at the front of each classroom. These could get pretty hot and each was surrounded by a guardrail. Horace liked to lean on the rail whilst teaching and, invariably, his gown would hang temptingly close to the stove. On a number of occasions we sat enthralled as his gown first smouldered and then suddenly burst into flames. How we loved such simple entertainment!

Miss Cummins (Maths) was totally diminutive! Regularly the board duster would have been placed high up on top of the blackboard: not only could she not reach it but she couldn’t even see it! However, she knew where it would be and when it was required one of the taller class members, ‘Pie’ Slater, Goffy or Bill Brennan, would be called upon to retrieve it. (They had put it up there, anyway!) Occasionally all three would get to their feet and stand closely around her, just for the hell of it!

Miss Hutchings (later Mrs Pickersgill) also taught Girls’ P.E. and Games. She was an ex-pupil and another who wasn’t much older than the Sixth Formers she had to teach. Her lovely smile persuaded many a big, rough rugby player along to her Square Dance sessions.

Miss Rahill (English as well as being Senior Mistress) could frighten the life out of the most hard-bitten Fifth and Sixth Form lads, let alone the girls! For me she made GCE English an absolute joy, she even taught us to read Chaucer's 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' in Old English, and I can still remember fragments of its opening lines. Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice' became a living thing too.

Others who joined the staff during our time included Joe Rudd (Sciences) whom I met at Bolton when I was in my first teaching post: he was then Headmaster of Turton Secondary Modern School.

There was Gordon ('Stanley') Black who taught Music and some French; one you liked or disliked – no in-betweens!

Mr Johnson (French) was a very earnest young man and drilled us hard for the GCE: so hard, in fact, that the actual exam was nothing terrifying at all for most of us.

OTHER EARLY MEMORIES WHICH SPRING TO MIND:-

The 'Bottom Field' which usually resembled a swamp, and where we first learnt our rugby.

The air-raid shelters.

The cricket scoreboard.

The wooden seats along by the brook.

The school gardens which weren't! - normally only seen when running the cross country course (although they'd been much used during the war years, I believe).

The young trees down towards that same corner of the school grounds, each with its small metal label, dedicated to past scholars who'd died in the two World Wars.

Mr Miller the Groundsman ('Johnny Noyler' was his nickname); 'Jock' Bowler the Caretaker, and Mrs Higham, one of the Cleaners.

Devising games to be played on the field, if fine (well...fine-ish!) and on the playground too. (Large concrete squares offer all sorts of opportunities.)

Devising games which could be played on a desk-top when it was raining at dinner-time and we were incarcerated in classrooms (boys on the bottom corridor, girls on the top corridor).

Two sittings at dinner-time, with the Medical Room (always referred to as The Tuck Shop) also being pressed into service.

Drinking milk from small (one third of a pint) bottles at Morning Break in the Dining Hall.

Societies on Friday afternoons.

House Parties and others such as the Prefects' Party, one for those involved in the Carol Concert and one for those involved in the annual play. The Prefects were invited to them all, so one could attend seven parties in the school year when one reached those dizzying heights! They could be great fun and one certainly provided me with an excellent wife, so I can't complain! (I also have to say that Miss Ball had done a good job with her.)

What about the end of term? Do you recall being playing 'Pirates' in the gym? Being allowed to play all manner of board and card games in the classroom and whiling away the time, awaiting Vic's heavy tread down the corridor as he headed your way with the Reports?

And when he did arrive... for some it was death by public humiliation since he always insisted upon reading out one's full name in that booming voice of his. He couldn't do much damage with plain Roy Smith but others, saddled with a granny or

grandad's first name, found it a trying time. The girls suffered most, blushing and squirming as he intoned, "Isabelle Madge Bamber, Margaret Emma Clegg, Dorothy Isobel Cook," in turn. If looks could have killed he'd have been slain a thousand times over! Then there was the regular mispronunciation of certain surnames, and woe betide the individual who dared try to correct him!

End of the Summer Term: Staff versus Pupils matches at Tennis, Cricket and especially Rounders. All were eagerly anticipated and provided much pleasure and entertainment all round. Whether you were participating or watching, they always seemed to be very positive occasions, crossing the boundaries between staff and pupils and building the sort of relationship envied by many other schools.

I found it particularly sad when – some years ago – a reunion was held here in school for members of our Year, and organised by Hazel Harvey and Jean Tomlinson as they once were: one person refused the invitation because he said he'd hated the place. We can probably all recall occasions when Balshaw's wasn't unconfined joy! However, we survived, and we went through a lot together – much of it pleasurable. Balshaw's provided me with a wife, as I've said, and with lifelong friends and acquaintances. For that I'm very thankful.

You all have your own memories of Balshaw's and I hope that you'll resolve to tell us some of yours next year. I haven't touched much on the various sports we played, nor on school matches; on the annual play; on various choirs and on each Year doing its 'turn' at the Carol Concert. On Sports Day; on the Friday afternoon Societies; on films and lectures we had; on visits out of school – both local and foreign; on detentions; on Prefect activities; the end of the Christmas term in particular; on activities in St Andrew's churchyard following the parties.....and so on and so on. Take a look at the various copies of *The Balshavian**, the Speech Day programmes*, term calendars* and the Sports Day programmes* we've brought along: they may just spark a few memories.

(* = items on display)

Roy Smith (1949 – 1956) and Dorothy Smith (1949 – 1955)

REMINISCENCES OF BALSHAW'S G.S. PART II

Good evening everyone.

Firstly I should like to draw your attention to the photo on the display board of Mrs Betty Laraway – possibly the oldest living Balshavian at 99 years of age – who sends her greetings to you all. Just a few things about her: she was a pupil at the Golden Hill school, of course, under the watchful eye of 'Pa' Jackson. The girls of her day played tennis – although they had to go to Mayfield Tennis Club in their own time to receive any coaching – but, perhaps most interesting of all, they also played cricket! Very forward-looking!! She's also my wife Dorothy's auntie.

I rounded off Part I of these reminiscences by saying I had scarcely touched on such things as the various sports we played; the dramatic productions; the Carol Concert; Sports Day; Societies on a Friday afternoon; visits, films and lectures; parties; Prefects and so on and so on.

So now I pick up where I left off.

Hockey was the winter sport for the girls and rugby (union, of course) for the boys – with boys' cross country fitted in as a bit of a makeweight. Nothing so unladylike as cross country for the girls in those days! Did we have House cross country practices? I can't remember, but certainly there was both a Junior and a Senior inter-house championship. Pretty well everyone had to take part and it was not unknown for some of the older, and less enthusiastic, lads to run as far as Beech Avenue, play football on the St Andrew's pitch, and join in at the rear of the returning throng. Some people DID like cross country running and WERE good at it. School cross country matches were often triangular competitions and small boys – some with flags – acted as markers around the course.

In summer the girls played both tennis and rounders, with cricket for the boys – and athletics for both as almost another afterthought between the main winter and summer games. "Sports Training Begins," was a regular entry in the calendar for mid-February i.e. in the midst of the rainy, muddy part of the year! Heats and some finals would follow a few weeks later – certainly pre-Easter. Sports Day was always held on either the last Saturday of April or the first Saturday of May – and often coincided with the F.A. Cup Final. Early in my school life the winner of each event was presented with a small wooden shield* No doubt SOME people will have a drawer full of these; I only have one – and the griffin badge has gone missing from it. Perhaps financial restraints caused these to be later replaced with Certificates* – which weren't nearly so grand. Such was the lack of standing of athletics at that time that I only recall taking part in one full-scale athletics match – and that was for boys only: it was in 1954 against KGV Southport and Kirkham GS. The only other inter-school event (and, again, for boys only) was a regular relays match between ourselves, Chorley GS and Rivington & Blackrod GS.

Hockey matches were often played on a Saturday morning, and opponents from schools in the Wigan area featured prominently in the annual fixture list. There was also an Old Girls' team which played in the thriving local Ladies' Hockey League, with Mr Miller – the school groundsman – as regular umpire.

Tennis and rounders were both crammed into the short summer term and therefore there was only a limited number of matches in each sport. Additionally there were the School versus Staff matches, and – in my day – there was also a fairly informal Mixed Doubles Tennis Tournament at the end of the summer term. There were both grass and hard courts too, I should mention. The lunchtime games of tennis played by Staff on their own (grass) court were always guaranteed to draw large crowds. Wilkie, Tom Speakman, Mr Brown, ‘Stanley’ Black, Miss Ball and Miss Hutchings are some of the regular participants I recall.

The major sports for both girls and boys had competitions played at two levels: the Knockouts simply involved the best team each House could muster for a straight knock-out competition. The Leagues, on the other hand, were played on a round-robin basis between House teams without School 1st and 2nd team players. This provided opportunity for lesser (and younger) lights to shine.

Until the move to this new building in 1931, Balshaw’s was a soccer-playing school. With the appointment of Vic as Headmaster the change was made to rugby. His promotion of the oval ball game extended as far as forbidding the use of any round ball bigger than a tennis ball for break and lunchtime activities, so soccer played with a rugby ball was a necessity. Mind you, it improved ball control for both games. There also developed a game of ‘advance and retreat’, using a rugby ball and being played up and down the length of a pitch. You could play it with one-a-side or any multiple thereafter, and it was based on catching and kicking.

Many of us did take to rugby – though not all – and some did very well at county schoolboy level, and in later adult life. Keith Smith, Ken Mather and Dennis Hurst all played in the same county schoolboys’ XV: a totally unknown achievement for a co-ed. School. Whenever we played Colne GS they always asked that we field an ‘A’ team rather than the 1st XV. On one occasion ‘Slats’ Morgan simply had the backs play as forwards and the forwards play as backs! It must have proved something because for the next fixture, against KGV Southport – a large school with two or three times as many boys to choose from – some of those ‘role reversals’ were kept, and we beat them. Some achievement!

Teams for younger boys were labelled Chicks and Bantams, and maximum heights and weights for members were circulated to schools. Did Colts come under the same rulings? I can’t remember.

Early joys of the game included learning its rudiments on the swamp known as The Bottom Field; having to shift cows off a pitch and take your chances with what they’d left behind! (this was at Wigan Old Boys’ ground at Standish – where Wigan GS played their matches) and playing in heavy morning dew or ground frost at Wigan, Ormskirk GS and Preston GS. At the old Upholland GS you sometimes had to play on a pitch liberally sprinkled with dust and pieces of brick from the local brickworks: then they moved to new buildings and used the Orrell RUFC pitches until their own were ready. There you had to get used to playing on a quite considerable incline!

If and when you achieved the dizzy heights of the 1st XV you could expect to play a number of Wednesday afternoon matches: Rossall, Stonyhurst, Kirkham GS, Hutton GS and Manchester University 'Freshers', as well as the Fylde Schools' Sevens featured in this list. Something which would NOT be permitted these days would be to pit a school team against adults such as Bamber Bridge Training College, Preston Grasshoppers Extra 'A', Leyland Motors 'A' or an Old Boys' XV.

Vic's other great love had been cricket, and he did still sometimes play in the Staff XI. There are tales of him, as a younger man, dismissing a West Indian test batsman for only a handful of runs in a charity match at Penwortham – and not being very popular at all with the large crowd! Balshaw's provided a steady stream of competent cricketers both for Leyland Cricket Club and other local teams. You can see what has happened to the fortunes of Leyland CC since this supply dried up! (Bottom of the Northern League this summer!)

Again, there were occasional Wednesday afternoon matches; there was also the School versus Staff match, and a joint School & Staff team versus a Blackburn Diocesan XI. Some members of staff, when they wanted to practise their batting, would saunter down to the cricket nets at lunchtimes and put coins on top of the stumps to encourage potential Brian Stathams and Freddie Trumans to do their best! Knock any of the coins off and they were yours.

Small boys had a version of mini-cricket with scaled-down stumps and bats. Others simply used a pile of coats then knelt or crouched down and used their fist as a bat. It kept them busy for hours!

A sort of hand-tennis was popular too, played using the large concrete squares of the playground near the Handicraft Room.

Not everyone's forte was sport: the Friday afternoon Societies offered a wide range of activities and the annual dramatic production was another talent spot. In our first year "Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure" was the offering, followed by a string of classic school productions until 1955, when Gilbert & Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance" proved a stunning departure from the norm.

Neither did everyone want to act or sing: some were content to be part of Harry Hewartson's gang of enthusiastic set-builders and stage hands. They were permitted to venture into the scenery store beneath the stage, where they frolicked about amid the dust and cobwebs. Some of the more adventurous would also embark on 'The Grand Tour' by following the tunnels containing the heating pipes all around the place.

But do you remember when injuries in the final of the Fylde Sevens, in 1953, nearly scuppered that year's production? Ken Mather broke an ankle, so he was out altogether, and Tony Hall took the stage on that opening night with a badly gashed head. "Shakespeare in Stitches" proclaimed the headline in the Lancashire Evening Post. Thereafter Vic banned thespians from playing in the Sevens.

That same opening night featured another fraught episode. The play was 'Romeo & Juliet' and as Audrey Salt waxed lyrical in the balcony scene, someone noticed that a claw hammer* had been left hooked over the top of the scenery above her head. The stage hands prayed hard that she wouldn't move about too much and dislodge it before it could be got down during the interval!

Another opportunity for talents to blossom was at the annual Carol Concert – but do you remember each Junior Year having to stand up and do its 'spot'? And do you also remember that in either the 2nd or the 3rd Year it always had to be a French carol? When our turn came I think it was "Il est né le Divine Enfant", but my wife thinks it was, "Dans cette etable."

There would be groups and soloists as well, and on one occasion I remember a young Ronnie Hayes stunning us all with a very proficient euphonium solo. He's still bringing on generation after generation of players for Lostock Hall Band – a number of whom have moved on to much greater things with some of the country's top brass bands.

Parties followed both the dramatic production and the Carol Concert. Add these to the four House Parties and the Prefects' Party and there was quite a social life around the place. Staff and Prefects would be invited to them all, and someone always worked out a list of who would accompany whom into the meal. The event itself was based on ballroom dancing (Old Time & Modern); games (musical chairs, crossing the river, feeding the baby etc.) and various songs, skits and entertainment. Rather daringly, one year, some of the older lads of Worden House appeared in 'drag' doing a mannequin parade. That really brought the house down!

There WAS a 'back way' into these events: I wonder how many of you girls volunteered to do the washing up at someone else's party? Thus did young romance flourish! It also flourished in corners of the school, and later in the evening in the alcoves formed by the buttresses at the back of Leyland Parish Church. What wouldn't Jo Venn give to have as her worst problem a complaint from the Vicar about young people 'snogging' in his churchyard?!!

Most people who stayed on into the VI Form became first a Sub-Prefect then a Full Prefect. It's well known that Prefects persecuted small persons unmercifully! Miscreants were given 'marks', and they always seemed to come in twos! Black marks or Demerit marks? – no one ever said, but you could count on being in detention if you were given four in a week. Do YOU remember being put in detention, either by a member of Staff or by the Prefects? This meant upto three quarters of an hour after school, incarcerated in 4A's form room – which was sandwiched between the Art Room and Miss Ball's cookery and needlework empire. It was also the lair of Johnny Downer (Latin, Greek & Ancient History). There you would be supervised by the Duty Member of Staff for that week. If you hadn't been set any work or lines to do then you would find yourself copying out reams from one of the Hansards which were kept in the School Library. It could sometimes be nearing six o'clock by the time I reached home because one had to contend with all the people going home from work at the same time – AND there was a time limit on a bus contract too. All in all it wasn't a good idea to wind up in detention!

During wet lunchtimes Prefects had the job of minding hordes of small persons in classrooms; boys were always in the classrooms on the bottom corridor, so where did the girls go? Marshall Haydock – a boy chorister of some note – might be persuaded to sing, but some children could happily occupy themselves: Dots, Noughts & Crosses and Hangman only required pencil and paper – or chalk and a blackboard; shove ha'penny required coins but a rugby variant only needed a matchbox or a rubber. Amongst the debris to be found in small boys' pockets would often be a small metal box* and contained within it two hexagonal metal bars. 'Owzthat' was a cricket game; all you needed besides that was a pencil and a piece of paper for keeping the score. Lack of these precious pieces was inconsequential: scrape two clean patches all around your hexagonal pencil, ink in the numbers and words onto the six faces and you had the poor man's version.* With this you could also play the game in relative safety on your desk during a boring lesson! (Best to roll the pencil on a book, or the regular rattle of your pencil on the wooden desk might attract unwanted attention!)

Another duty as Prefects: if you stayed for school dinners several of you would sit together at the top end of a table to maintain order and also to serve out the food. Some members of Staff also ate in the Dining Room. Vic, however, always had his lunch served on a tray, in his room, by a senior girl.

At the other end of the (long) table would be several 4th & 5th year girls, who would see to clearing away the plates and cutlery etc. As a small, hungry 1st year I felt that Blundell, 'Froggy' Lawson and Billy Blythe were out to deprive me of as much food as they dare – and pile it onto their own plates! Subsequent investigation and observation proved that the window table was shorter, and therefore had fewer people – and yet it seemed to receive the same amount of food as the others. That was obviously the place to be!!

Prefects had one great fear: SNOW! This was when they could expect to be pelted with snowballs at any and every opportunity. It was revenge time for the masses!! However, it was possible to get out onto the flat roof of the Geography Room and give them a taste of their own medicine!

When we arrived in 1949 Tomlinson's were busy constructing 2 new classrooms to fill the gap between the Geography Room and the Gym. – and in the process totally enclosing the lawn in the quadrangle there. The room nearer the Geography Room would come to be the form room of the Lower VI – but what was the other one? Was it 4C? Later on in our school life the builders were back, adding 2 more classrooms on top of the two already mentioned and one on top of the Geography Room: that one was to become the form room for the Upper VI.

You may not remember much about these things but we had lectures, films, concerts, BBC radio broadcasts; visits to plays, films, exhibitions, industry, Manchester University and to Paris. We had health inspections, were visited by the mass radiography unit, and had a school photograph taken every two years. Apparently we also had careers talks and interviews, although I for one don't remember much about them. Moving from the 1st to the 2nd year one had to opt to do – or not to do! – Latin (in 2A & 2B), although the choice seemed to have been made for you by the Headmaster! Twelve months later it had to be a choice, for some, between History and Geography: again the same rule applied and the die had been cast for you! A few

also opted for Greek and Ancient History. Sometimes a parent would be prevailed upon to write a letter of protest, or even to face Vic in his den – but it was generally a lost cause and with much subsequent heartbreak.

Having become a teacher myself I can now see the problems associated with choices and having sufficient bodies in the right slots to make courses viable. However, the whole system was long overdue a good shake-up: any VI Form course HAD to be either Arts or Sciences – no mix and match such as exists nowadays; universities still had a bias towards Latin; a boy wanting to embark on an apprenticeship had to have left school by 15 years of age; and the idea of someone with a good academic brain going into industry or commerce was generally scoffed at.

Even when the time came to consider life beyond Balshaw's one usually found that Vic had a considerable input in the matter, and University or Teacher Training College featured highly in his thinking.

In this respect my wife was something of a maverick! Because she had entered Balshaw's a year early i.e. at 10 years of age, she was too young to apply for Teacher Training College at the same time as her compatriots. Rather than repeat an academic year she made enquiries about banking. Vic blew his top!! "You would be going to a place where you couldn't use your own brains because you'd have machines to do the work for you," he exploded. Early adding machines had recently made their debut – although there were many people around who could add up columns of figures far faster than any machine. They would have been – and some still are - appalled to see modern, total reliance on a till or a hand-held calculator to add up only a couple of items. Such is progress!

Eventually an agreement was reached whereby Dorothy would have the option of returning to her studies after a year at the bank. And did that happen? Of course not!

Other random memories:-

Piles of coke dumped on the playground against the wall of the Handicraft Room and which Mr Bowler, the caretaker, or Mr Miller, the groundsman, would shovel down a hatchway into the boiler room.

Mr Miller, with the help of senior boys, taking down the rugby posts ready for the summer term. These were stored , under cover, along the side of Vic's garage. But who helped him to put them up ready for the autumn term? They were always up when we returned to school!

The pages of English text books being liberally sprinkled with pencilled notes.

School hymn books with little messages: "Turn to number 62," then – having turned to number 62 – "turn to number 378," and so on. You went up and down the book until you came across , "Boo!" or some such exclamation.

Some of you, of an earlier vintage, may have had fee-payers in your year.

When we began, in 1949, the exam system was being re-jigged because the School and Higher School Certificates were giving way to GCE 'O' and 'A' levels.

A school chess team run by Wilkie.

Miss Bromley with, "When I was in the Pyrenees..." If you could only get her onto reminiscences like that then the remainder of the lesson went up the Swanee!

Boys raising their caps to lady members of staff when outside the confines of the school.

Giving up your seat on a bus to older people: woe betide anyone reported for not doing so.

A School Song of the time:

"This Balshaw's, O Balshaw's is a wonderful place
But the organization's a (terrible) disgrace:
There's Brownie Boy, Benny and 'Slats' Morgan too
With their hands in their pockets and nothing to do."

From a very tender age I learnt other, far more vulgar songs on the coach to away rugby matches. What would be the reaction of today's parents? Mind you, my parents knew nothing about it: I didn't tell them! However, it was a recognised part of an on-going rugby tradition and ensured that I could make my own particular contribution to song sessions both during National Service and at Teacher Training College. I recall that Joe Walsh was a particular fount of such songs, but there were other people too.

The half term holiday of the Autumn Term – the longest term in the school year – being a respite of only two days. That was hard!

Dinner times: cheese pie; cottage pie; semolina; treacle pudding; prunes, custard or liquid syrup in a large jug.

Games played in the classroom at the end of term: all those I mentioned earlier in connection with wet lunchtimes plus board games such as draughts, chess, Monopoly and L'Ataque; card games such as Speed, Lexicon*, and Patience of various sorts - sometimes played with mini-packs of cards*. If you were in 3B with Mr Brown – then spinning the bottle!!

Just to round off: two weeks ago some of us were here to celebrate – almost to the day – 55 years since we first entered the hallowed portals of Balshaw' Grammar School, and 50 years since we'd taken our 'O' Levels. I adapted the talk I' given to you a couple of years back, and added a few points of interest. I hope that those who were here on that occasion will forgive me for repeating them now (It's what comes with age, isn't it?!)

I expect that many of you are familiar with teatowels and wall plaques carrying such gems of wisdom as: 'The Perks of Being 50-Plus' (Kidnappers are not very interested in you!); 'What Is A Senior Citizen?' (We were before Batman, disposable nappies and instant coffee – and Kentucky Fried wasn't even thought of!); or 'How To Know That You Are Getting Old' (The gleam in your eye is the sun glinting on your bifocals!).

Well, here are a few of our very own:-

When we began at Balshaw's in 1949, Leyland had just been given its first 'Keep Left' sign – at the junction of School Lane and Golden Hill Lane.

In 1950 the 'Eagle' comic was launched (14 April) – and what would a copy of that first issue now be worth?

Points and petrol rationing in Britain ended that year (26 May) – 5 years after the Second World War.

Legal Aid came into force in Britain on 2nd October.

1951 saw The Festival of Britain, and Worden Park became the property of Leyland Urban District Council.

That same year (2nd November) saw Leyland get its first bus shelter – at the Cross.

Early in 1952 (15th February) King George VI died. Can YOU remember exactly where you were when we were summoned to the Hall to be given the news?

1952 also saw the first Preston Guild for 30 years (on account of the intervention of the Second World War).

The summer of 1953 (or was it 1954) was very similar to this year's, with a wet July and August to hinder both the corn harvest and the potato harvest.

For anyone still here in 1956 – the Leyland Perfumery, otherwise known as Leyland Gas Works, ceased production.

We hope that this will have stirred some more memories for you, and that – generally – you still remember Balshaw's with fondness.

Roy Smith (1949-1956)

and

Dorothy Smith (1949-1956)

(nee Cook)

**“The past is a foreign country
where they do things differently.”**

(L.P.Hartley)