

Hamish Johnston



Durlston Court in the 1950s

How elastic is time! Today it is fifty years since I left Durlston Court in 1958, and it seems like the day before yesterday. Yet when I went there in 1953 the Jubilee Entrance, celebrating the first fifty years of the school, was being constructed and 1903 seemed as distant to me as the Middle Ages.

In September 1953 the coronation had just taken place and Winston Churchill was Prime Minister. It was a time of hope, with the imminent ending of rationing suggesting that Britain was finally recovering from World War II, to which reference was frequently made. The school roll had about 95 names in those days – all boys between 7 and 13 years old, and all boarders.

Although confined to the school grounds we learned what was going on in the world, even if we were too young to understand the implications. There was a daily newspaper and a weekly "Illustrated London News" in the Library, and sometimes when we were eating a meal Mr. Cox, the headmaster, would report on major events. I recall clearly hearing about the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1957 launch of Sputnik in this way. I also remember him telling us that former pupil Tony Hancock (of whom he was very proud) had been nominated best TV comedian of the year.



Older boys also got weekly current affairs talks from the school's landlord, Mr. MacLellan, who lived in a big house just inside the school gates. We were very conscious of Britain as a great power. Curiously this was reinforced by the fact that the skies above us were always filled with military aircraft. The de Havilland Aircraft Company had a factory at Christchurch, and most days we would see test flights of cutting-edge flying technology in the shape of such aircraft as the Vampire, Venom or DH110 Sea Vixen. But young as we were I think we had a sense that Britain's future was going to be different from its past.

Our outside world consisted of supervised crocodile walks along local residential streets and round Barton Common, or to the cliffs, where we could see the English Channel and the Needles. The annual Ascension Day picnic followed a chapel service and usually took place at Wootton Bridge or Burley. Wootton Bridge was a very good habitat for butterflies – collecting them was a popular pastime. And at the start and end of each term the train (corridor and compartment carriages pulled by a steam locomotive) took us past large numbers of cargo ships and huge trans-Atlantic liners at Southampton. Commercial air travel had not yet displaced them.

Portable radios were banned, and small transistor radios had not yet been invented. Some boys tried crystal sets although I can not remember any that ever worked! Modern technology did arrive at Durlston, however. In 1958 a TV room was built for the occasional viewing of suitable programmes. This relieved Mr. Cox of having to open his sitting room for boys to watch such selected events as the Boat Race. The 33 r.p.m long-playing record was just coming onto the market, and I remember we were all treated to a hearing of "My Fair Lady", which opened on Broadway in 1956. Because the show had not yet reached the London stage it was also, perhaps, a way of somebody boasting that they had American contacts.



I should not proceed further with this memoir without mentioning the staff, most of whom I remember quite well. Pat Cox, the headmaster, must have been about 60 when I was there. He was stocky, not particularly tall, with straight silver-grey hair. Clearly the boss, firm and fair, he handled the business side of the school. He had many contacts, and once arranged for Colin Cowdrey, the master England batsman, to come to the school to coach Stevens and Close, Durlston's two outstanding players.

The power behind the throne was undoubtedly Marjorie Dawson, an energetic and well-organised lady in her 50s, full of drive and positive enthusiasm. She controlled the pupil side of school administration and ran the Durlston Shield house system, using it to promote desired behaviours from hard work to tidiness. Sadly for me my house - St. George – was rarely successful, and I only went on the winning house's outing three times. The one I remember is a production of "Ruddigore" by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company in Bournemouth. Miss Dawson also ran basket-making groups and was one of my first English teachers. My other English teacher was Miss Edna Taylor, a rather round woman who also taught me Geography in my first year. Her main subject was Art.

Mr Vibert was my first Latin teacher. He was very keen on photography and did his own developing and printing. He had a Rolleiflex camera and always took the photographs of events such as school plays and sports days. He was also very keen on horseracing, and kept a black notebook of form, and claimed to have an infallible system for selecting winners. He also taught Maths.

I have little recollection of Mr. Ogden as a classroom teacher, but do remember his boxing classes in the two winter terms for which a ring was set up in the gym. Boxing was a voluntary activity, but it was unthinkable that one would not participate despite the scuffed leather gloves padded with horsehair. It wasn't really much fun being bashed by flailing arms (usually), or worse by well-aimed jabs.

Captain Goodin taught me History, Geography and Maths, and also how to swim. He walked with a limp, no doubt the result of a war wound. I used to dread Thursday mornings that involved a double Maths class. Once that was over I could look forward to the weekend.

Francis Nelson-Wright was the form-master for the Upper VI and taught Latin and Greek. He was also the school chaplain and the master in charge of the Library. He waged an ongoing and often unsuccessful campaign against unsuitable books and comics. Only the "Swift" and "Eagle" were allowed. Ironically it is the banned "Beano" and "Dandy" that still thrive today.



Ian Onslow joined the school not long after I went there and taught me Geography. He had a MG sports car. He was quite a firm character who did not hold back on his opinion. He supervised the model railway room in the hut beyond the Upper VI classroom. He was also the leader of the team that in 1956 constructed the pool for sailing model boats. I remember a narrow trench being dug and then filled with concrete to form the walls before the remaining soil was removed and the concrete base poured – the entire operation done by hand. There were no JCBs in those days.

Mr Trubshaw taught me French. He was a hard disciplinarian and we were rather afraid of him, dreading the days he appeared wearing yellow socks, especially if the homework we had been set had not be learned perfectly. The music teacher in my early years was Mr. Barton. He was a very precise man, short and thin with a toothbrush moustache. He left after a couple of years and was replaced by Norman Pope, a rather more laid-back character. The non-teaching staff I remember are the matron, Miss Tewson, and her staff who changed from time to time. I remember Miss Stapley, Mrs Harrison and also Miss Adshead.



My main memory of Durlston food is (because I hated it) toast and marmite for high tea once a week, and by contrast, a slice of birthday cake if you were a friend of the birthday boy. If you were good at sport and in a team you got food at matches. For non-sporty people like me operating the score board at cricket matches gave to the teams' sandwich spread sandwiches. I suppose that what we got to eat was determined as much by the school budget as anything. Once a week we were allowed one item from our own tuck box, which was kept locked away in the Tuck Shop, which had a painted sign outside depicting the eponymous friar. My box contained small tins of mandarins and Bounty bars.

Not surprisingly I remember much more about extra-curricular activities than school work. The Art room, which was in reality a small floored-over indoor swimming pool rendered redundant by the recently opened outdoor pool, was where we made our model aircraft. Once a week Mr Vibert, who was in charge of boys' pocket money, would take orders for shopping and buy the necessary items in New Milton. Balsa wood planes were very popular, especially the rubber-band powered Keil Kraft models of World War II fighters. More affluent boys owned miniature diesel engines, and build line-controlled planes. I seem to remember many more crashes than successfully executed circuits!

Sometimes large-scale games were organised on free afternoons, often involving most of the boys. In fair weather it was 'Fieldcraft' between two rival 'armies', and in bad weather 'Insects' in the gym. The best thing to happen in the gym was the evening cinema show. This was provided several times a term by a Mr. Scutt. A cartoon short was followed by a feature film, the end of which was never seen by junior boys who had to go to bed at a reel-change. The tarmac playground outside was popular for roller-skating and the racing of 'chariots' – for the construction of which you had to acquire some old pram wheels and axles and pieces of timber.

Other outside activities included gardening – an area was set aside for small individual plots between the chapel and the cricket field – and the nearby sandpit, which was contained within a

concrete wall and in which elaborate sand structures were built to provide a race track for Dinky Toy replica racing cars.



At the far end of the school grounds in an area known as the Pine Walk boys would create huts using fallen timber and pine needles. Many of these structures involved creating space by digging and tunnelling – fortunately there were no accidents with collapses of the sandy soil. This area also included a hay meadow. One year this was cut during term-time exposing large numbers of field mice many of which were captured and kept in makeshift cages. Needless to say, the school authorities swiftly stepped in and the mice that had not already escaped were ejected to the outdoors.

School plays were major events and great fun for the participants. These were of two kinds. There was a full-scale production every autumn term in the gym. The actors were always boys, but the staff and spouses were heavily involved in the sets, lighting, costumes and make-up. Pat Cox himself (who was involved in the local dramatic club) was the producer/director. In the summer term the Upper VI boys put on "Scenes from Shakespeare" in the headmaster's private garden, the script being heavily edited to manageable proportions by Mr. Nelson-Wright.



One of the unpredictable but inevitable events that occurred from time to time was an outbreak of infectious disease that disrupted classes and required the cancellation of sporting fixtures. In November 1957 a particularly bad 'flu outbreak affected 60 boys and a number of staff, and normal school life came to a standstill. I remember it because it took place towards the end of the term and boys were allowed home as soon as they were on the mend. Unfortunately my recovery was slower than most and I remember the anguish I felt as the beds emptied around me.

That term apart, end of term was always exciting. On the last night before break-up there was a film show, a Feast in the dining room and a sing-song led by Pat Cox – a sort of Durlston "Last Night of the Proms". The programme included a lengthy song called "Vive la Compagnie" written by Pat Cox and Miss Dawson and consisting of a line about every boy in the school and a rousing chorus after every few lines. And the next day, luggage already sent off PLA (i.e. Passenger's Luggage in Advance), it was off to New Milton station and home. Wonderful!

Hamish Johnston

(1953 – 1958)

Nick (C.N.) Jones 1958-63

I arrived at Durlston in the summer of 1958 just before my 8th birthday.

My abiding memory is one of continuous summer – largely due to the benign quality of Pat Cox's headmastership. In retrospect he may not have been as fully in control of every aspect of the school as he might have wished, but as an example of upright English good sense, good nature and honourable behaviour I can't think of a better role model.

I remember endlessly drawing skies full of Lancaster bombers in the art class run by Miss Taylor, strange, half underground bolt holes in the grounds (do they still exist or has Health and Safety meant they've been banned?), the wonderful firm but still mother-substitute matron (Miss Tewson?), the school shop run bringing back enormous penknives (surely no longer allowed!),

wearing dungarees with one shoulder strap always undone, Sundays in the New Forest with my parents, woodworking, model making, reading GA Henty and John Buchan (although that might have been later!) in the library, tipping my sprouts out of the dining room window and dreading being caught (sorry!), cakes for the whole school on birthdays, the choir processing into the chapel.....

The key I think was the way the school found to celebrate the achievements of all the boys however modest. Apart from the Stevens brothers who had favoured son status with Pat C (I was very amused to see a photo of one of them with Colin Cowdrey on the school website – surely after getting on for 50 years they're not still being talked about in hushed tones?!), which seemed to be accepted without any rancour by the rest of the school, everyone was more or less equal.

My own talents were fairly limited, reasonably good at maths (100% in Algebra at common entrance under Mr Beavis's guidance being a never to be repeated academic distinction!), nor much of a sportsman although I did get my cricket colours as a legspinner/batsman, and a more enthusiastic than talented actor in school plays and Rev Nelson-Wrights Rose Garden summer evening events (Orsino in Twelfth Night). One year my Vive La Verse ran "Jones is an actor we all must agree" so maybe I'm underselling myself or maybe Pat C was being characteristically kind! (I'd like to be able to say that Pat C had described me as the best actor "since the war" – his highest accolade - but alas no!)

My acting carried on at Tonbridge but I was never cut out to be a professional actor. However I did end up working in the theatre, for getting on for 40 years now. Initially as a technician and then working my way up through various backstage management roles to MD/CEO. I can't say that Durlston set me on that course but I'm sure some of the self-confidence needed to make my way in life has been provided by the benevolence of the whole Durlston experience.

Durlston is certainly my Blue Remembered Hills – and, although there were no girls in my day, more Swallows and Amazons than Lord of the Flies!

Nick (C.N.) Jones 1958-63

David Micklethwait

My earliest story of Durlston Court is not my own recollection, but my mother's. My parents had no idea how to go about choosing a prep-school for me, but my father's younger brother Guy, who was in the Foreign Service and unmarried, used to stay with us when home on leave, and he happened to be in England when the matter was being discussed. "Old Mac's got a school somewhere in Hampshire", he said. 'Old Mac', I think, was a friend of Guy's from his time at Oxford. Of course, he didn't 'have' a school at all – he just owned the buildings, lived in the gate-house, and on Friday evenings used to give us completely incomprehensible talks on 'current events'. In one such talk, I remember, he told us about a play that had just been put on in Moscow (in 1955) called We Three Went to the Virgin Lands. What on earth was that about? Anyway, Guy got in touch with Mac, and he went with my parents to look over the school.

Pat Cox first showed them the boys' side of the main building – the gym, the art room, the

dormitories (named after public schools), the classrooms, and finally the dining room, with silver cups to be won in sports, and a board showing who had been awarded scholarships to Bradfield. "And through this door here," he said, "are my private parts. I am lucky enough to have larger private parts than most prep-school headmasters." He went on to tell them that his private parts had recently been repainted in a rather attractive shade of green, chosen by Mrs. Cox!

My father and Guy could not take this. They returned to the boys' side, and made their way into the garden, where they could hold each other up and roar with laughter, unobserved. My mother had to cope with Pat Cox and his private parts on her own, and try to explain where her menfolk had gone. Perhaps she told him that they were allergic to the smell of fresh paint.

The same sort of innocence was apparent when Cockeye gave a little talk – known as 'the sex razz' – to small groups of leaving boys. This was intended, I think, to ensure that we were not too alarmed by manifestations of puberty, and also to warn us of the dangers of being led astray by bigger boys in the wider world of public school. The whole thing was couched in a mysteriously horticultural idiom – we faced the risk of being "led up the garden path", at the end of which something or other was to be found "under the gooseberry bush". I still do not know what that meant.

CARPENTRY

Carpentry was one of the optional 'extras' at Durlston (which meant, I presume, that one's parents had to pay extra for it). My father was, or had been, a keen carpenter, and so he put me down for it, regardless of expense. I duly attended carpentry classes for a term, but then I absolutely refused to do it any more. This upset my father, because he took my rejection of carpentry as a sign of rejection of himself – the more so as I also refused to give any explanation of why I did not want to go on with it. Actually, the reason had nothing to do with my father. It was something strong enough to outweigh the affection I felt for him, but I felt too ashamed to explain it to anyone – the chap who taught carpentry was a countryman, and I could not understand a word he said.

THE G.K.

At the end of each term, we had a take a test, which was in the form of one hundred General Knowledge questions, and was therefore known as the 'G.K.' We then had to take it home, and were supposed to look up the answers, and learn them, during the holidays. The same test was set at the beginning of the next term, and we were expected to get full marks.

In my case, I never looked up anything at all. I gave the paper to my mother, who could generally answer three-quarters of the questions. She was well informed, but mischievous, and when asked "Who was Samuel's mother?", put in "Mrs. Pepys", hoping nobody would notice. I spotted that one because I knew the correct answer – Hannah – which was commonly cited as an example of a palindrome. After my mother had written in the answers that she knew (or had made up) the G.K. was passed on to my father, who took it in to his office and gave it to the youngest of his associates, who had to fill in the rest with the assistance of an encyclopaedia.

HISTORY

History learning at Durlston was largely a matter of memorising, with perhaps not a great deal of understanding or analysis. The various Royal Houses were the subject of a useful mnemonic – "No Plan Like Yours To Study History Wisely". To build on that framework, from early on in the school, we had to memorise a list of the Kings and Queens of England, with their dates of accession : "William

the First, 1066, William the Second, 1087, Henry the First, 1100, Stephen, 1135 ... ", and so on. As a back-up, when memory failed, one fell back on "Willy, Willy, Harry, Ste, Harry, Dick, John, Harry three ..." etc. Progressively, as one got older, extra events (mostly battles), with their dates, were added to the list, one per reign. Then, when it came to the Common Entrance, Capt. Goodin would study past papers, in order to spot what topics in the syllabus were due to reappear (not having been included in recent papers), and – as Michael Palau has recorded – "we learned by heart a series of essays", which the good Captain dictated to us, and which covered the questions he thought we were likely to be asked. It only recently occurred to me (when hearing of examiners seeking to identify essays that have been downloaded from the internet) that the people marking Common Entrance papers must have noticed that all the candidates from Durlston gave identical answers. What would they have made of that ? I then found myself wondering whether the Captain had himself written the essays, or had he perhaps been taught them himself ? Would it not be rather beautiful if the same words had been passed down from generation to generation, like the oral history of an aboriginal tribe ?

LATIN and GREEK

The Latin textbooks we used were Kennedy's Shorter Latin Primer, and Latin Prose Composition by North and Hillard. The front cover of the first of those was commonly altered by a few strokes of the pen to read Kennedy's Shorter Eating Primer. I have heard of more adventurous schools where it became Kennedy's Shortbread Eating Primer, but I do not remember to have seen that at Durlston. At the back of Kennedy are gender rhymes, and verses showing which prepositions take the accusative, and which the ablative, such as :

Prepositions with the ablative: A, ab, absque, coram, de,
 Palam, clam, cum, ex, and e,
 Sine, tenus, pro, and prae:
 Add super, subter, sub, and in,
 When 'state,' not 'motion,' 'tis they mean.

For some reason, Durlston did not choose to bring those to our attention, which left us classically less well educated than boys from more academic prep-schools. Mr. Vibert, however, had simplified versions, one of which started "to, into, ad, in plus accusative; in, at, in plus ablative ...", and these we not only had to learn, but to recite as fast as possible, against the clock – he actually timed us ! It was jolly good fun – in fact those were the only lessons I remember at Durlston that were fun.

In the Upper Sixth, classics were taught by Rev. F. I. Nelson-Wright. Pat Cox used to call him 'The Padre', but to the boys he was 'Smelly Nelly'. In my memory of it, the Upper Sixth classroom was a wooden hut – or one end of one – but I don't think that was in any way educationally harmful. The class was divided into two halves, those on the left side (who I suppose were those who were taking scholarship exams) were taught Greek, while those on the right (destined for the Common Entrance) were not. I was in the Common Entrance group, but could not avoid hearing the teaching of Greek, so that I learned most of what was on offer, though without the opportunity to practice writing in the Greek alphabet.

After games, the boys would be splashing about in the communal baths at the end of the changing room, and Smelly Nelly would often be seen standing in the doorway of the changing room, watching them. We were well aware that he seemed to like to watch bare boys bathing, and we

regarded it as slightly comical, and not in the least threatening. He lived in a wooden hut or chalet next to the chapel, with a sitting room in front and a bedroom behind, and I do not remember the slightest suggestion that any impropriety ever took place there. Those were more innocent times, when (as it has since been said) boys aspired to get into the clergy, and not the other way round.

SOME OTHER MASTERS

Mr. Trubshaw objected strongly to boys who said "Oh" when they should have said "Nought" or "Zero", but he never managed to stop it. If he beat you, he used a leather slipper which stung more, but hurt less, than the headmaster's cane.

Mr. Barton taught me the recorder, which I learned to play rather well. In one School Concert I played the Telemann Sonata No.1 in F major; at his suggestion, after playing the first movement, I put my treble recorder on the ground, took a soprano out of my pocket, and played the repeat an octave higher. He drove a Bond minicar, which was ludicrously light. At one time (for a reason I cannot remember) it was brought indoors by a couple of chaps who picked it up and carried it.

Mr. Ogden, who taught boxing, would line up the class, and instruct them in the correct stance with the order "Left foots forward !" – he did not encourage southpaws. I always wondered whether he imagined "footes" to be the correct plural to use when seeking to acknowledge that each boy had only one left foot. As I was subject to nosebleeds even outside the boxing ring, this was not a sport at which I excelled.

OTHER SPORTS

I have been surprised to see that in many others' recollections of Durlston in the 50's and 60's there is mention of the school's sporting super-heroes Stevens and Close. The reason this is surprising to me is that Stevens and Close were the sporting super-heroes when I was at Durlston also – but surely the same boys cannot have remained at this pinnacle for ten or twenty years ? Were they in reality gods, who did not age, or were there production lines of some sort, turning out a succession of athletic Stevenses and Closes ? I myself achieved no sporting distinction of any sort at Durlston, being rather averse to running. I later took up rowing, because one did it sitting down. My speciality in rugger was "falling on the ball", which gave me an excuse for not running. It was therefore rather curious that Pat Cox was forever trying to persuade my parents to donate a new set of rugger posts to the school, in the mistaken belief, I think, that they were rather rich. This may have been because they used to turn up at the school in an enormous (though rather old) Rolls Royce. What he didn't realise was that a succession of pre-war Rolls Royces and Bentleys were my father's hobby, and were in part the reason that he was not as rich as he might otherwise have been.



Mother, daily help, sister, me, and the big Rolls - May 1955

Pat Cox offered various financial inducements to encourage sporting excellence. In football, whenever Durlston were taking a corner kick, he would stand on the touch line calling out "Penny for the heads!", which nobody ever came near to earning. The footballs of those days were very heavy leather things, and no corner kick was anything like high enough, or long enough, for anyone to have a hope of heading it into the net. In cricket, there was a standing offer of sixpence (or it might have been half-a-crown) for anyone who managed to hit a ball so far that it broke the pavilion clock.

In the School Sports, attempts were made to encourage family participation. There were races for fathers, mothers, sisters and little brothers. There was even a race for grandmothers, in which granny and grandson started at opposite ends of a length of wool, and the grannies shuffled along while rolling the wool into a ball – the first to reach her grandson with a complete ball of wool was the winner. My grandmothers were both dead before I went to Durlston, and my parents did not join in. They were only willing to be spectators at these events, and anyway, my mother said, nobody had any chance against the Stevens family, who all turned up in running shorts and spiked shoes – she was in her Ascot summer frock, and my father in his city suit.

At one Sports Day I suffered an indignity which left me emotionally scarred for life. It was in the Obstacle Race. The obstacle in question was a framework from which were suspended several motor-car tyres hanging from ropes, through which the boys had to pass. An athletic boy might manage to dive through a tyre, landing with a graceful somersault before running on to the next obstacle. More normally, a boy jumped into a tyre, swung a while with the tyre under his tummy, and then levered his hips through it, falling on his head at the other side. I was definitely not in the graceful somersault class, and I had just reached the stage of swinging with the tyre under my tummy, when damn me if Kirk, the fattest boy in the school, did not jump into the same tyre! We were jammed together, swinging some way off the ground, unable to advance or retreat, pushing and shoving and swearing at each other, our legs waving in the air, as the rest of the field disappeared into the distance. It didn't help that the spectators thought it was the funniest thing

they'd seen in years. My only consolation was that I did at least manage to extricate myself from the obstacle before Kirk, so I didn't come last in the race.

AN OFFICIAL APPOINTMENT

In my undistinguished prep-school career, the only official appointment given to me, and not for very long I think, was the position of 'Duc du Papier Buvard', which means 'Duke of Blotting Paper'. In those days, ball-point pens were only just becoming available, and few of us had fountain pens, so writing was done with dip-pens. They had replaceable nibs that easily got twisted out of shape, and used ink held in little china inkwells set into the corner of each desk. Blotting paper was essential, and it was my job to carry out a weekly distribution of little sheets of the stuff.

RECREATION

The School Library had an unrivalled collection of the works of G. A. Henty, with pictorial hard covers, but I don't remember anyone reading them. It was not very long after the war, and we preferred our own paperbacks telling tales of wartime adventures, busting dams with Guy Gibson VC, sinking the Bismarck, and escaping from POW camps such as Colditz Castle and Stalag Luft III. In the Library there were magazines in which we could study the designs of wartime aircraft, and interesting planes were sometimes to be seen overhead. I particularly remember the occasional appearances of the Saunders-Roe Princess, the last great flying boat ever made, lumbering over from its home in the Isle of Wight.

There was a good deal of building of model aircraft. Some of us had little diesel engines which were supposed to leap into life with a couple of flicks of the propeller – but they never did. One's fingers became sore from flicking the propeller, and the most that ever happened was a few seconds of snarling fart, but never enough for a flight. The only planes that flew were either powered by twisted strips of rubber, or were gliders. Only later did glow-plug motors become available, which were easy to start. The construction method for the models was very much like that of the aeroplanes of the first world war – a balsa-wood frame was covered in tissue paper, which was then painted with 'dope'; this made it tight and hard, so that it could be painted. The dope had a very distinctive smell, but only now does it occur to me that one might have got 'high' by sniffing it (so that its sale to children will nowadays be illegal) and perhaps that is why it was called 'dope'.

An alternative power source was the 'Jetex' rocket engine, which was a small canister in which you put a pellet of solid fuel. The engine was stuffed up the back end of what was to be propelled, and the fuse was lit. I had a Jetex-powered car, which was on the end of string. It whizzed round in a circle until the fuel ran out, which was not particularly interesting.

A popular hobby was butterfly-collecting, and my recollection is that the better-equipped boy had a large net, and a killing bottle in which specimens could be dispatched without causing them damage, by the use of cyanide. Can that really have been so? If it was, it is no doubt another thing now prohibited. I did not collect butterflies myself, but I became familiar with the different varieties. In the summer of 1985 I was walking up 3rd Avenue in Manhattan, and was astonished to find myself in the midst of a vast cloud of Monarch butterflies. I had learned at Durlston that the Monarch, Milkweed, or Brown-veined White was one of the rarest butterflies in Britain, so my experience in New York seemed little short of miraculous, but I later learned that they migrate in large numbers in North America. They are rare in Britain because not many get blown across the Atlantic.

Another feature of Durlston life that may now be illegal was the carrying of offensive weapons. To us, wearing a sheath-knife on one's belt was perfectly normal, and it was not considered to be a weapon at all, merely a useful tool. It might be used, for example, in constructing 'huts' in the Pine Wood. These were not actually huts at all, but snug shelters. I remember one time when they were damaged by visiting village vandals, and this was considered to be particularly unsporting because the rotters had done it during Sunday chapel – the ungodly taking advantage of our piety. The next weekend, chapel was cancelled, and we crept into the wood and concealed ourselves, hoping to ambush the oicks when they returned to do more damage. Unfortunately, they didn't return, so the thing was a bit of an anti-climax.

Roller-skating took place on the hard playground beside the Upper Sixth hut. I had old-fashioned skates with metal wheels, but the luckier boys had more modern 'Jakoskates' with rubber wheels. Another popular activity was chariot-racing, where the 'chariot' was a board with a single roller skate strapped in the centre; the rider sat on the board holding each end, with roller skates on his feet, and was pushed by another boy running along behind.

Beyond the hard playground there was an area where vegetables and fruit were grown, and this gave the opportunity for 'apple-buzzing' in the Summer season. A small apple impaled on the end of a short bamboo could be propelled by a flick of the wrist for an enormous distance. The principle is exactly that of the Australian aboriginal spear-throwing stick or 'woomera'.

In an episode of Hancock's Half Hour concerned with the boredom of Sundays, Bill Kerr makes the suggestion: "Let's play Beat Your Neighbours Out-of-Doors". Hancock initially scoffs at the idea, but finally asks how you play. It turns out that nobody knows. Durlston had a game of exactly that sort, which was called Lurkey in the Copse. The Copse was a small area of woodland beside the drive on the further edge of the playing field, and we sometimes played there, but though the invitation "let's play Lurkey in the Copse" survived as a form of words, the rules of the game did not. Perhaps the Headmaster knew how the game was played, but nobody else did, and we were not bold enough to ask him.

AN ATTEMPT TO GET MORE POST

Life at boarding school was somewhat like imprisonment – we were isolated from the world outside, and allowed only occasional family visits. Receiving post was very important. My mother understood this, and whenever she was away from home would send me and my sister almost daily postcards. This was not enough for me, however, and I had an idea for getting something extra in the post. In those days, stamps were supplied in little booklets which, between the panes of stamps, had pages of advertisements. One of those, from the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada, I think, offered an insurance policy which would pay "£4,315 for you at age 65". That was a considerable sum in 1954 – the top prize on the football pools was then £75,000, which was a life-changing amount of money – and you had only to fill in your name and address and send off the little advertisement, to receive further particulars. This I did. Unfortunately, what I got was not an exciting envelope in the post, but a summons to the headmaster's study, where I was forced to apologise to a very angry insurance salesman, who had driven over to Durlston Court in his Daimler, thinking D. Micklethwait was a member of the staff, and a potential customer.

SOME DOMESTIC REMINISCENCES

In the area of food, I have few memories, so it cannot have been too bad, or memorably good. I do remember the so-called 'scrambled egg', which was not scrambled at all, but made from post-war egg powder. It came in a pale yellow homogeneous slab and was served by the slice rather than the spoonful.

A memorable feature of the dormitories was the enamel bucket which served as a potty for those who needed a pee during the night. Once (when I was in 'Winchester', I think) we all had a huge amount to drink before going to bed, so that when the maid came to remove the bucket in the morning she would find it surprisingly heavy – how we laughed !

Every boy had his hair washed periodically by an under-matron, and when this had been done an excellent hair-drying system was employed. A towel was placed over the boy's head so that it hung down in front of him, and behind. The boy then grasped the front end, scrunched up, and the matron placed a hand on the boy's back to steady him, and grasped the back end of the towel with her other hand, so that the boy's head was encased in a tube of towel. The boy and the matron then pulled the towel alternately, to and fro, very vigorously, which stimulated the scalp, and dried the hair in no time at all.

THE CORONATION

The Coronation was a great event during my time at Durlston. The whole school watched the ceremony on a small black and white television, and a boat was hired for the school, which chugged round the Home Fleet, parked in impressive rows for the Spithead Naval Review. The boat trip was particularly memorable for me, because I put my sixpence into a one-armed bandit on board, and won two shillings, which I spent on a bottle of cherryade, big enough to share. I'd never tasted cherryade before.

PLAYS

My first theatrical performance at Durlston was in the 'Scenes from Shakespeare' that were put on in the garden. I was given the part of Trinculo in *The Tempest*. In the action the party have been shipwrecked in the storm of the title, and Trinculo complains "Here's neither bush nor shrub to bear off any weather at all. And another storm brewing, I hear it sing i' th' wind. ..." This cannot have been very convincing to the audience, for we were in the garden, and were entirely surrounded by bushes and shrubs. In the picture, I'm the one kneeling on the right.



The first School Play that I remember (on the stage at the end of the gym) was *The Ghost Train*, in which I was not involved. Two things remain in my memory from that production. The first was a jolly good poster stuck up in the station, which had been painted in 'Art' by my friend Dean. It showed a stylised jockey on a horse, and advertised a race meeting which might have been Ascot. The second memorable thing was a square biscuit tin with holes cut in the sides, and an electric light inside. When the tin was rotated, it projected onto the windows of the waiting room a very convincing image of the lights of railway carriages passing through the station, accompanied by thunderous sound effects.

In my last year at the school there was a play in which I had a starring role. It was called *Crime in the Jungle*, and I played the part of a chap who was pretending to be a bug-hunter, but was actually some sort of policeman, chasing a gang of villainous drug or alcohol smugglers in league with the natives. It was memorable for various reasons. One was that Pat Cox's brother, Colonel Cox, was on the scene. My impression was that he was something of a hero to the Headmaster, having done adventurous things of a military and colonial sort, while Pat Cox was leading the less exciting life of a schoolmaster. Also, I think he died not long afterwards. The Colonel threw himself into the preparation for the play with great enthusiasm, undertaking to coach the jungle natives in their dancing – because he knew about that sort of thing. There was a rumour that he also offered his service revolver for use in the performance, but after he'd let off a few practice shots (just missing Miss Dawson, it was said) the Headmaster confiscated it, and we had to make do with a little starting pistol firing .22 blanks.



In one scene, I was seated at a camp-fire, made of a few sticks, some orange paper, and an electric light, and I was given an empty pipe to chew on.



To liven things up a bit, I spent some time before the first night wandering round the school grounds collecting cigarette ends. There were fewer tipped cigarettes in those days, so I easily got enough tobacco to fill the pipe. When the time came, I lit it, and puffed out tremendous clouds of smoke, to the great delight of the audience, who thought it was an intended part of the show. I could only do it once, because the powers-that-be quietly removed the spare tobacco from my desk.

LATER EVENTS

In about 1969, I was sent to do a small job in Lymington, and when I'd finished it I decided to go and see what had happened to Durlston Court in the years since I'd left. While I was a boy at the school, Ian Onslow had arrived to join the staff. He was then a single man, with a red MG and a black spaniel. Now, he was the headmaster, and a family man. The MG had been replaced by a large people-carrier, and the spaniel by black Labradors. Perhaps because he wanted his children to be educated entirely at Durlston, he had had to open kindergarten and pre-prep departments, and make the school co-educational. I wondered if Pat Cox would have made the same changes if he had had children later. I didn't ask him, though, when I went to see him in the house he and his wife shared in his retirement with Marjorie Dawson. It was a bit embarrassing actually, because he was full of memories of the school, but my time there had been so unremarkable that he scarcely remembered me at all.

Some years later, in the Brick Lane market on a Sunday morning, I found a merchant who had a black plastic rubbish bag entirely filled with Durlston caps. I've no idea why these were being sold off, but for old times' sake, I bought one. A few years after that, I read in a copy of the Saga magazine (for old folks) that Marjorie Dawson, when she retired, had started taking piano lessons again, after a gap of fifty years or more. When the article was published, she was about to give her first public recital, at the Chewton Glen Hotel, at the age of 100. The magazine was an old one (which I was reading in a launderette) and by the time I saw it the performance had already taken place, so I could not go.

David Micklethwait December 2011

Michael Palau



I arrived at Durlston in the Summer Term of 1954. I had left my mother at Waterloo station but that might have been my second term. My parents could well have driven me down. I had better concentrate on those things that I can remember clearly. Within less than 10 minutes of being let loose in the school I fell prey to the 'elbow grease' wheeze. George Bird, as convincing as ever, asked if I had had mine done. There had been so many new things to cope with and this appeared to be

just another one. "Oh Pally" as Cox started to call me, "that is just a joke". That was enough to feel a good blush and Bird sniggering in the wings meant that I had been blooded into the Durlston family. Apart from the blush there was in my experience always a warmth in the humour and the experience at Durlston.

I am now racking my brains for something cold and unpleasant but apart from the rice pudding I cannot really think of anything. Was it as magical for everyone else? (not the rice pudding) Well, I believe that although everyone's story is different there are many experiences that are just as good as mine but it clearly wasn't all a bed of roses for everyone. There were stories where boys possibly affected by unhappiness at home decided to run away. We sometimes heard about these at the time but not all of them as possibly not good for morale. We still lived at a time of the 'stiff upper lip'. Where is it? Hancock was asked : "above this loose flabby chin" came the reply. Maybe our memories edit out the 'loose flabby chin' moments.

Talking about loose flabby chins reminds me of the Boxing. Peter Ogden introduced this to us in the 4th form I think. There was a box of outsize gloves that made us all look a bit like Mickey Mouse's ears. We were taught ring craft and I needed that as my arms were short and I was not as tall as David Drayson for example. Gum shields were unheard of so my crooked teeth inevitably cut my lip early on in any bout. I got used to this and usually insisted on fighting on and the blood just added a bit of colour. It meant I never actually won a bout, well not until I had my teeth straightened at about 12, but did win the 'The Best Loser's Cup'. This was meant to reflect my plucky efforts but for years this label seemed to stick a bit. Losers are often popular but it wasn't popularity that I courted. I did win another cup at Durlston and it was for hard work. It was again in the 4th form when Grundy was the lead scholar of the form and I came within a point of unseating him.

I put three terms consecutive work into this effort and this meant, a certificate for the first term, a book, "Treasure Island", for the second term and a cup for the third term. But a miss was as good as a mile, second just wasn't acceptable and I was not sure that I liked all the adulation and prizes. Of course it was meant to be encouraging and to a degree it was but unbeknown to me I had 'peaked' at the age of 9; it was a long time before the same degree of effort was made for anything academic. Probably another 9 years when another school master inspired me. Who was it who inspired me in 1955 in the 4th form? Well apart from John Grundy, it was Miss Dawson, that no nonsense school mistress and as it transpired, the vital third person in the partnership that sustained Durlston at the time. It is only writing this that has dragged this out of me as I had forgotten that she had taught me and only remembered her for her surprise 'desk inspections' and her attractive niece.

Judging by the history, MD was a bit of a dancer in her time as well although we just did not see that side of her. MD gave us a pride in knowing the dates of the Kings and Queens of England: William I 1066 etc. and it was at this time that this was learned. It stood me in very good stead through the years as being a very weak History student, I did at least know which reign I was in - very little else though.

I remember being elevated to the Lower V where PHC taught Latin. I still like Latin. It must have been at this time when because of a July birthday I could stay playing Cricket in the Colts. Trubby tried to encourage this shy little fellow and made him Captain of the Colts cricket. Miss Taylor told me this as I was about to leave and I think Trubby had just died (1958?). I imagine that shy boys and girls, for that matter could be a bit of a challenge for teachers. Although still 'shy' now I really fear

very little and put this down to the part these early teachers played. And then there was 'Carpie Goodin' - Captain Goodin, a ruddy faced chap who had been shot up in the war and taught us swimming in sub 60 degree temperatures in the outside pool with water wings. Good memories as I managed to learn reasonably quickly. CG also taught history and would not risk letting his students express their knowledge or otherwise of History; we learned by heart a series of essays that came up time and again for Common Entrance. The seventh Earl of Shaftesbury springs to mind. The sad thing is that by reciting these eloquent 'something I prepared earlier' we displayed an insight into the subject way above our station. We sailed through Common Entrance with fancy high percentages but, and I speak for myself, without really grasping the basics.

This is taking too long but maybe we can treat this as a first instalment. With encouragement I could go on. It is a bit of a surprise to do as there are things lurking around in the memory which would otherwise never emerge and are totally unexpected. I have famously good memories of Durlston and sharing some of them at the recent OD dinner was a laugh. I will give you an example : the motto was/is 'Erectus non Elatus' and true to form Jonathan Newton was able to throw a cricket ball a very long way. I remember an effortless throw of over 75 yards on Sports Day. At the OD dinner I reminded him of it and he said that far from being effortless it wrecked his shoulder which had given him gyp ever since. Even if it did hurt like mad he made it look easy - who knows, he might just be trying to make me feel better - what a charmer!

There is plenty more but I do not carry the same wonderful sense of being on the 'Wanted' list that Alastair Ritchie's stories convey. Each to his own and there must be plenty more to recount. For every one we have heard or experienced there must be ten that we haven't but for the moment it is 'Over and Out',

Kind regards
Michael Palau