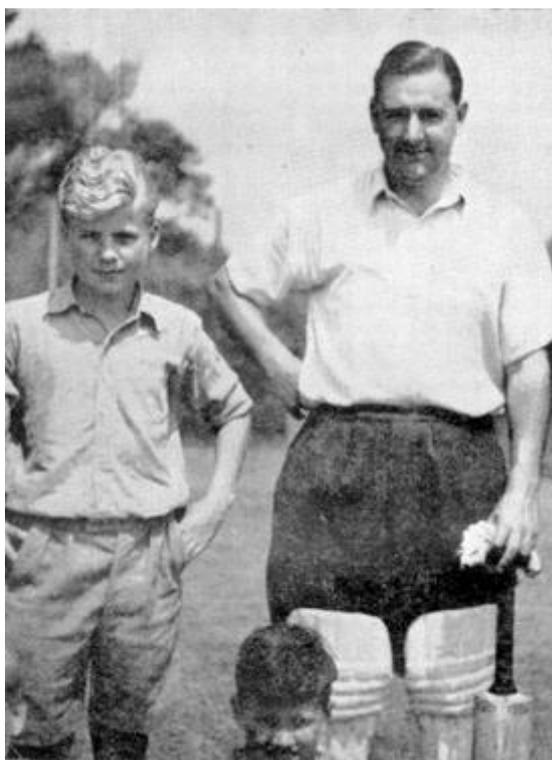


## The 1960's



I. D. STEVENS AND COLIN COWDREY

Colin Cowdry visited the school in the summer of 1960

Christopher Slade: 1963-67

I arrived at Durlston in January 1963, after a 5-hour car journey from Swindon! Unusually long, yes, but if you remember the winter of 62/63... I was very homesick, having never been away from home before. The extended journey did not help.

One of the first people I met was the Head Matron – Mrs Reynolds – dressed all over in grey. Even her hair was grey. She was very kind, but strict. The two other matrons I remember from the first day were Miss (Bunty) Mills and Miss Stuart.

I met Miss Dawson next. I had heard a lot about her from my father, also a pupil at Durlston in the late 20s. Dad and I also shared the same Headmaster – Pat Cox. He was very kind. He loved golf. I remember hearing the shout “fore” as he hit a golf ball “over the river” – the main drive! The other teachers I remember from the early days were Derek Beavis (Maths), Mr Andrews (Latin), Rev Nelson-Wright (Scripture), Ian Onslow (French), Norman Pope (Music) and Miss Taylor (Art). When Norman Pope left, he was replaced by Richard Smithers, who left after a very short time. Rumours abounded, but nobody was told why. Mr Watson took over for a while, being replaced by Noel Clarke. I have a love of the classics because of Noel Clarke, and I still use the, now dog-eared, Christmas Carol book he gave me when I left in December 1967. He had the most terrible eyesight, but his motivation was tremendous. He taught me to play the chapel organ. One of the first hymns I learned was “Oft in danger, oft in woe”. One Monday evening he was “unavailable”, so I played for

the service. Another pupil who frequently played was Gordon, a master of the keyboard. Other teachers who came and went during my time were John Youle, David Osborne (Geography, French & Spanish) and Peter Chappell and his wife, the latter teaching Art when Miss Taylor was away for a while.

The food would never have earned any praise from Egon Ronay, or anyone else come to that! Generally medium-warm to cold and greasy (everything) and lumpy mashed potato, all served on white plates. The teachers had blue plates. To this day, I cannot eat porridge or drink tea! The latter surprises everybody in Germany where I now live with my German wife and children and teach Business English. "But you're English" is always the cry! Mrs Pitt was the head cook. It got even worse after she left – in 1965, I think. I always managed to lose weight during term-time. Now, at 53, I need the Durlston diet!

The lessons were, looking back, of a very high standard. Some of the teachers could be bullies, particularly if you suffered some disability – a lisp (me) long gone, a stammer etc. They beamed in on it and made life hell. Prep was done after high tea. Low tea was always my favourite, especially the "Southampton" buns. The tuck shop, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, was a happy event.

Every so often there would be a film, shown in the gym, on Saturday evenings. The favourite of the time was "Captain Clegg". The younger pupils had to go to bed at the interval. There was the film & feast on the last day of term – a happy event for all.

Sport was always an important part of Durlston life. I enjoyed rugby and cricket and, initially, swimming until I was forced to jump off the high diving board. I have always suffered from vertigo and it was a terrifying experience. The belly flop of all times! Modern health and safety inspectors would have had a field day!

Parents were allowed to take us out once a term, on a Saturday and a Sunday, but we had to be back at the school for bed. I have never understood the reasoning for that.

Pat Cox retired in 1965. Miss Dawson retired at the same time, but returned. Maybe Frank Sinatra got the idea from her! Ian Onslow replaced Pat Cox. He was very fond of using the cane, sarcasm and shooting animals and birds. The two outstanding memories I have of him are shooting a sparrow in the squash court one Sunday afternoon when it delayed the beginning of an inter-school match, and taking about 5 of the leavers, including me, on a shoot. I hated every second of both! Coming from a family of animal lovers and vets, you can imagine how I felt on that day!

Durlston memories? Fantastic. Being a teacher, I often find myself hearing and using the words of the some of the teachers I had.

CHRISTOPHER TASKER 1961 -63



A picture of me and my brother in May 1961.

Tasker C on left, Tasker T on right.

I could say my father contracted out both my education and upbringing from the age of 6-18. I was in boarding schools in Jamaica from 6-9, Durlston Court 9-11, Jamaica again 11-13 and finally a boarding school in Surrey 13-18. After taking my "A" Levels in 1970, my father informed me he had finished paying for my education and living expenses. At the same time he gave me box files that contained all my letters, school reports and invoices for school fees, uniforms etc.

My Durlston memories (May 1961-March 1963) are assisted by my term reports, Durlstonian magazines, and all my letters written to my father (one every week). My letters show what I thought of Durlston, my teachers, and my fellow pupils. My school reports show what my teachers thought of me.

Most pupils would have a home to go to during the holidays, I did not. I stayed at Redcroft Childrens Hotel in Bournemouth. The word "hotel" is misleading since, like Durlston, I slept in a dormitory and had meals with many other children. This fact explains my attitude to my life at Durlston and the profound influence of my teachers - who had far more contact with me than any member of my family. I remember some boys crying because they were homesick, I did not have this problem since Durlston was effectively my home for two years.

I was very grateful to my class mates, who were kind enough to take me out at half-term. They were Bland (June 1961), Langmead (Nov 1961), Puddle (June 1962), Hayward (1962), and Carey (1963).

When I arrived at Durlston from Jamaica I had two major handicaps. My education was at least one year behind British standards, and I was very shy. My term reports in 1961 said:

1. *"he is very diffident and inarticulate" (MD)*
2. *"He is behind the standard of this form but does his best" (NP)*
3. *"He is trying hard to get up to the standard of his age" (Mr Cox)*

4. *"He appears very shy and it is difficult to get anything out of him"*
5. *"Improving though still well below the average for his age" (Mr Cox)*

In October 1961 I wrote *"I am learning English now instead of Jamaican. Some people call me a Jamaican banana, but I don't mind it."* Durlston created a very competitive atmosphere. I wrote in July 1961 *"In our form-room we have a shelf and it has racing cars on it and I am fourth and I have my school number 89 on it."* In June 1961: *"This week I have overtaken a boy named Bland and a boy named Woodhouse in class"*. The encouragement I received from my teachers had a huge effect. Some examples from my letters:

1. *"I am getting better at reading Mr Cox said so."*
2. *"Mr Cox said I am improving with my work."*
3. *"I got a star for English with Miss Taylor"*
4. *"My best subject is mathematics and Mr Pope, who teaches me maths, thinks that I am very neat at work."*

The teaching methods were very effective because they used both the carrot and the stick to motivate pupils. An example of the "carrot" was in my letter in Dec 1962: *"Yesterday we had History Dates and if you got full marks which is 82 you get a sixpence from Miss Dawson who takes the IV form at History but if you get under half marks which is 41 you miss the feast at the end of term and I got 81. If I had got the date of George V which is 1910 I would have got sixpence."* I remember trying to memorise all the English Kings and Queens from 1066. An example of the "stick" method to motivate pupils was my letter in June 1962 concerning my brother who also went to Durlston. *"Trevor has been beaten by Mr Cox for not working and Mr Cox says that if anyone is not prepared to work they will have to leave because there is 50 boys waiting to go to Durlston Court."*

Written evidence of my views of Durlston are:

1. *"I am enjoying myself very much here" (June 1961)*
2. *"I am very happy and well at Redcroft and Durlston" (Aug 1961)*
3. *"My best friend is Des Clayes and we have a lot of fun together" (1963)*

The Durlstonian for Autumn Term 1961 shows that I was second from last in my house - St David. One term later I was second from top, behind Gush M (House Captain). M.D. wrote in 1962 *"Looking at these scores and comparing them with those of last term I see that the following have done much better: Gaskell, Kilpatrick, Hayward, Wallace A, Nettlefield H and Bland, while Fisher is third in St Patrick and Tasker C has risen in St David from second bottom to second top! Well done you two, both from Form III."*

I am sure my two years at Durlston gave me a driving ambition to succeed in my business and personal life. This has helped my career in Marketing which concluded with building from nothing my own manufacturing business in partnership with my wife. The quotations from my letters are the exact words used by a nine year old boy, without any corrections. Some of these letters are quite

hilarious, written like a stream of consciousness and free association of thoughts. I was surprised not to find one single complaint in all my letters written from Durlston Court. This proves my personal theory of relativity - that you can only miss something (e.g. good home cooking) if you are accustomed to it.

**Chris Tasker (written July 2008)**

Pre-Prep  
by Maragaret Vyse



Margaret Vyse

**In the Beginning**

When the time came for Headmaster Ian Onslow to find a Kindergarten for his youngest children, twins Victoria and Robert, he had problems to face. Why was it that the local Kindergartens all seemed to be closing down at that time? Ian's solution lay in the creation of a Junior School of his own, to be built on the ample acreage occupied by the then existing Preparatory School.

Durlston only catered for boys at that time. The new venture would be open to both boys and girls. This was a leap in the dark from the point of view of continuity for girls - would prospective parents give it their support?

Nevertheless, in spring 1969, a flat roofed sectional building consisting of three classrooms was erected on the present site. At first only two of these rooms were used for the dozen or so children, mostly boys, but with a girl or two. The finding out of tables, cupboards, fixtures and countless other items were wonderfully crafted by the skilled handyman Mr. Spalding, and much still remains of his work. The rooms were spacious, light, airy and up-to-date for that time. However, a number of people shook their heads. "It'll never work!" But it did work.

Under the wise guidance and pioneering ability of Charlotte Wass, Headmistress for the first four years of its existence, the little School took shape. Charlotte and her husband, Geoffrey, had previously opened a Cheshire Home in Bethlehem and were experienced in pushing through the impossible and in working on the tightest of budgets.

The Junior School, as it was then called, certainly operated on a shoestring. Staff recall working with few resources and little pay! No piece of scrap material of any kind was ever discarded but turned

into art, craft, and display or for dressing up purposes. Petty cash accounts for the early terms are evidence of these economical times.

Six of the original intake of children came with Mary Lindsay from her Highcliffe Kindergarten, which it was envisaged would amalgamate with Durlston. However, there was a change of plan during that first year when Mary Lindsay left to start a new school elsewhere. Nevertheless, Jo Andrews, who had a Nursery School in Milford, joined Durlston in the Summer of 1969 bringing her pupils with her. Jo contributed much to the continuing of the Pre-Prep and was responsible for the running of the Kindergarten section. She remained a member of Staff for 11 years before moving north.



Charlotte Wass, Headmistress  
for the first four years.

Myra Dickens, wife of Durlston's Bursar, came to help as a classroom assistant. She gave loyal support for a number of years and will be remembered, amongst other things, for her craft sessions - weaving surplus wool on simple wooden looms - many tangles were sorted out and colourful little scarves were borne proudly home. Charlotte's husband, Wing Commander Geoffrey Wass lent a hand from time to time, initiating some of the boys into the wonders of woodwork - never mind the noise level! He was also a good storyteller and would keep the children enthralled during the after lunch quiet time.

I (Margaret Vyse) joined the Staff in Autumn 1969, as an assistant teacher with a previous qualification in Social Science (Child Care). By Spring 1970 all three classrooms were fully operational with pupils divided into specific age groups. By the end of the first year there were about thirty pupils with three teachers and a classroom assistant. Being the dedicated person that she was, Charlotte Wass soon put structure and purpose into the day-to-day running of things.

She loved children and had sparkle and magnetism that immediately drew - both children and their parents. From the start there was a warm and loving atmosphere in the new school, creating an ambience that has endured throughout the years and has been remarked upon so often.

### **The Right Name**

In the first year or so the school was known as the Junior School. When a heading was needed for

Report Forms I remember saying to Charlotte, "Why don't we call it the Pre-Preparatory Department; after all, that is its function:' And so it came to be called. It was certainly the first purpose built school of its type in the area and the first to be known as a Pre Prep. I believe this to be a modest claim and that Durlston Court Pre-Prep was possibly a "first" in a much wider area. This creation of a Pre-Prep for both boys and girls triggered off a significant change to the development of Prep Schools. Their doors would eventually be open to girls as well as to boys. At that stage, the first girl of age to move on had no option but to transfer to a local girls school.

### **Early Uniform**

I cannot let the history of the Pre-Prep pass without taking a look at the early uniform. The mention of this brings a smile, (possibly a shudder), to a number of faces, not least to Sandy MacLaren. that long-suffering Pre-Prep dressmaker.

Sandy had been matron at the Senior School. How were we to kit out the girls? No problem with the boys because they adopted the existing uniform, caps and all. Charlotte, with Marjorie Onslow settled on a simple grey tunic worn with a white, crew neck sweater. For winter warmth there was a grey and white dogtooth check cape with hood, lined with white and bound with white braid. They all looked both splendid and distinctive but were not the most practical of garments for young ladies of Pre-Prep age.

These capes, all made by Sandy, were not without the nightmare factor! Sandy writes "Making the girls' school capes from a photograph on the centre page of a pull-out section of a magazine seemed a good idea at the time. Each one had to be individually made to fit. Girls come in different shapes and sizes and my machine was very basic, and so was I - so buttonholes all had to be bound by hand, and this was very time consuming."

Tunics and summer dresses and overalls were all made by Sandy. The summer dresses were of grey linen with decorative white laces threaded through eyelets from the neck - wonderful for chewing! With hindsight, it can be seen what a stalwart part Sandy played in helping to get things off the ground. No wonder there were sighs of relief when girls eventually became an integral part of Durlston and the uniform could be unified and purchased through the school outfitter.

I feel it is appropriate to mention here that the MacLaren family can probably claim the longest continuous association with Durlston. In the 1960s Sandy (nee Stewart) was assistant matron at the Prep School; in the 1970s daughters Fiona and Lizzie entered the Pre-Prep. followed by Tim in the 1980s; then grandchildren in the 1990s with youngest grandchildren entered up to 2003! In addition Peter, Sandy's husband, provided and worked lights for Christmas productions and Fiona became a much respected teacher in the Pre-Prep. How's that for a record?



### **More room is needed**

Further building took place in 1971 when the original sectional builders were called in to add the Kindergarten Hall. This was connected to the original block by an office, Kindergarten loos, a kitchen and entrance hall, all still with a flat roof. Although more recent building development has brought about considerable reorganisation, that entrance hall became an all-purpose focal point for more than twenty years. Jo Andrews and the Kindergarten moved to the wide-open spaces of the Hall. three-year old children were admitted, all were regrouped and Rosemary Berman took charge of the youngest children.

With an on-site office, Anne Paddock became School Secretary and matron, rapidly becoming indispensable to children, staff and parents alike. I wonder how many cups of coffee Anne dispensed to tearful Mums who delivered their children on the first ever day at school! Also, dozens of plasters were administered to grazed knees and elbows. Anne remained a vital part of the Pre-Prep over many years. I greatly valued her loyal support and efficiency. We were all saddened by her recent death (2002). Anne was followed by Sue Foan who also helped in the Kindergarten.

She was a competent and hard working member of Staff with a keen sense of humour whom I remember for the many laughs we had together Sue left at Easter 1990 to take up a training course and was succeeded first by Claire Hannaford and then by Sue Nay!or, a parent who was dedicated to the success of Durlston and whose untimely death in 2001 grieved us greatly.

### **Life in the Classroom**

From the start the Pre-Prep curriculum was based on the 3-Rs with a generous helping of music, singing, art, craft, sports and games. Books, schemes of work and equipment were acquired steadily. It must be appreciated that there were no existing schools of the same type on which to model ourselves or from which to gather ideas. By present day standards and with the teaching support and materials now available, the early Pre-Prep teaching was rather formal. The atmosphere, however, was always relaxed and full of humour. The children wore extended but never pressurised. Life was happy.

### **Widening Horizons**

A liaison with the Prep School soon developed, particularly with the Reverend Peter Yerburch, who became a lasting and valued friend to the Pre Prep until his retirement in July 1993. He regularly took the Friday morning Assembly and led the end of term Chapel Services and Harvest

Thanksgivings. Both of these were devised in the Pre-Prep and involved the children in songs and readings.

The memory of Peter receiving daffodils into a huge shallow basket still conjures up a wonderful fragrance of mind. Staff eventually had the benefit of attending courses at the local Teachers' Centre. Structured schemes of work were introduced in all areas of basic learning. Margaret Poole of the New Milton Dancing Academy and various members of her Staff visited weekly for ballet, music and movement for every class.