

Old Modernians Association

There is no written constitution.

We are an association of former pupils of the Modern School, Surbiton, Kingston and Peasmarsh, who wish to maintain contact with each other direct and through a periodic newsletter with the opportunity of attending a regular luncheon on dates to be mutually agreed.

Subscriptions - 2004

All members - £15 per annum (will receive 3 Newsletters, one in June another in December and this special Ralph Page centenary number, and information about reunions and other matters relating to the Association).

Overseas members are requested to add £5 to cover the additional cost of sending communications and the newsletters by first class air mail.

Come into the office boys and girls



On the 11th of this month we shall be celebrating what would have been the 100th birthday of Ralph Page.

It is over 80 years since The Modern School came into being under his headmastership - as we know from the History of the Modern School Part 1 in our very first Newsletter he was not yet 20 when he took over the school.

It is nearly 50 years since the school closed and every member of the Old Modernians Association can now draw his or her state pension.

Where have all the years gone? In the 31 years the school existed it saw 4 Monarchs, 6 Prime Ministers, the General Strike, the Depression and the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy. Old Boys served in all branches of the military to fight in the Second World War and a significantly high number gave their lives. Little maidens saw service in units such as the WAAF, WRAC, WRNS, ENSA, Land Army and elsewhere in support of the war effort.

Before, during and after the war the Modern School and its pupils lived through times of depression and austerity with shortages and rationing which had been introduced in 1940 and continued until 1953. Modernians were called up for National Service both in the UK and abroad. Many served in Germany, Egypt, Malta, Cyprus, Malaya and Singapore. Some served in Korea.

It was an eventful period and historians might say that much of that time was drab and depressing with many hardships. We did not feel unhappy - I believe that the time we were at school we could not have been more relaxed and content. We look back on a time when we felt secure and did not know that we were missing out on anything. This was due in no small part to our old friend, Ralph Page whom we honour in these pages.



Ian Whitmore
38 Lois Drive, Shepperton
TW17 8BE Tel 01932 228753

Modern School Personality - No 8 **Ralph George Page**

This really should have been the first in this series but anticipating that we would have this special issue of our Newsletter I thought it might be more appropriate to wait until now before producing this potted biography of our old friend and headmaster.

Before writing this article I thought long and hard about how to refer to him. To his face, of course, I could never call him anything but Sir and I challenge any Old Modernian to say any different. Having just joined the ranks of the septuagenarians, however, I feel emboldened to use his first name.

Ralph was born in Gravesend on 11 October 1904 and was always proud to be a man of Kent (or should that be Kentish man?). Bearing in mind his love of the cinema, his musical talents and his affinity with things eccentric it is interesting to reflect that among those born in the same year were Cary Grant, Joan Crawford, Glenn Miller, Bing Crosby, Peter Lorre and Salvador Dali. Ralph survived them all.

Other notables still living when Ralph was born included Florence Nightingale, Mark Twain, Jules Verne and Leo Tolstoy.

What sort of country was he born into at the beginning of the twentieth century? We had emerged from the rather restricted Victorian era with exciting developments ahead in manufacturing, combustion engineering, cinema technology, transport, trade and, perhaps, most importantly education.

Within living memory of much of the population the Education Act of 1870 had made it compulsory from 1876 for children between the ages of 5 to 12 years to have basic literacy and numeracy education. Until then education was very limited and only easily available to children of the upper and middle classes. Public Schools existed for those who could afford the fees but otherwise there was a limited opportunity for children in charity and church schools, elementary schools in some parishes and a relatively few places in grammar schools. Additionally there were tutors and some private proprietary schools.

I have checked official records and in 1869, the year before the Education Act was passed, there were 1,765,944 children receiving some sort of formal education and about 30% of the population was illiterate. In 1876 when education became mandatory the number receiving formal education had nearly doubled to 3,426,318 and by the end of the century illiteracy had dropped to around 20%.



So by the time that Ralph was born, basic education for all children was in place although it would still be a few years before children in their early teens were required to stay on at school. In 1904 schooling and the educational curriculum were still being formulated and the so called Public Schools were regarded in fairly low esteem by the country at large. They placed much emphasis on a classical education of Latin, Greek and History

largely in response to the entry requirements of the Universities.

The public saw this type of education as being of little benefit to the country at large which was undergoing tremendous strides in motor, aeronautical and maritime engineering, cinematography, trade, assembly line manufacturing, communications and much more.

Ralph was born into this era of considerable change in the education system. His mother, Wilhelmina, was a qualified teacher and his father, George William, an accredited maritime master so he and his older sister, Beatrice, grew up in the right atmosphere for the acquisition of knowledge.

Another Education Act of 1902 had been passed just before Ralph's birth to formalise many aspects of children's schooling so these important changes which were within the living memory of his parents and peers almost certainly helped to shape his decision to enter the field of education at an early age.

Ralph said many times that he always enjoyed reading books on school life and he referred particularly to three books which influenced him :-

- Tom Brown's Schooldays
by Thomas Hughes (1857)
- Eric or Little by Little
by Dean Farrar (1858)
- The Bending of a Twig
by Desmond Coke (1906)

The authors all attended Public School and each story is based loosely on boys' schools - Rugby, King Williams College (Isle of Man) and Shrewsbury. Reading them now the books display

an extremely moralistic tone each with high codes of value and an emphasis on patriotism and superiority.

However, the schools depicted all had house systems and strongly featured games, loyalty and team spirit.



We know also that Ralph was, from an early age, a great reader and collector of the Gem and Magnet which first respectively saw publication 3 and 4 years after his birth. The Public Schools tended to have rugby football as the main winter sport whilst soccer was played at Greyfriars, St Jims and Rookwood the famous fictional schools of Frank Richards. Whilst they were boys' schools there was a neighbouring girls' school, Cliff House, which featured prominently in the stories in the Magnet.

The Edwardian age ushered in a more liberal and socially aware society so it was against all this background that Ralph formulated his career and, as we read in the first edition of our magazine, the Modern School was born. A co-educational private school with a popular house system, an informal atmosphere, a youth club feel, a tremendous team spirit with a good balance of education and sport including the universally popular game - soccer. Ralph used the best of the facilities of which he had read (and, perhaps, he had experienced in his own Gravesend school) and fashioned a

school of which he and those who attended the school could feel proud. How many schools which closed their doors almost 50 years ago have the same following as the Modern School?

We have seen 6 articles on the history of our school in the early issues of our Newsletter which contained some details of Ralph's early life so I will not repeat what has already been written. Suffice to say that Ralph spent a third of his life as our respected headmaster but to many of his old pupils he was more than just that - he became our friend too.

By 1955 he had fulfilled his first great ambition - to create a school which was unique for the times and it was with a feeling of sadness for all of us when the curtain came down on that great adventure. It seemed that Ralph and the Modern School were part of the fabric of Surbiton yet the school as we all knew it had been formed only three decades before and at the end Ralph was still only 50 years old.

I was still living in Surbiton up to 1959 and often I would come across Ralph in the town. Invariably he would be wearing his khaki shorts, sandals and a polo shirt or sweatshirt. Nothing at all remarkable today but in those times this mode of address was somewhat avant garde.



More soberly dressed I am now ashamed to admit any feeling of

embarrassment as any slight restraint on my part was very quickly dispelled as he was genuinely pleased to meet any of his old pupils and wanted to know all about your family and what you had been doing.

Ralph and Madam turned 23 Grove Road into a private hotel and he spent several years helping to organise the original Old Mods Association. He arranged trips to the London theatres to see all the Billy Bunter shows and he accepted invitations to play the piano at a number of them.



Sketch by Bob Whiter

But Ralph had another great ambition. He had that enormous affection for the writings of Frank Richards and his knowledge of the Old Boys' papers of the period 1907 - 1940 was incomparable. He had contributed very many articles to the Collectors' Digest since it started publication in 1946 and he was regarded by all in the hobby as probable the foremost expert in the field. The Editor, Herbert Leckenby, had become very ill and he asked Ralph to take over the Editorship of the Collectors' Digest which he was delighted to do in 1959. Herbert died just as Ralph took over.

In his persona as Editor and, as he had been known to collector friends for many years, he used the name Eric Fayne. Almost certainly the first

name of Eric came from the title of one of his favourite books mentioned before whilst probably the name Fayne was merely an adaptation of "Feign". As we know, Ralph also used the pseudonym Andy Fellowe in his stage shows.

1928 - Macbeth at Hillcroft Theatre Surbiton



RGP as Andy Fellowe is second left

He must have found it convenient to put different parts of his life into separate compartments. In this he followed the example of Frank Richards whose real name was Charles Hamilton. He used the name Frank Richards for his Greyfriars tales in the Magnet, Martin Clifford for the St Jims stories in the Gem and Owen Conquest for those of Rookwood in the Boys Friend.

Ralph was a superb Editor. He produced a highly professional monthly Digest for Old Boys' Book Collectors around the world. There were hundreds of subscribers and each monthly edition was of 10,000 words and more - about the number in our Newsletters. Each December he produced an extensive and widely circulated popular Annual. The work he put in was prodigious but I know that it was a labour of love for him - his correspondence was huge but he answered every letter promptly.

Ralph happily devoted his time and energy to editing his Collectors Digest

and to writing many articles himself including a full history of our own small cinema. He and Madam continued to run Excelsior House as a private hotel until 1971 when the property was sold and they moved to Fleet in Hampshire.

Ralph always enjoyed visits from Old Mods as did Madam - the writer called on them regularly and, in the earlier years, accompanied by his children who were made very welcome. Madam's teas were legendary and the conversations were far reaching. Memories were tested and seldom found wanting.

Unhappily, Madam died in 1984 which was devastating for Ralph as they had been together for 40 years ever since her husband and Ralph's father, the Captain, had died towards the end of the war. Ralph was then aged 80 years and he continued to edit the Collectors Digest for a while longer but early in 1987 he handed over the reins to Mary Cadogan, a well known writer and broadcaster, whose love of the old story papers matched his - Mary continues now to edit the Digest as only the third editor in 58 years and she has written her own tribute to Ralph - see page 20.

Ralph's reign lasted 28 years to which we can add those 31 great years as our headmaster. A short gap in between when he was the proprietor of a private hotel and including twelve years when he had two tasks - running the hotel and as editor. He seemed to thrive on work and responsibilities.

By the time he gave up his editorship Ralph was aged 82 years but he was not one to put his feet up. He continued to write articles for the Collectors' Digest, he maintained a

heavy correspondence file and whenever possible he attended monthly meetings of the Old Boys Book Club at various venues in and around London. He also accepted many invitations to attend the Northern, Cambridge and South West meetings of the Club.

In 1988 Ralph received the award of the Silver Cross of St George from "This England", a quarterly journal for all those who love our green and pleasant land. Others who had received this prestigious award before him included Lord Denning, Mary Whitehouse and Catherine Bramwell-Booth. Details of the award can be found on the back page.

Ralph often used to say that Frank Richards, whose most famous character was Billy Bunter



- even now a household name - and whose literary output was higher than any other English author according to the Guinness Book of Records, should have received an honour from the country for the pleasure he had given over sixty years to so many readers. He referred to the awards given to film and TV stars, politicians, pop singers, business and union leaders, sportsmen, military personnel and civil servants many such awards being automatic for

the job. I venture to suggest that the lessons taught by Ralph Page and the memories and pleasure he had given to so many people in the fields of education and story papers should similarly have been recognised.

Whenever I visited Ralph at his home in Fleet he was always an entertaining host with a wealth of stories to relate. He never forgot a Modernian, sometimes just a little confusion as to the era involved, and he looked back on those happy school days with a great deal of nostalgia. He maintained a youthful appearance and manner to the end.

His death on 2 May 1997 at the age of 92 years was a blow to everyone who knew Ralph. It may be hard to credit, but when he died we were as distant from his birth in 1904 as 1904 was from 1812 when we were still fighting Napoleon's armies in the Peninsular War and the self styled Emperor was retreating in ignominy from Moscow. The death of Ralph was the catalyst for the reforming of the Old Modernians Association the year following. Wouldn't he have loved being part of it?

In 1904

Did you know.....

the wristwatch was invented by Louis Cartier?

the third modern Olympic Games were held in St Louis, USA?

the keel of the Lusitania was laid at the Clyde Shipyard?

the Rolls Royce Motor Company was founded?

Reminiscence by Valerie Reddall (Goth 1939 - 48)

Sir always regarded his pupils as individuals and not merely money making necessities.

When my father was called up in the second World War he had to shut down his business and my mother was left with no income other than his private's allowance.

She went to see Sir to tell him that she would no longer be able to afford my school fees and she would have to take me away at the end of term. He would have nothing of this and assured my mother that this would not be necessary and that he would be happy to wait until matters improved or he would accept the money in instalments.

Fortunately my mother found work to do from home so she wouldn't have to go out and leave me alone and this enabled her to pay the fees. She did not know she could do this until well after Sir's generous offer.

Letters to The Times

(1) A month ago, in answer to an advert telling me I'm worth it, I purchased a pot of cream which purports "to reduce the signs of ageing". To date I find no reduction in baldness, gum-shrinkage, myopia, varicose veins, short term memory loss, involuntary flatulence or incessant reminiscing about the good old days.

(2) When you are our age never attempt to put tights on standing up.

(3) One advantage of growing old is that whatever you buy won't wear out.

My Headmaster - Sir by Ian Hill (Saxon 1937 - 41)

We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ralph George Page, our late headmaster, known to generations of Modern School pupils as "Sir".

My first encounter with Sir was in the garden of the school at 23 Grove Road, Surbiton in 1937. He was very youthful in appearance and I was uncertain as to his identity. Over the years he did not change much and seemed to have the secret of eternal youth.

There is no doubt that from 1921 when he arrived in Surbiton Sir's life centred around the school. In retrospect one realises the tremendous amount of work he did in teaching and interest in the welfare of his pupils. The latter was evident in the summer term of 1937 when a number were taken ill with diphtheria. During the period he made frequent visits to Tolworth Isolation Hospital to see how they were progressing, regardless of the fact it might be outside normal visiting times.



Sir was not a martinet by any means but discipline throughout the school was good and his manner always commanded respect. I remember an occasion at Grove Road one lunchtime when there was more than the usual amount of noise emanating from the cloakrooms in the basement. Suddenly the decibels decreased and word went round that Sir was standing

at the top of the stairs. His presence was all that was required.

There were times when his voice would be raised in Senior School which, when heard next door in Middle School, caused a certain amount of alarm.

By example we were taught good manners and behaviour. One occasion towards the end of my schooldays I asked Sir to look after a small amount of money while I played football. When it was returned to me later in the afternoon I responded in the style of Arthur Askey, a comedian of that time, saying "I thank yow". As a consequence I was sternly instructed to sit down and, to my trepidation, Sir disappeared for a few minutes.



On his return he said I could go but in the future I was to be careful with my answers. It was the last time I tried to be clever!

There were phrases he used which were unique but conveyed the necessary message. If in class our headmaster observed one of the girls holding a handkerchief in her hand he would say "put your blanket away little maiden, put your blanket away". A reprimand would be worded in such a way as to make the recalcitrant pupil feel as if the wrist had been severely slapped.

When instructing a class and it appeared a pupil was not paying attention that person would suddenly be asked "what was my last remark?".

If the correct answer was not given the sort of comment which followed was "I sometimes think that my task would be easier breaking stones in the road or pushing toothpaste back into the tube".

During my time in Senior School the last lesson in the morning session was a short French one which was timed to last 15 minutes. Sir, however, would go round the class checking the work starting at the front and finishing with the prefects at the back. This often meant lunchtime for the seniors was somewhat curtailed as Sir did not stop work on the stroke of noon.

Occasionally a pupil would be referred to by a name other than his correct one. This nickname could be a distortion of the original but not always. How did Evelyn Davis become known as "Bottle" for example?

Looking back one wonders how our headmaster had time for all his activities outside the classroom. At Peasmarsh in the winter evenings he would set aside a period of time to read to some of his pupils and staff. And this was after he had travelled to Surbiton and back where he had been teaching during the day.

There was much interest in the world of entertainment in relation to the theatre and cinema. The former was demonstrated by the shows written for the Excelsior Players. Sir used to appear as some character or other and would be listed on the programmes as Andy Fellowe. Many of the shows had a patriotic theme being based on naval tales. In Coronation Year 1937 there was "Salute" which had a song appropriate for the time and one of the ways we were encouraged to be loyal to our country.

In the early days of the war the school cinema would operate on Sunday evenings. No doubt this was to entertain the boarders but day pupils were welcome to attend providing they could be accommodated. I saw a number of films on a Sunday evening on that screen in the basement of 23 Grove Road.

Reverting to the subject of patriotism there used to be a small triangular shaped Union Jack in the rear window of Sir's car. Mentioning this on one occasion I was informed that when touring on the continent he flew three flags - one in the rear window and one each side at the front so everyone would know it was a British car. I believe the vehicle concerned was a 1936 Rover 16 Sports Saloon.

In more recent years I visited Excelsior House at Fleet. On one of these visits I was accompanied by Brenda Hodgson who, in the course of conversation with Sir, asked about his life as a teacher. The immediate reply was "I enjoyed every minute of it". As Cyril Duke said to me recently Sir would have been a good subject to appear in the TV programme, "This is your Life".

It is true to say that we shall not see his like again.

.....

It's good to see the School we knew,
The land of youth and dream,
To greet again the rule we knew
Before we took the stream
Though long we've missed the sight of
her,
Our hearts may not forget,
We've lost the old delight of her,
We keep her honour yet
Sir Henry Newbolt (1862 - 1938)

Reminiscence

by Peter Ganley (Goth 1939 - 44)

It was late spring in 1944. Night bombing was not so severe, the school had not been hit and the large mirror in the senior classroom was still intact. However, Hitler's flying bombs were in full flight and one exploded in Long Ditton where John Allen and I lived.

We reached the ruined house together and helped three people out of the rubble and administered first aid before the Civil Defence workers arrived.

We were both King Scouts and we had also erected many Morrison Air Raid Shelters between us. For this we both received special scout awards which were presented to us by the Mayor of Esher at a large ceremony.

When Sir heard of this he called us up to the front of senior class and lavished praise on us both and, as he was extolling our virtues, I had a vision of him showering us with hundreds of house tokens and stuffing our pockets with personal tokens. The feeling of euphoria vanished, however, when he escorted us back empty-handed to our desks. We had to be satisfied with his praise and looking back, of course, we should have expected nothing more. It was one of those urgent lessons we were taught as the words of the school song emphasised.

A Thought for the Little Maidens

It was not until 1928, four years after the Modern School was born, that voting rights were extended to all women over the age of 21 - until then there existed only limited voting rights to property owning women granted in 1918.

My Friend - Eric Fayne

by Bob Whiter

(Bob and his wife now live in Los Angeles having emigrated from Wood Green 30 or more years ago)

As we travel through life we come in contact with people, some good and some not so good. If we are lucky we meet more of the former than the latter. If we are really lucky we meet a few outstanding people.

I always consider myself exceptionally fortunate in meeting Ralph Page or, as I always knew him, Eric Fayne. I had corresponded with Eric over the years; I remember I had purchased through the post several of our mutual favourites, including the 1932 Holiday Annual, from him.



The first Old Boys Book Club meeting had been held at the East Dulwich home of Len and Josie Packman in 1947 and Ben, my brother, and I volunteered our residence in Wood Green to be the venue for the second.

Acting on an impulse I invited Eric to the meeting. I'll never forget opening the front door to this athletic looking gentleman resplendent in his Modern School blazer. Before the meeting was over I found it hard to believe that Eric and I hadn't known each other for years! Such was his friendliness. In those days I had a mop of blonde hair and he paid me a very great compliment by saying that I made him think of a mixture of Tom Merry (from

the Gem) and Bob Cherry (from Greyfriars).

He offered to host the third meeting and invited me to lunch. So I set off for Surbiton early and before the meeting proper had commenced enjoyed a get-together which I shall always remember. Eric had also invited a John Robyns from Brighton and over lunch prepared by that wonderful lady, "Madam", three friendships were forged that lasted until the sad demise of John and Eric. At the meeting itself club members included some of Eric's pupils - Tony Blunden, Vincent Page and Ian Whitmore, all enthusiastic readers of the stories of Frank Richards.

Even after I emigrated to the United States Eric, John and I kept in touch with each other and I treasure the memories of both these men. Whilst still living in the UK we made frequent visits to each other's homes. On a Thursday, which was half day closing in Wood Green, I would often make the journey to Surbiton. Sometimes I would arrive to find Eric sitting at the piano playing and conducting a rehearsal with the students at his school. This would be a musical show that Eric himself had written and produced for the boys and girls to perform.

In spite of a busy life, Eric would still attend and take his turn to host the Old Boys Book Club meetings. It was Eric who introduced the feature that became standard at the meetings. I refer to the "Quiz". I have good cause to remember the first one of these - I was lucky enough to win it! Eric always gave jolly nice prizes to the winner of his quizzes. These were often special drinking glasses engraved with the likeness of one of the

Greyfriars characters. Others included copies of the companion papers such as the Magnet, the Gem, Schoolboys Own Library and other favourites.

In the course of collecting over the years Eric, besides adding to his own collection, had amassed quite a large number of duplicates and these he put to great use (we remember that after the war the windows of our tuck shop were adorned with these papers - Ed).

Eric was a truly remarkable man. Apart from being the headmaster of a top notch school he was a talented pianist - in his younger days he had travelled the cinema circuits as piano accompanist to silent movies. Later on he played the piano at some of the live Billy Bunter theatre productions.

Besides writing and composing musical shows for his students to perform, Eric wrote songs and entered them in radio competitions. I well remember in company with his wide circle of friends sending in postcards listing his song as our choice. One year two old ladies just pipped him and won with "Cruising Down the River on a Sunday Afternoon".

Three of his songs I can still sing from memory are "Some Tomorrow", "Saturday, Saturday, Lights Will Shine" and "Carry on Men of March". The last one in particular Eric sent me the words and music and gave me permission to paraphrase and make a scouting song out of it, i.e. "Carry on Men in Scouting".

When Marie, my wife, had our twins, Eric sent via Interflora a beautiful bouquet. One of our greatest joys when on a trip to my homeland was a visit to see our good friend, Eric. Generally he would meet us at the

Station and we would either go straight home with him or stop en route at the Oatsheaf Pub for lunch. What wonderful times they were.



*"Eric Fayne" and Bob Whiter
in the garden at 23 Grove Road circa 1960*

When Herbert Leckenby had to relinquish the editorship of the Collectors Digest Eric stepped in and took over. Without any disparagement to Herbert he made a terrific job of it. He incorporated a batch of new ideas and gave an already popular amateur magazine which Eric had been associated with since its inception a whole new lease of life. This fact, coupled with holding regular OBBC meetings at the school in Surbiton and its annexe in Kingston, really kept members full of the spirit of the old papers.

The Collectors' Digest, albeit now a quarterly publication, is still going strong thanks to its third Editor, Mary Cadogan, and her skilful and dedicated management. But to all concerned, particularly people like myself who were honoured by his friendship, it stands as a living testament to the evergreen memory of Eric Fayne.

There are three kinds of people - those who can count and those who can't.

Reminiscence by Dorothy Foster (Goth 1929 - 36)

When I started at the Modern School in 1929 it was a very small school. I think there were only 32 pupils and just 8 of these were girls.

Sir was not really keen on girls at the beginning but as I was a tomboy I was accepted and always had a good relationship with him.

Memory tells me that most of the boys were boarders while all the girls were day pupils. When I was studying for exams we had evening classes and my mother was not happy for me going home at 10pm so for a while I was allowed to board. I was very friendly with Miss Ravenscroft, Sir's cousin, and used to help after school hours with the boarders.

In the 1930s the school roll increased quite rapidly and my ambition from the age of 9 years to become a teacher was realised in 1936 when my schooldays came to an end and Sir asked if I would like to stay on to teach at the school. I'm sure that I would have continued had it not been for the war. I was not qualified and so would have been called up into the ATS which I did not want so I joined the Wrens instead.

It is difficult now to remember all the details of my switch from being a pupil to becoming a teacher but this is just to say that I was very happy with both my situations. Sir certainly made the transition very easy for me and I shall always be grateful for my association with him.

Rehab is for quitters.

My Uncle Ralph recalled by the late Lynton Evett (New House 1932 - 39)

Sir's nephew and our old friend, Lynton Evett, spoke to your Editor on the telephone only a few weeks before he died and knowing that we intended to have a special Newsletter to celebrate what would have been Ralph's 100th birthday he said that he would try to draft a suitable article on Ralph as a family man.

Sadly Lynton was not able to do this but we talked at some length about Ralph and the family and what follows are Lynton's reminiscences.

We know from early numbers of our Newsletter that Ralph's mother, Wilhelmina, was a qualified teacher and had taught at what was then the Parkfield Modern School for a few years before Ralph joined the staff. She died soon after Sir took over.

Ralph's father, George, whom everyone knew as the Captain, was a Master Mariner by profession and for about 5 years before his death in 1944 he became a respected member of the school staff at Peasmarsh.

In or around 1933 the Captain married again - to Beatrice, the lady we all remember fondly as Madam. In 1935 Vincent, Ralph's half-brother, was born. Vincent was at the Modern School for all his education from 1940 to 1951. As reported in Newsletter No 2 he died on 10 September 1998.

Ralph's older sister, also named Beatrice, had 4 children - Vernon, Lynton, Yvonne and Neil. The name Beatrice was clearly a popular one within the family as it is Yvonne's second name.

Vernon and Lynton were boarders at the Modern School in the 1930s. Vernon died on 19 January 1998.

Yet more family connections linked to the school can be revealed. Miss Ravenscroft, a cousin of Ralph, joined the school before the war and taught some of the younger pupils - your Editor was one of them. Miss Ravenscroft with her brother, Billy, and Ralph shared the same grandparents. Would you believe it but Miss Ravenscroft's first name was Beatrice? Within the family and to friends, however, she was generally known as Triss.

During his early years Ralph made great use of the postal system sending postcards regularly to members of his family. Those were the days when a letter or card posted in the morning would arrive at a local destination in the afternoon or, regardless of the cost of the stamp, it would arrive without fail the next morning. Lynton was a life-long collector of postcards and retained many of those which had circulated amongst the family.

I read in the papers a short while ago that a newly appointed senior executive of the company with that rather absurd name, Consignia, maintained that there never had been a second post. Ralph would have referred to the lady as a silly little maiden who really should get her facts right. Whether or not that uninformed senior executive is still in her post it is a relief to know that the company has now reverted to the name The Royal Mail.

Ralph had three close members of his family as pupils at school - Vernon, Lynton and Vincent. Ralph, his mother and cousin, Beatrice

Ravenscroft taught at the school. His father and step-mother took responsibility for gardening and housekeeping duties. The relationship between them all during school times was always absolutely professional. However his family addressed him in private he was always "Sir" in public.

Regular family get-togethers took place at Surbiton, at the Gravesend home of the Evetts or the Tiptree home of the Ravenscrofts at various holiday times. Ralph was something of a joker in the family as he would relish playing pranks on individuals. For example he used to attribute various comments or events to "Beatrice" and the family were never quite sure about whom he was referring.

Ralph took part enthusiastically in the party games and he was well known for reading aloud ghost and other stories to family members.



There is no doubt that Ralph was proud of his family and always kept in close contact with everyone. Most of us will know that he regarded all his boys and little maidens as his family as well - he warmly welcomed all who visited him and he was happy to correspond with all who wrote to him.

We remember Ralph as someone we could trust and confide in - just like a favourite old uncle who took such an interest in you and your family. He will be remembered with great affection and respect by his family, his friends and by generations of Old Modernians.

Reminiscence

by Diane Piper (Saxon 1946 - 53)

The recent article on nicknames reminded me that Sir always used to call me "Miss Braddon".

I knew she was a writer but nothing else about her and it was a mystery to me why he applied the name to me.

The life of one of Richmond's most successful but long forgotten residents is the focus of a new exhibition and play at the Orange Tree Theatre - thus did an article on Mary Elizabeth Braddon in our local Kingston Guardian tell us just the other day. Apparently she wrote more than 80 books and is credited for being one of the creators of what became known as sensation novels. Her biggest seller, "Lady Audley's Secret", sold more than one million copies.

By the standards of the day Miss Braddon's life was remarkably unconventional and belied her carefully cultivated respectable reputation. The article comments that she was a 21st century woman living in the 19th century.

Miss Braddon died in 1915 when Sir was 11 years of age so my first thought that he made her acquaintance was probably wrong. Maybe one or more of her novels was familiar to him. As her books had a racy reputation I can only hope that I didn't remind him of some saucy female in one of them!

Whatever his reasons for giving me the nickname I found the article most interesting - it is strange to find out so many years later some information about the life of this lady whose name I had to share at school.

It Must Be Modern - Andy Fellowe

by two old Excelsior Players who are still playing -

Roy Smith (New House 1943 - 49)
and Bill Waddell (Saxon 1943 - 48)



"We'll remember ever more"

That is what we have been doing. Roy and Bill have been drifting back into memory lane. Looking back at the school shows in which we took part. "It Must Be Modern", "Spindrift", "This Youth of Ours" plus numerous revues. Bear with us, for our combined memories have mellowed with the passage of time, but these recollections have given us much laughter and enjoyment as we have sipped our Scotch on the rocks. Evelyn and Marjorie, our wives, are for ever asking us what we are laughing at. Our answer is - ourselves.

There was little doubt that "Sir" was gifted in the way in which he wrote, composed and produced his musicals and revues. Many of them were scripted to the personality of the person he expected to perform them. These productions were presented at various halls and we came to the conclusion that the audiences were usually comprised of stoical parents, the very old, who had been given free tickets, those who had an interest in the antics of amateur dramatists and those conned into buying tickets who were apprehensive of losing their investment. Few were disappointed and all the monies raised were given to local good causes.

We both have memories of "Sir" in his capacity as producer, director,

choreographer, script writer, composer and lyricist, writing under the nom de plume, Andy Fellowe. He was always on the look out for talent which he could use in his productions...Jackie Ridley (now Hoegarts) sang solos with her clear soprano voice and, what most of you don't know, there was an aspiring Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly in your midst whose ambition in his youth was to emulate those famous tappers. His constant companion was a piece of plywood which he would lay on the floor and, wearing his patent leather tap shoes, dance away happily.

"I would practice my skills to the accompaniment of all the latest dance music from films. I would go to the cinema time and time again to learn more dance steps. I was sure that my future lay in being a great dancer and I was going to take up a living as a professional. I finally persuaded my father to pay for dance lessons with one of the best teachers, an American called Buddy Bradley. Sadly Mr Bradley's dance studio was in the West End of London and the flying bombs started to land. Because of the dangers of travelling my ambitions of a future career came to a halt".

But ambition is not easily stifled and when "Sir" held an audition for one of the shows Kelly Astaire Smith was able to trip the light fantastic to the accompaniment of "Sir" on the pianoforte. The result was that Roy appeared in many shows resolving his life's ambition.

Rehearsals for the shows were held at the Church Hall opposite the Oak Public House in Grove Road where, if selected, you were expected to know your part. These rehearsals required attendance at least twice a week and more often when we were nearing the

performance. Some of you may well recall that failure to remember one's lines or to make an entrance at the wrong time brought with it a demonstration of energetic aggression.



There was nothing that quite concentrated the mind so much as the thought of "The Ralph" suddenly bursting into a fit of pique or rage and hurling the first object that came to hand in the direction of one's cranium.

We remember on one occasion where the missile aimed at us was not a simple object such as a book, script or chair, but an upright piano on which he had been playing. He had been upset by the general lack of zip in the rehearsal and, unable to identify one person in the cast, all of whom happened to be on stage, he rose like a Phoenix from the ashes and, banging down the lid, grabbed the corner of the unfortunate instrument and propelled it with great force in our general direction. Being young and fleet of foot we leapt balletically out of its route, gazing at it with some apprehension as it slid majestically past us, and then silently waited to see what was going to follow. This just happened to be some choice criticism, so we pushed the offending piano back from whence it had come and continued the rehearsal, needless to say with a somewhat more alert attitude to the task in hand.

The parts one played leave somewhat more vivid memories as Roy recollects.

"In a sketch about the Perk Family, I was playing Mr Perk complete with glasses, moustache and a pipe. Jackie Ridley was playing Mrs Perk and made up to look middle aged with a faux fur round her shoulders and what was best described as a keep death off the road hat. We had two children and this is where Sir let loose his writing skills by casting them as what would be described today as the kids from hell. The sketch was a great success but the subtlety was that he had caricatured actual pupils at the school and, whilst the audience clapped enthusiastically, there must have been those in the audience who squirmed just a little when they recognised their own sons and daughters."

One of the revues had a sketch in it called somewhat poetically "Ortobee Banned". This involved "Sir" on the piano, Roy on the drums and Bill and others blowing our silly heads off on gazoos which were crafted in the shape of musical instruments. For those readers who are not acquainted with this particular musical phenomena, it involves one humming a tune whilst blowing into one end of a hollow tube shaped like a musical instrument with tissue paper over the other end.



L to R Phillip Whitley Barry Shiers Bill Waddell Roy Smith
John Crow (part hidden) Peter Jones Peter Ferns

This produced a sound that we can only liken to that of cats out for a night on the tiles. Whilst "Sir" was pretty efficient on the piano poor Roy had the task of maintaining the beat to a timing which varied somewhat according to

whatever tune was being played or hummed. This led to some confusion on the part of the drummer and each hummer. In consequence Roy would hit the drum harder to ensure the beat could be heard upon which "Sir" would place his size twelve down firmly on the loud pedal and hit the keys with renewed energy. This gave rise to certain doubts in the minds of the hummers and fearing that they could not be heard they would hum even louder. Somewhere during this rising crescendo of hums, beats and bangs the timing would be completely lost.

The hummers not knowing whether to follow the drummer or the pianist who, by this time was tinkling the ivories behind the scenes in a maniacal frenzy with a strange glint in his eyes, was trying to bring the sketch back in some form of order. When the item finished and the curtain came down there was no definite end. The drums would stop. The piano would stop. And the hummers who were not sure when to stop, having completely lost the plot, ceased blowing when they thought fit. The audience were left with their hands clasped to their ears trying to cut out a noise akin to the sound of bagpipes when the piper has finished playing and was deflating the airbag. As one reviewer in the Surrey Comet said - "The Ortobee Banned was appropriately named." One could never say that the performances lacked enthusiasm.

"Sir" devised a comedy sketch where several of us would walk on to the stage in order and sing about our craving for a particular job or profession. Each one would sing his chorus about what he would like to be if he was not a student at the school. This was followed by vigorous arm

movements and actions to demonstrate the particular activity. The Keep Fit Instructor would do a knees bend and arms stretch. The Policeman would direct the traffic. The Ballerina would pirouette. Bill said he was given the job of decorator/painter where his lines were "Slap it on, slap it on, up and down the wall." This involved a bucket which he was banned from filling with water and a large eight inch distemper brush.

Now the scenery for a lot of these sketches were drapes and curtains, which cunningly hid "Sir" who was playing the piano behind them. As many of these halls were a bit strapped for space and the sketches were very varied they involved a number of quick changes which, for "Sir" or perhaps we should say Andy Fellowe, meant changing clothes a bit at a time whenever he got the chance whilst still providing the piano accompaniment.

Bill's enthusiasm for the "slap it on" knew no bounds. In fact those near him on the stage could be seen moving away to avoid his swinging distemper brush. Of course trouble was not far away.



As he swung his brush he caught the drapes and pulled them to the floor revealing a bewildered "Sir" banging away at the piano dressed in a red wig and wearing just a singlet and shorts. His attempts to cover himself were futile. Playing the piano whilst trying to grasp a curtain were not effective. As the perfect player manager he kept looking at the audience and trying to smile as if it was part of the act. The audience were in stitches but the headmaster was not a happy camper.

Oddly, however, he said nothing apart from ensuring that the curtains were firmly secured for the following night and Bill was moved further along the stage. While walking through Kingston Market Place some days later one of the stallholders who had seen the show gave Bill an enormous bag of cherries. The Surrey Comet summed it up by saying "William Waddell played the buffoon and played it well" a role, Bill says, he has been playing ever since.

They were happy days and looking back we enjoyed every minute as Excelsior Players. We remember many of our fellow artistes - Peter Gooding, Jacqueline Ridley, Marilyn Henderson, Jill Evans, Pauline Butler, John Crew, Peter Jones, Arthur Ponsford, Peter Ferns, Mike Grunuklee, Phil Whitley, Ken Walters, Ron Tanner, Mike Harting, Basil Irwin, Keith Judd, Buster Woodman and all others who shared those times.

So, as we have finished this article, we are about to open a bottle of champagne and toast all of you including Andy Fellowe. Thank you Sir for giving us some of the good and great times. Remember he always said "Schooldays are the best days of your life". We are not sure whether that was true for all but Roy and Bill remember them with pleasure.

In 1904 -

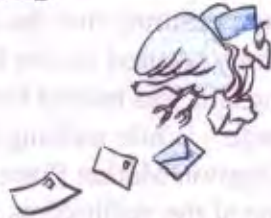
Did you know.....

the Entente Cordiale agreement was reached by Britain and France recognising British interests in Egypt and French interests in Morocco?

the Russo-Japanese War broke out?

Anton Chekhov died?

From The Post Bag



Some years ago I happened to be in a shop to find myself near another Old Modernian and overheard her telling her friend that she was not very impressed with the Modern School as she had learned more since she left than whilst attending as a pupil. Was the comment for my benefit or was it part of a comparison with her children's education? I don't know but I was very surprised at her statement.

I am certain that Sir would have been disappointed that the lady had not thought it through properly but, at the same time, pleased and delighted that he had achieved that very result. Our school was not about forced education where each pupil is supposed to outdo the others and leave full of scientific facts but few social graces.

No, Sir had it right. By working with our parents and understanding his pupils he laid the foundations for our futures and created enquiring and open minds. Remember the school songs - "Excelsior" and "Men of March"? Their sentiments were the goals he set for us. To make the best of bad times and extract every ounce of goodness from the good. No two people are the same and none perfect and life has dealt us all some very odd hands and we have responded differently to our lots sometimes even making others unhappy in the process.

This is natural life. It is our ways of dealing with it that counts and if we rely on the good old ways we were

guided into then we can't go far wrong. Sir made a point of knowing our parents and together they worked towards a well rounded childhood and education for each of us.

Whatever your status when you left school it was what you did afterwards that really counted. You took charge of your own life. Some "made it" almost immediately, some took longer but I have yet to meet an Old Modernian who can say that life has failed him or her or that in some way it has all been a failure. Maybe there have been times in our lives when we should have been more circumspect or done things differently but it is what we learned at the Modern School that has carried us successfully through life. No, that lady in the shop could not have been more wrong and it is sad that she has such a lack of understanding of those lessons she should have learnt in her formative years.

Norman Clarkson (Goth 1946 - 52)

I really enjoyed seeing in the June Newsletter the photograph of the 1935 Gorleston holiday party. So many of my friends are there - Rose, Matron, Alan Dodd (my first boy friend!) and my great friend, Bob Miller. What happy times they were. As I was an only child I really enjoyed those wonderful school holidays with all my school friends which Sir organised so well.

Looking over the list "For King and Country" I am most upset that Sir had me down as a Saxon - I was always a Goth and in my mind I am still a Goth.

Dorothy Foster (Goth 1929 - 36)

(How awful for Dorothy. As a Goth myself I can well understand her feelings. Ed)

Thank you Ralph/Eric For So Much
by Mary Cadogan (His friend,
successor as Editor of the Collectors'
Digest and writer and broadcaster).

My tribute is to Eric Fayne - for that is the name by which I always knew Ralph Page. It was the name he used for his writing and editing. Perhaps, like other teachers of his time, he decided that he was well advised to use a different name from his own for activities outside his profession.

I understand that he chose "Eric" because of his admiration for Dean Farrar's resilient but often maligned book "Eric or Little by Little. Writing about his fondness for this story he said "Even today, despite its blatant preaching and sentimentality, it is easy to see why it was a best-seller for many years ... it contains such pleasant prose, and, in pathos, those writers were onto a winner ... whether Dean Farrar had a message is doubtful, unless it was that the good die young - which is dismaying for the good." Well, our Eric was indeed good, but we can rejoice that he did not die young.

My first contact with him came in 1969 when I was just beginning to develop an interest in children's fiction of bygone years. Eric was then the Editor of the monthly magazine, Story Paper Collectors' Digest, which has always specialized in the study of boys' papers and magazines. When I became aware of the existence of the Collectors' Digest (as it is usually called) I telephoned Eric almost immediately. He was my first contact with the book-collecting hobby and I still remember his friendly, welcoming attitude and his unlimited enthusiasm.

He told me once that he had achieved his two greatest ambitions - to be

Headmaster of his own school, and to edit a magazine. As well as this, his musical talents brought their rewards, both private and professional. He composed several songs, and his piano-playing enhanced his enjoyment of light popular music. He had the joy of playing the music for the Billy Bunter plays which were staged in London over several years.

Eric's knowledge of boys' papers, particularly of Charles Hamilton's stories of Greyfriars, St Jims and Rookwood schools in the Magnet, Gem and Boys' Friend was truly encyclopaedic. He wrote about these, and about his interest in films, music and much else with charm and skill. Without ever appearing pompous or moralistic he upheld strong Christian values in his writing and in his living. He also had a delightful and often self-deprecating sense of humour.

He was the first editor of any paper or magazine to publish my work, and I shall never forget his kindly, gracious and unfailing encouragement. He edited the Collectors' Digest from 1959 to the beginning of 1987 and wrote many of its main articles and stories. Editing, producing and publishing this magazine for so long when he had many other commitments was an outstanding achievement. Although he did not relinquish its Editorship until late in his life it was a sad day for its readers when he decided to do so. For all of them, he had become a friend, taking time and trouble to answer their letters, respond to their queries, and always to offer words of help and cheer. By the time Eric decided to resign the Editorship I had become an established writer and reviewer. When he asked me to succeed him as Editor I felt greatly privileged to follow in his footsteps.

Ralph Page/Eric Fayne - Educator, Editor, Writer and Musician - for all this he will be long remembered. Most of all, however, in the minds of so many people whose lives were touched by his, he will always be considered a true English gentleman (it is significant that the magazine This England awarded him their Silver Cross of St George). Although a modest man, Eric would, I think, have appreciated this kind of praise. He was a great patriot, and was always gentlemanly and considerate in his dealings with others.

It hardly seems possible that he passed away seven years ago: his memory is still truly bright and evergreen, and it is good to be celebrating the centenary of his birth.

In 1904 -

Did you know.....
Henry Morton Stanley died - he is the explorer credited with the greeting "Dr Livingstone I presume" when he and the missionary met in 1871 near Lake Tanganyika both seeking the source of the Nile?

Ovaltine was created?



The first Colt .45 pistol was manufactured?



Reminiscence
by Norman Clarkson (Goth 1946 -52)

It may seem to some people who saw but didn't know Sir that he was not a paragon of virtue and taste. Some folk in Surbiton of a conservative disposition found him distinctly odd when he appeared very casually dressed in shorts and tee-shirt in the 1940s and 1950s. But, when greeted by an acquaintance, pupil or parent he was instantly the perfect gentleman and every inch the headmaster.

Discipline and good behaviour and manners were demanded both in school and outside - Sir was strict upon these issues and would not tolerate anything but the best at any time. Failure to live up to these requirements brought instant retribution. It was fear of the dreaded slipper threatened by Sir during one of his famous rages that was largely the key to his success.

Once, having offended a lady in Claremont Court by playing "knock down ginger" I was hauled up before Sir the very next morning. I never actually got the slipper but never again did I play silly jokes on anybody and to this day I hate practical jokes. Incidentally did anyone experience the slipper? Did it actually exist? Perhaps we shall never know.

I think I can reveal it now - how I got my nickname "The Colonel". In those days for some unexplained reason I found it necessary to answer the call of nature at about 10.30 each morning. If you remember it was the custom to raise one's arm and request permission to leave the room from our class teacher and when this was granted to proceed and ask Sir - of course this was never refused. One bright morning I duly knocked on Sir's

classroom door as usual. "Come in." Sir went on "Oh Good Morning, it's the Colonel again for his inspection. Yes, you may go". The name stuck and I'm proud that Sir gave it to me.

There are so many things I remember about Sir and the Modern School. His Rover Car and the new lamps we presented him for it on his birthday. The Billy Bunter Books and those Bunter shows at the Victoria Palace and other theatres.

The Tuck Shop. The Monday Cinema. The School outings at Southend and other seaside resorts. The Coronation Party. Getting measured up at Horne Bros in Oxford Street for a new blazer. Cricket Week. The School Shows.

All these things and many more. And all those wonderful people to whom I owe a lot of gratitude and the greatest of respect - Miss Smallpage, Miss Blanchard, Simpo, Madam, Nellie and, of course, Matron. None of these people, events or memories would ever have existed if it had not been for the advent and genius of one very special headmaster, Ralph Page, or as I always knew him, Sir.

My grandchildren are all doing well at school and seem to like their teachers but I wonder.... Will they remember their names and will they look back in 50 years time and express similar sentiments to their grandchildren about their headmaster?

The friend of man, the friend of truth;
The friend of age, the guide of youth;
If there's another world, he lives in
bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of
this.

- Robert Burns (1759 - 96)

Teacher - Employer - Friend

Ralph Page

by Cyril Duke (New House 1930 - 37
Staff 1937 - 40 and 1946 - 54)



I thought when the Editor asked me to write a piece to include with others to celebrate Sir's centenary it would be the easiest thing in the world but in fact it has proved to be the most difficult since I find that viewing someone objectively whom I have known since 1930 as my headmaster, then as my employer and later as a good friend of my wife and myself is a hard task. I hope, therefore, that this piece that follows is a reasonable tribute to a man, a gentleman, who was very much of the 20th century.

Being born 100 years ago and living until 1997 meant that he saw most of that troubled century yet I believe he viewed it with courage and optimism to the very end.

As a very young boy aged 10 years I was in some awe of the might and majesty of a new Headmaster who, to me at the time, lived in the completely different world of adults. Gradually as I rose through the ranks and hierarchy of the Modern School I realised what a talented and caring man he was in so many ways. His approach to education (progressive yet conservative), his tremendous capacity for work, his gift with words as a playwright, as a composer and musician, innovator, actor etc. etc. were all attributes which bound Old Modernians together and taught us all many lessons to take into our later lives.

At this point I see that I have been subjective which was not my intention but looking back with the benefit of hindsight he was so very much his own man - a non-conformist yet one who respected tradition. Quite a religious man but again non-conformist and especially so in his later years. In other words like many of us he was a man of contradictions - compassionate yet believing strongly in punishment for wrong doing. He abhorred alcohol but was a heavy and indulgent smoker to the end of his life.

He inherited the work ethic from his parents. I never knew his Mother but I knew and liked his Father, Captain Page who, incidentally, did his training "before the mast" in a sailing ship. In later years he was Captain of a millionaire's private yacht and Sir took a party of us down to see the steam yacht and go over it at Newhaven where she was berthed at the time. It was from his Father that he inherited his strong love of the Navy reflected in so many of his plays - "Leaving Port", "Port of Call", "Hooray! The Fleet's Back", "Salute" and others.

Though he did not have a family of his own he was very much a family man keeping in close touch with his only sister, Beatrice, and his three nephews, Vernon, Lynton and Neil and niece, Yvonne. As I now know he was very helpful financially towards the family. Vernon became a very talented artist. After the death of Madam, Lynton and Neil were very good to their Uncle visiting regularly most weekends to tend his garden and to cook him a Sunday lunch.

Right up to the age of 50 years his school was his life and he was absolutely single-minded believing that teaching young people that loyalty,

duty and responsibility were character forming. The formation of Houses, the appointment of prefects and school captains, the love of country and family were all features that he demonstrated time and time again to his pupils. How right he was and how lacking some of this is in education today. Whilst he was a mild disciplinarian he taught that the only real discipline is self discipline - something I have never forgotten.

When I said he was single-minded one of his few faults was a difficulty to understand that as one matured, married and had a family one had other interests and responsibilities. As an employer of trainee teachers he was excellent. As an employer of older teachers perhaps he was perhaps less understanding in view of his own determination to live and breathe every waking moment for his school.

With the social changes of the 1950s he realised, as I did, that his methods of teaching were not really compatible with the continuing interference from the state and finally in 1955 the school closed and he and Madam with the help of the redoubtable Nellie used the school building to provide good reasonable accommodation for young single working men - and very successful it became.

As the years passed he and Madam decided to retire to Fleet on the Surrey/Hampshire border. Elsie and I by this time were living in Hereford and though very busy we always made time to visit them both spending overnight stays. Sir had given up driving some years before and one of our great pleasures was to take them both to the Redgrave Theatre nearby at Farnham to see the only revival production of Noel Coward's

“Cavalcade” (originally played at Drury Lane in 1930 and which Sir saw at the time) that has ever been staged and which was the only time to my knowledge that Amateur Players have been asked to take part with Professionals.

To wind up this tribute to an English gentleman of unusual talents and special gifts I remember him as an eccentric man with strong views, a firm and steadfast friend, a misfit in this modern world - how English can you get? His sense of humour which shows in his various writings was never spiteful or cruel. How much our so called comic writers could learn.

Finally I recall a sketch he wrote and performed in where he pretended to be an old man of 100 years who was very deaf being interviewed on his birthday by a young reporter (somewhat precipient as he became extremely deaf towards the end of his life). The closing soliloquy of his old man went -

“A 100 years old, a 100 years old
I’m the oldest old man in these parts
so I’m told
I’ve had a few troubles on the pathway
of life
I’ve had my share of trouble
And my share of strife
But I shall go, and quite ready
When I get my call
For I’ve had love from my loved ones
The best thing of all.”

The last few words sum things up -
loved by family, loved by friends,
loved by pupils and everyone who
came in contact with him

Sir’s views on Old Father Time by the Editor

Around the time I turned 50 years of age and just before Sir reached his 80th birthday he wrote a letter to me with some lines about birthdays and anniversaries which he said he loved dearly. Sir said that these had been sent to him by a friend in Canada.

The words seem particularly appropriate to end this Newsletter - they made a great impact on Sir and he would be delighted if they met with your approval as well.

“Do not count the years, but count the blessings they’ve bestowed
- and the many friends that you have made along the road.
Do not count the birthdays, let them come and let them go.
Time is not an enemy unless you make it so.

Do not count your troubles when you’re looking back today.
Count the joys, anticipating good things on the way.
Make a friend of time and it will bring its best to you:
comfort and contentment, hopes fulfilled and dreams made true.”

Thank you Sir for so many of our happy memories.

“We’ll remember ever more
Your urgent lesson -
.....Excelsior”





A Silver Cross for the Headmaster who liked children's story-papers



One of the greatest joys experienced by English children during the first few decades of this century was the weekly appearance of their favourite story-paper. On that red-letter day everything else would be forgotten as excited youngsters caught up with the latest adventures on the pages of the *Gem*, the *Magnet*, *Schoolgirls' Own*, and numerous other eagerly-awaited publications. Thousands of boys and girls spent a precious part of their pocket money so that they could follow the exploits of characters like Billy Bunter and Betty Barton, and the values of tolerance and fair play that shone from the pages stayed with them throughout their lives.

Nadly, as the world changed and children's entertainment became more sophisticated, one-by-one these charming story-papers fell by the wayside, so that any good quality copies found today would probably be valuable collectors' items. But for all the distance in time that separates papers like the *Magnet* from today's colourful, glossy comics, they have certainly not been forgotten, and one of the people who has been most responsible for keeping their memory alive is Eric Payne of Crookham in Hampshire.

For nearly 30 years from 1959 until the beginning of 1987 Eric Payne was the Editor of the *Story Paper Collectors' Digest*, a non-profit-making journal devoted to the old story-papers and containing interesting articles on all sorts of matters relating to them. Under Eric's dedicated guidance the *Digest* attracted subscribers in every corner of the globe, its pages enlivened by his own introductory columns. "A Word from the Skipper", which struck a sympathetic chord with a great many people. He recognized how the children's story-papers had been an important influence on the lives of countless young people, playing a vital part in setting them off on the right road in life, and through the pages of his magazine he crusaded tirelessly

to keep their ideals of decency and understanding alive, extending the sphere of the journal beyond the bounds of mere book and story-paper collecting. The following passage, which he wrote for the Summer (1979) number, was typical of his deep-rooted concern:

When I was young, people did not live in the past. They used to tell me how lucky I was to be living in what was the present, then. The best is still to come, they used to say, and you will reap the benefit of it. We hadn't the money then; we hadn't a car in a garage; Dad didn't give us a "music centre" then to compensate for Mum being out all day; we didn't have meals laid on at school, or free buses to take us to our seats of learning; we didn't have television in the lounge or a refrigerator in the larder, or a latch-key in our pocket. Yet "You don't know how lucky you are!" the adults would say to us.

And I'm sure we were. Most of us, perhaps, would not change our own childhoods for those of the modern youngsters. I know I wouldn't. In a store in the town near my home I saw this morning T-shirts being sold in a boyswear department. Printed across the front of the shirts were the words "I Hate School". It struck a chill at my heart. What kind of land are we making for the next generation?

Eric's marvellous ability to recall how things were in his own childhood (he was born exactly 80 years ago at Gravesend in Kent) was aided by the habit he acquired at an early age of keeping detailed diaries in which he recorded public and private events. For most of his life he was the headmaster of his own private day-school at Surbiton in Surrey, passing on to the children in his care those same admirable principles that he had found in the story papers and which he was to perpetuate during his editorship days. One of Eric's great interests is English films, and the showing

of these was a regular and extremely popular feature of life at the school.

Eric never married, but after he retired in the late 1950s he continued to be remembered with tremendous warmth and affection by former pupils, many of whom kept in touch with him through visits and correspondence and became like a large family to him. The same can be said of those people who got to know him through the pages of the *Digest*. By his devotion to his subject — hard work which was all done voluntarily, leaving little time for himself — Eric inspired immense loyalty. As interest in the old story-papers revived, more and more people turned to him for his expert knowledge and he was always ready with advice and a helping hand. It was due in no small part to his labours — carried out quietly, a long time before anyone else recognized their true merits — that some of the papers from the Twenties and Thirties have now been reprinted for new generations to enjoy.

It was Mr. Norman Wright of Watford, Hertfordshire, who wrote to *This England* about Eric Payne, suggesting that he would be a worthy winner of our Silver Cross of St. George, adding: "The *Digest* was a bastion of all things English. Under Eric's editorship it became an oasis for those who lamented the passing of so many of the institutions we hold dear. His aims have always been to uphold those traditions that are so special to England."

Story-papers like the *Gem* and *Magnet* were certainly a quintessential part of English life and in recognition of Eric Payne's crusade to keep the memory of them alive, we are pleased to award him a Silver Cross of St. George. He becomes the very latest in a growing list of Silver Cross winners, all of whom are recalled in a special "Roll of Honour" on page 13 of this issue. Well done, Eric Payne! Or as Billy Bunter might have exclaimed: "Good egg!"