

Crossleys in the Fifties

My first day at Crossleys, in early September 1951, was marked by an incident that half a century later, will remain crystal clear in the memory of all my contemporaries, who have not yet joined a daisy support group. Fazzah had to start somewhere, so he started with someone who had a brother already at the school. "Let's see what you heroes know...Right, Booth...How do you spell 'dog'?" "D.A.G., sir" was the instant reply and Dag acquired a life-long name.



Staff of both schools photographed in 1954

The next image that comes to mind was a bleak morning the following February, when John Lucas, the senior master, told us of the King's death. We usually played touch rugby league at break and lunchtime and Kevin Verity, already captain of anything with a moving ball, called for a minute's silence that day, 60 seconds frozen in the memory for all time.

Keeping chronological, for a moment, a year or so later Holme Moss TV station had opened and we all crowded, behind drawn curtains, round the new 9" TV sets, with blurred, blue-grey pictures, to watch the crowning of our beautiful young Queen. The new Elizabethan age had arrived. We saw the wondrous, massive, Queen Salote of Tonga in her carriage, with the little man in top hat and tails famously described as 'her lunch' and the tiny figures of Prince Charles and Princess Anne. Within days, we all had a day off school to see it again, this time in colour, as the Film of the Coronation was shown. There was then another day off school to see the colour epic of the Conquest of Everest, announced to us all on the very morning of the coronation.

In our early school days, our fun was untroubled by thoughts of work. Most of us continued in that happy state. I spent one whole period crouched under my desk, which was occupied by Stotty. He repeatedly told Fazzah I wasn't well, that I was sick, that I was ill and further variations. I haven't the slightest doubt Fazzah knew exactly where I was but, as an excellent teacher, he won handsomely by not recognising the prank.

Much later, there was the Great Fire of

Crossleys that wasn't. By the time I was in the sixth form, I had acquired a collection of objects that had appealed to me from time to time. To give one example, I had a bus stop and buses would actually stop at places where buses had never stopped until my sign was displayed. I thought a fire alarm would add a little colour to my collection, so one day I started to dismantle the one near the 6th form room. Something went wrong and the alarm started to ring. The whole school, with two exceptions, assembled in the playground, every boy and girl, master and mistress. One exception was the whole of Dan Davies' maths form. He was heard going downstairs, exclaiming, "There's no fire practice scheduled; it must be a false alarm" – yes – and following this with "I've left my b..... upstairs", a word never spoken aloud those days. His stock soared.

I was the other exception. I decided my best course was to stay where I was. A couple of minutes later, the Sergeant arrived. "I knew you'd be here", I began. "I was going past and I saw the glass was loose, so I tried to fix it". He and I were old sparring partners and actually pretty good friends. "Tell that to the Marines" said he. "I've just done so", sez I. We stood there, each trying to keep a straight face, each breaking at the same time and an accidental fault was duly logged, although I was a bit miffed nobody noticed my absence from the hundreds assembled outside.

We had two great history masters, 'Bumbly' Butterworth and 'Willy' Wyman, who inspired a lifelong love of their subject – I still write about it. An

April fool prank sealed my admiration for Willy. We set a wicker waste-paper basket over the door, filled with scrunched up waste paper. It worked like a dream. Willy came bustling in; the basket fell and enveloped his head. He roared with laughter, as loud as any of us, strode to the front of the room, saying, "Very good, you actually caught me... Now, we were discussing the war of Austrian Succession..." and we were instantly switched. It was brilliant.

Not quite so brilliant was poor Miss Brayshaw. While she was holding a physics class in her lab, on the top floor, Frank Rycroft and Dag Booth, both experienced climbers, decided to go for a stroll around the school on the ledge at that level. I suppose it was a foot or so wide, with a very slight slope, and perfectly adequate for a couple of mountain goats like those two. As they wandered past the lab, Miss Brayshaw spotted them. Even her cries "Don't panic, don't panic" didn't faze Frank or Dag but they – those cries – left an indelible memory on everyone else.

One matter that jumps to mind in this century is how rarely we used Christian names, at least lower down the school. We started with surnames and some never left them – indeed, I can think of some lads who may never have had first names – Cabbage, Squeak, Chico, Jacko, Toto, Dag, Dizzy, Garth, Stotty, Tanner and even Sam and Fred were not actually our first names. ('Fred', a character on the Goon Show, was my own second name, having been the first name of my father, grandfather and great-grandfather.)

Even the Headmaster had his nickname, John Stanley Bolton, always known as 'Egg'. He was nutty about his tropical fish. He once celebrated quite openly spending a huge sum obtained from the L.E.A. on buying more of the things, under the guise of biological laboratory material. In one of my last years, Egg really hit the jackpot. In those happy days, prefects had powers of corporal punishment – indeed, whether it should be capital punishment was debated. Anyway, I was patrolling a line of boys waiting to go into lunch, armed only with my hymnbook to deal with the odd malefactor... (The routine was to hit down the back of the head, then sweep up and catch the miscreant again as he put his head back.) I was, of course, standing on my dignity, when Egg emerged from his study. He grabbed me in his arms, shouting "A triumph, Fred, a triumph" again and again and, quite literally, he waltzed me along the line of boys. His beloved fish had hatched!

Then there was the Great Tuckshop Robbery. Two members of the lower sixth ran the tuckshop. Each year they chose their successors, so forming a tight little line of people who got free Wagon Wheels. We scouts, who were used to having the run of the school building on Friday nights, thought this undemocratic when we were not chosen. Anyway, every break and lunchtime the shop opened to sell biscuits, ice lollies and so on. It was on a back corridor on the north face of the school, at second floor level, at the west end and so pretty adjacent to the sixth form room. A main east-west corridor ran parallel to this one, separated by a wall.

However, over the whole structure ran the attics and, of course, we scouts knew our way round these as well, indeed far better than anyone else, boy, girl or, for that matter, teacher or domestic staff. One of us noticed there was a trapdoor in the tuckshop ceiling. The next Friday, up into the attic by another trapdoor, over the under-roof space, drop down into the tuckshop, borrow a few packets of cheese biscuits and back through the trapdoor. Over the next few weeks, the pangs of hunger struck during the day. It became a slick routine to bring forth the ladder, liberated from the maintenance staff and hidden in a disused room at the far end of the

corridor, nip up it across the roof space and drop down into the tuckshop in order to unlock the door and allow the rest of the sixth in, while an accomplice replaced both trapdoors and hid the ladder.

I recall one moment of total farce when, just as some of us were about to drop down through the trap, there was the sound of a key in the lock and the normal door started to open. There was no time to replace the trapdoor, where the watchers were spellbound to see Egg arrive with a packet of frozen peas. (Domestic freezers were unheard of and he and his wife lived on the ground floor of the school, in the southwest corner.) Egg put the packet of peas in the freezer, then after looking round the room to see he was unobserved, he scuttled over the shelves and put a handful of Wagon Wheels in his pocket before leaving without a glance upwards.

All good things come to an end, though, and the Friday when all, or nearly all, was revealed is graven deep into our collective consciousness. Authority swooped and our caches were discovered. All hell broke loose. Egg, Lucas, as both sixth form master and deputy head, and others interrogated us all at length, individually and together. Not one person split. Despite threats and bribery, we remained solid. The scouts fell under immediate suspicion and for some reason I was singled out as ringleader. It may be that others were similarly accused – I don't know. We hadn't any one of us in charge and, although the scouts may have started it, no one was going to harm the scouts. One of our chaps was the son of a policeman – he too received a lot of pressure. By the end of the day, Authority had two choices – expel the entire sixth form, facing the embarrassment of how Authority had been fooled – and including the point, made with more or less subtlety by more than one miscreant, that Egg had been seen doing exactly what we had done – or forget the whole affair. Authority chose to forget.

I accept we scouts may not have come out of this with the reputation Baden-Powell approved of. Initiative, being prepared and so forth are not



Standing from left to right: Cedric Robertshaw, David Barraclough, Clive Tempest, Michael Denton, Tony (Fred) Pay, Frank Rycroft, Keith Willis and Richard (Dag) Booth

supposed to be applied thus. At least Frank Rycroft, Cedric Robertshaw and I were selected as part of the West Yorkshire contingent to the 50th Anniversary Jamboree in Sutton Park in 1957. The whole sixth form, boys and girls, knew of the girlfriend I acquired there and who has now been my wife for almost 50 years. Six of us went through to Queen's Scout together, followed by a couple of others. Of the six, one was deputy head boy and four of us were house-captains.

Crossleys, even at the time, was super. In hindsight, it remains so, only better. Some warts are more visible perhaps but they round the picture rather than spoil it and others are long forgotten. We had sport every day, in a very long day. We worked pretty hard at school, as everyone does, but in the evenings, with almost no television and no computers, there was always several hours of homework – even if with scouts or scouting activities, sports training or play rehearsals, two choir practices a week, books to read for fun, bikes to polish or model planes to make, it meant we were seldom abed before twelve. Weekends also had a large school input, at least for those involved in scouting or sports.

I was a little scared of what I might find when I returned after some forty-five years. That's not true – I really feared the prospect. I need not have done – I was thrilled. Within the four walls, everything had changed (except the lions to stop us sliding down the banisters) but the atmosphere, above all the staff and especially the pupils, made the old place as warm as ever.

Long may it remain so.

TONY PAY
(aka Fred, but not since 1959)