

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 22nd 2003

[Excerpts from old school magazines](#) [Ian Dury](#) [Old school photographs](#)
[OW sport](#) [Roger File's post war memories](#) [That'll teach 'em](#)

OW GOLF

On July 16th four pairs of Old Boys played a RGS Staff team at Hazlemere Golf Club. The matches were as follows:

MIKE MOFFATT & ROGER FILE v
MARTIN PRIESTLEY & JOHN
ANDERSON

IAN WILSON & JOAN ALLEN v
DAVID MERRIMAN & ED COLLINS

IAN CLARK & ANDREW PEARSON v
PAUL DOLPHIN & CHARLES LLOYD

STEVE GAMESTER & WILL PHELAN v
MARK FORRESTER & PETER PRICE

This was the first Old Boys against the RGS Staff golf match and we hope that it will become an Annual Event. Unfortunately many of the OWs who had said they could play had

to cry off because of late urgent business or injury, and David Merriman signed on two honorary OW members for the afternoon. The weather forecast was heavy thunderstorms. Luckily apart from a little rain early on the weather was good, the course was empty



and everybody seemed to enjoy himself. The event was based on a handicap system and the Teachers won in all four matches. After a drink or two in the Clubhouse a number of OWs and teachers went to the School Playing Field to enjoy drinks and a barbecue with the OWs who had been playing cricket against the RGS 1st Team. There will be a similar event next year and the date will be published on this website before Christmas. If you do play golf, I would encourage you to consider playing next year.

OW CRICKET

The sixteenth of July saw the third annual ‘old boys’ cricket match, a fixture between an RGS

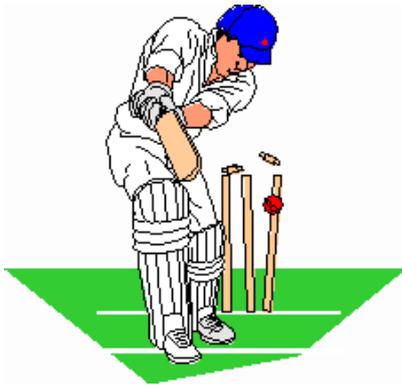
XI and a team of former pupils, for the Duncan Moore Memorial Trophy.

Bobby Dix, captain of the OW Team, writes as follows:

After rain delays, the match was reduced to 35 overs-a-side. The RGS XI won the toss and elected to bat. Former RGS first team captains Matthew Honeyben (4 wickets) and Dan Grant (8 overs for not many), helped to stem the flow of runs, ably supported by the accurate seam bowling of Jason De Gelas (well done son! says Editor's assistant) and the spectacular fielding of Dave Tang. However the RGS XI posted a score of 188-9.

The 'old boys' reply started shakily as they were reduced to 16 for 3 by an excellent spell from one of their opening bowlers. The fall of the third wicket brought Matt Honeyben to the crease to join captain Bobby Dix, the pair quickly brought the score along to 89 before Honeyben fell for 21. The remaining runs were quickly knocked off, as the game was wrapped up in the 29th over for a six-wicket

victory. De Gelas finishing 34 not out and Dix hitting the winning runs for an unbeaten 108. (Ed. This was his first-ever hundred. Well done, Bobby!)



In fairness the RGS XI had been severely weakened by the first team's tour to Barbados and comprised mostly of second team and U15 players, but nevertheless put up a good fight.

Thanks to all the 'old boys' who made the effort to play and special thanks must go to Nick Moore, Duncan's father, who presented the trophy.

DID YOU SEE IT?

Did you watch the Channel 4 programme shown on Tuesday nights in August called "That'll Teach Them"? It showed about 30 students who had just completed their GCSE exams working for the old O Level papers,

and living under the conditions of the 1950s in the Boarding House. If you did watch the programme, you probably recognised parts of the RGS buildings, or thought you recognised them. The lessons were filmed in the Gym Block or as it is called nowadays the Maths Block, the School House, and the Quad. I wonder if those of you were here in the 1950s recognised Andrew Mactavish, who was the Headmaster, and if those of you here in the 1970s recognised Geoff Heath, then Head of Spanish, as the Music Teacher. The security round the buildings was considerable, but one reporter from a newspaper unsuccessfully tried to break in. There was quite a lot of press reaction, and articles about it. For an article by Roger Scruton published in the Daily Telegraph [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#).

One OW has written in to say, "What nostalgia! But I do not remember some aspects being as bad."

What do you think? If you were at the RGS in the 1950s did the programme bring back memories of that period? If you were in the

Boarding House, did it reflect what life was like? Do write in and give your reaction to the programme.

MISCELLANEOUS

(1) A number of OWs have contacted me to ask if I could send them a copy of this year's School Magazine. This I am very happy to do at a cost of £4 if you live in this country and £7 if you live abroad.

(2) If you were at the RGS in the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s, and send me an account of your memories of the RGS for publication in a future newsletter, I will send you a free copy of John Mitchell's book. Two OWs of the 1970s have responded. Four more copies are still to be distributed.

(3) If you would like a tour round the RGS buildings, do contact me and I will be delighted to take you round.

(4) In April John Mitchell, the School Archivist, published a new, pictorial history of the RGS. This shows the story of the RGS in prints and photographs from its foundation in the 16th century to the present day, so complementing the history by Leslie Ashford and Kit Haworth published in 1962. [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#) for further details.

(5) When the magazines are sent out in January to all members on our mailing list, a number are returned because OW has moved and we do not have the correct address. It would be great if we could get into contact again. [Please click here](#) to see a list of "Missing OWs". If your name is here, or you know how we can contact someone else on the list, please email me at ianrclarkuk@yahoo.co.uk. About 30 OWs are now in contact with us again as a result of this list. Please help us.

(6) If you have become more interested in your old school in recent years, and feel that you would like to have more contact with it, you can become a Life Member of the Old Wycombiensians' Club for £30.00. For full detail [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#).

(7) Some OWs have asked for the dates of RGS plays, concerts and rugby matches. For details [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)

MISSING

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Anyone know of Tony Gordon, Philip Webb and Tim Abdulla? They were all boarders in the early 1950s. Iain Johnston, Paul Verhoeft. Jeremy Edwards and Brian Sinnett would like to meet up with them.

Anyone know of Roger Pearson, a boarder in about 1946 whose family came from Streatham? Malcolm Piratin (1942-1948) would like to contact him.

Any information to Ian Clark please (01494 530782) or email ianrclarkuk@yahoo.co.uk

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THE RGS IN THE POST-WAR (WW2)

Roger File has very kindly written his personal memoir of a boy at the RGS in the years 1945-53. He was of course also a teacher at the RGS in the years 1960-1993.

Joining the RGS in 1945 was certainly one of the most significant turning points in my life, which coincided with pivotal events in Twentieth Century history. The final victory of the Second World War had been celebrated only days before I set off in newly purchased maroon cap and blazer across the open fields that undulated between my home in Totteridge and the dominating and elegant neo-Georgian building on the Amersham Road: a vista now blotted out by the 1960's extensions to the School and housing that has spread over every last corner of those open fields.



The ground sloping up from the road to the main entrance was still a mess of abandoned early wartime ‘Dig for Victory’ plots. The level gravelled area at the top was ‘the Parade Ground’ and the preserve of Officers Training Corps, quickly renamed the Junior Training Corps in the new Labour Britain. Car parking was not a consideration: virtually no member of staff had a motorcar or a petrol ration to fuel one. A big feature of the Corps activities on Thursday afternoon and one that must have been dreaded by near neighbours was its large Band, consisting mainly of bugle-fife-and-drum. Many of the mere foot soldiers were still attired in peaked caps and putties and ready for the war before the one just ended.

On the school field a few posts were still in place remaining from the many that early in the war had dotted the entire field to fend off airborne invaders. Another shortly-to-disappear sight was that of some soccer

goalposts, a reluctant dispensation for an Air Training Corps team. Soccer must have been the main winter game in the 1920's although some rugby had been introduced. Mr Tucker, however, a South Walean, an Oxford man, and an admirer of the English Public School Tradition, was in no doubt about the total superiority of the oval ball game. As the wartime staff was largely female, rugby coaches must have been noticeably absent anyway.



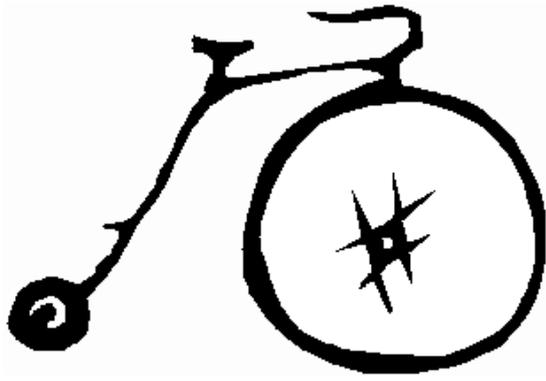
Another curiosity of the period was that the Head insisted that the female staff were addressed as 'Sir', emphasising the transience of the situation before the return of the conquering heroes who would be male, of course. As my form 'Master' was pregnant, this was all the more confusing. She was my first Latin teacher and when she set class work that would last fifteen minutes or more, she would take out her knitting and get on with the

production of baby clothes. By one of life's little ironies, the issue of this pregnancy presented himself as one of my first A level Economics students on my return as a member of staff.

Yet another female 'Master', and in this case a very young one, took our PT (Physical Training!) classes and always ensured that we took our required shower afterwards. Her name (and I am not making this up) was Zoë Body.

I was placed in three lower B. The second form, a fee-paying preparatory class, had just been swept away in the brave new world of free secondary education for all following the 1944 Butler Act. The Upper Third was followed by the Fourth, Fifth and Upper Fifth and ultimately, for the seriously ambitious, the Sixth.

3LB's form room was in the 'New Building' to the side of the cycle-shed that housed many dozens of bikes. Our room was partitioned off from 3LA by a folding wooden screen,



which provided entirely inadequate sound insulation from the adjoining classroom. After establishing that the rumours of new-

bug's bashings were grossly exaggerated, my main fear welled up on Saturday mornings when the most sadistic member of staff took the class on the other side of the partition whilst our teacher for that period was notorious for turning up late. The least noise audible from our side of the partition would lead to our being kept in AFTER Saturday morning school, in itself much the worst feature of my new school, and mercifully abolished the following year.

A new normality steadily established itself as the male staff returned. Fee paying ended; the soccer posts disappeared. A 'Shell' form accommodated the thirteen-years-old entrants, mainly transfers from Secondary Moderns. A new canteen was fabricated to relieve the Hall (now the library) from its lunchtime function

when trestle tables were set up mid-morning, even on the stage – the Staff’s ‘high table’.

The Hall also served as an arena for the annual boxing competition. A proper elevated ring surmounted by arc lights was installed for the final week. The finals for all the weights were held on one afternoon with the whole school as an audience. As a gangly and even weedy youth I was at least blessed with long arms for my age and adopting a cautious style won the ‘Cigarette’ weight at my first attempt.

Subsequent success led to rather greater confidence, less caution and ultimately to a knock-out by an awful brute in a national competition. By such blundering my education progressed. Enthusiasm for rugby football was acquired more slowly and more lastingly. In contrast to soccer for which I was already something of a fan, rugby seemed rather shambolic and impenetrable. I think it was only in my second year that it was made clear to me that tripping up an opponent did not constitute a legitimate tackle. Eventually, after gaining a place in a school team and being

drawn into the school's sporting community and traditions, I was hooked.

I was even more enthusiastic for cricket. To play for school teams on proper squares in 'whites' exercised a very strong appeal. Alas strong appeals were usually ringing out all too soon after my appearance at the wicket and although I played for school teams for my last five years, deriving much pleasure, big innings and elegant strokes remained serious aspirations rather than achievements. Music was a fairly minor provision by current standards but was led by a distinguished musicologist, Bernarr Rainbow, who instituted the first annual productions of Gilbert and Sullivan with all-boy casts, which generated considerable enthusiasm and some lively productions over the next twenty years. Unlike today, beyond a few talented pianists, there were very few even half-competent instrumentalists and the orchestra for the operas and occasional choral work had to be almost entirely imported from known local musicians.



The two double-bass players were Charles Hills, the Senior English Master, and a large and rather morose-looking elderly gentleman who Charles told me played well and with considerable sensibility but hardly ever said a word. Eventually he did venture a comment to him whilst rehearsing a Bach mass. To Charles' shock, he confided, "I 'ates Bach!"

The school uniform throughout my time was the maroon cap and blazer. With the end of clothes rationing exotic variations manifested themselves. Prefects had blazers with yellow piping (on those parts of the garment that most readily attracted dirt!). Those awarded colours for the various sports could wear their specially designed cap – different for each sport. Even the ego-boosting afforded by these distinctive awards did not save cap-wearing from considerable and growing unpopularity as apparently it had a century before for the mortar-board squares as the required headgear. It was only after my return to teach that the

requirement was dropped and even then some older colleagues were convinced that it was the end of civilisation as they knew it. The long-hair styles that soon followed were taken as complete confirmation.

Academically the school quickly regained its post-war feet. The Sixth form of around a hundred was subdivided into upper and lower sections for Science and Arts and a single Classics section. Such was the success in university entrance that a national recognition had occurred, that I must say came as a pleasant shock as I was going through RAF selection processes in the North to discover the Wycombe RGS was so apparently well-known and respected.

Personally, I took my time settling in to academic regimes. At the end of my first year I was placed into the upper Third's 'General form' – 3G. This was a new departure (never I think to be repeated) in which the allocation into the four Second year forms was between 3X (the express form for those judged up to reaching School Certificate success a year

ahead of the rest), 3A for Arts, in effect for extra language options, 3S for the more scientifically promising and 3G, a single, barely disguised sink form. In the less-than-fierce competition it was not too difficult to float quite high although it was not until I had reached the Fourth form that I discovered what a remarkable difference revision could make to exam performance. A good proportion however of our form made it to the Sixth form and on to university, and in one case to Oxford. The teaching was generally efficient, occasionally inspirational,



and most characterful. It was still quite physical. Chalk and board-dusters were sometimes used by masters as projectiles. Ear-clipping had certainly not disappeared from the pedagogic repertoire but even the recipients mostly sensed that these acts were wielded with discretion and restraint and even affection, and therefore seldom resented.

An extraordinary exception to this was occasioned by one peculiarly 'bolshie' lad. He was in fact the son of a Communist M.P. (Two were elected in the 1945 General Election.) He had joined late and was not able to do chemistry but had to sit in the classes where he was supposed to get on quietly with his other work. A situation occurred in one of these classes that led to the class being kept in. Bolshie lad claimed that he was uninvolved and not subject to the sanction. Master was unyielding. Insubordination occurred and the headmaster was alerted and proposed a caning. Bolshie lad not only refused to bend to such iniquity, but fled from the study with the Head in pursuit. The younger legs prevailed out and away into Hamilton Road.

The MP father was called for and duly presented himself to the Head. The old Communist, as much a pragmatist as a Marxist, was more concerned to keep his son in school than to express solidarity with his son's revolutionary tendencies. The terms, so it was rumoured, that he would be allowed

back if he accepted his caning before the whole school. He did return to complete his school certificate year, but no public hanging actually occurred. A more characteristically discrete RGS deal was struck.

Nearly forty years later the miscreant turned up at the School Office declaring himself an old boy and wanting to look a round and I happened to be on hand to escort him and almost certainly the only person left in the establishment who knew of his past exploit. He was by this time a lawyer, a Recorder, and a divorcee so his acquaintance with dispute and conflict had continued beyond his RGS experience.

By the end of my school days in 1953 I was ready to leave even for unwanted conscription into the RAF, but I had over those eight years gained a great deal, and a respect and affection for the place and the people (or at least the vast majority of them). 1953 was a year when it was easy to have an optimistic outlook. The last traces of post-war austerity and gloom were gone. A new young Queen had just been

crowned. Everest was conquered for the first time by a British led team. Stanley Matthews won his first F.A. cup medal and Gordon Richards his first Derby. England were about to regain the Ashes. Even Stalin died. The RGS was in good heart and set to get bigger and better.

When I returned to teach in 1960 this was widely confirmed. The Tucker era culminated with the quater-centenary visit of the Queen and the opening of some very impressive new buildings and facilities. Alas! Ronald Tucker was to die in harness not much more than a year later as the sixties began to present a host of new challenges for secondary education in a less optimistic era.

Editor: If any of you have memories of the RGS that you would like to have published here, please send them to me. Three accounts of life at the RGS in the 1970s will be published in the next edition.

PHOTOGRAPHS

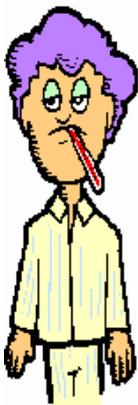
John Haley, who was at the RGS from 1956-1963, has very kindly sent in a collection of photographs taken when he was at the school.

To see the collection, [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#).

If you would like to send any RGS photographs in to be published on this site, it would be much appreciated.

FILE PAST

From the Wycombiensian of 1923:



For the first time for very many years, the School was closed for eight days this term owing to a mild outbreak of scarlet fever. The drastic action of closing the School proved completely effective, and apart from the original case, there were no other cases among the day-boys. The boarders were not so fortunate, and eight cases in all were removed to the Isolation Hospital at Booker.

Mr CW Raffety has added to his many generous gifts to the School by establishing a

fund for an essay competition, with a view to encouraging the qualities of citizenship in the rising generation. He has invested a sum of money, to be administered by the Head Master of the Royal Grammar School and the Head Mistress of the County High School for Girls, as joint trustees, the interest from which is to provide a prize to be competed for, in alternate years, by the boys or girls of the two Schools. The prize is to be awarded 'to the boy or girl who writes the best essay on some subject connected with the past history or future development of High Wycombe and the district thereof.' The Fund is to be known as the Raffety Prize Fund. We wish to express our gratitude to Mr Raffety for his further proof of his interest in the cause of education in his native town.

From the Wycombiensian of 1945:

SUPREME COURT IN THE LIBRARY
An Old-Time Prefects' Meeting. Once the tables have been re-arranged on a Friday afternoon, and the home of the sixth form has been transformed from playroom to

courtroom, an air of dignity permeates the place. Books are picked up from odd comers where they have been thrown and are stacked on to the nearest shelf. Caps and football shirts are hauled down from cornices and lampshades and are hastily hidden. Facetious notices are removed from bookcase ends; and all windows are carefully closed at the bottom. Prefects break off games of twopenny-ha'penny football, check themselves at the height of some intriguing conversation, quickly swallow the remains of half a dozen buns, or tear themselves away with the greatest reluctance from some absorbing problem of the higher mathematics. Duty calls. Justice, not blindfold, and with curly black hair, carrying not scales, but a sceptre of cane, commands: 'All non-prefects outside! Buck up and take your seats, gentlemen!' and the prefects, instantly magistrates with faces full of frozen gravity, cram into the chairs around the three-sided square. Someone says, 'I hope we've got a lot of victims!' and the spectacle of impartiality is complete. Hats off, strangers! The court of Prefects is in session.

From the Wycombiensian of 1962: One is never quite certain how to consider the School's ever-growing numbers, which are bringing with them a few minor problems. In a large community some effort must be made to preserve a kind of spirit, otherwise the members will slide into apathy. A system which works well in the traditional Public Schools is regarded with apathy here: increasing the number of Houses three years ago has solved no problem, because any temporary gain has been swept away by the 13 increase in the School's numbers. The Houses are too large for there to be any House 'feeling' here, and nothing is done to encourage it. House meetings are so infrequent as to be considered a curiosity, and the inclusion of certain events in the House Championship make it farcical, for instance Chess, Badminton, Fives and Shooting: two of these are cliques (and almost impenetrable ones at that), one is little played as a regular School game, and Chess can hardly be thought of as a sport.

Ed. The House system was abolished in the early seventies. All competitions have been arranged since then on an inter-form basis.



*Cricket
1956 team
– do you
recognise
any of
these fine
fellows?*

*All names
to Ian
Clark at
usual
address
please.*

IAN DURY

What did Ian Dury think of the RGS?

Here are a few quotations from his book.

"Couldn't say I was happy there. I was the most miserable I ever was in the five years there. I didn't fit in there and I would not have fitted in there, if I had not had polio, I'd like to

think. God forbid. I might have been a bank manager."

"When I went to Grammar School I became a right little c***. They used to call me Spastic Joe, so I had to get up a whole defence mechanism against that. It got to my head. I was an odd case. I was just an outlaw and it was like that until I was 17."

" I was aware of my positioning in the society of the Royal Grammar School. I entered the RGS as a chubby little mascot. That did feel like a weird environment, and it was. I still think so."

His friend said, "We would break into the Signals' hut of the Combined Cadet Force, and listen to Voice of America Jazz Hour on the radio receiver."

If you wish to read about more about Ian Dury's time at the RGS, and his life generally, you can read it in "The life of Ian Dury" by Richard Balls

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Ian

After leaving University, I started work in the music Industry as an Agent. One of the first acts I represented was Ian Dury and the Blockheads, looking after all his live concert work from 1981 to 1991, when he stopped working.

We became close friends and we often discussed old times at the school over a few beers! He had fond memories of the place.

Did you also know that one of the members of the 1980's pop band Matt Bianco attended the school?

Steven Todd (1972-79)

Dear Ian

I have only just caught up with the last issue (June) of the magazine on the website, and have obviously neglected to call up several earlier issues. Never mind: my nephew Danny White can no doubt fill me in.

John Fellows, a year junior to me at RGS, misremembers Mr Rainbow's forename: it was Bernarr. John's recollections of G&S operettas resonate in my memory, and very enjoyable they were for the performers if not the audiences. I took part in a couple of them, but only in the back row of the chorus.

A contemporary was asking about Charles Peter Keeling. He went to Jesus College Cambridge a couple of years after me; the college recently published a *Who's Who*, but sad to relate, his entry says that he died on 15th February 1993.

Paul Kirwan (1945-1953)

Dear Ian,

Are any of "Moan's Motion Movies" still in existence? These were cine films taken by Mr (Lt. Col.) Pattinson of CCF activities and occasionally shown at camps etc. There was also a group of senior people within the CCF who acted as the enemy on exercises and were known as " Moan's marauders". Some others

may well remember the group or have been one of the marauders.

John Haley (1959-1966)

Dear Ian,

Saw my name as 'wanted' so to update you on my details. (Ed. I have put these in the Old Boys' details Section of the website)

I have fond memories of my time at RGS – particularly after seeing channel 4's series – it is the RGS isn't it?

Good to see Mr Mike Earl is still there – on many occasions he used to give me a lift up the Amersham Hill in his (Austin?) 1100 – we were the cream of the science sixth form!!!! – does he still support Oxford FC? (Ed. Yes!)

Also fond memories of the lower years – especially Mrs Wilson, Mr Chuter, whom everybody respected – he could aim a board rubber with pinpoint accuracy!! And Jez Lingard who played his electric organ in the hall and everyone respected him for that.

On my first day ever at the RGS I remember the maths teacher – nicknamed – Bulldog (can't remember his surname) – pull a poor boy onto the stage during assembly for having long hair!!! – only to be punished later by either Malcolm Smith or Sam Morgan (more scary!!).

It was a tough era but everybody learnt respect and I'm sure everybody's memories were fond of the RGS.

Also memories which probably ought to remain secret of the Headmaster's visit to 5Y (in a 'terrapin' classroom next to the fives courts).....and the discussion with the class about what we used to call 'bundles'if other pupils see this they will instantly recognise his comments. "well, how did these screws fall out of this desk.....listen boy – I know a lot about screwing – I do a lot of screwing at home.....!!" This is the honest truth but maybe is best kept within the archives!!

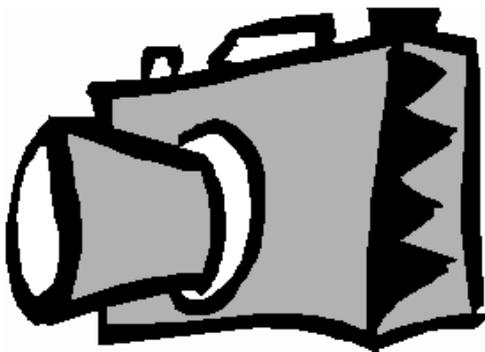
Regards

Peter Robinson (1968-75)

OLD SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHS

There have been requests for old school photographs. We would not know the

addresses of the photographers who took the photographs and no doubt some may have gone out of business by now. However we do have copies of photographs for a few of the years and if you did want to buy a copy, please let me know. The cost would be £11 + postage. The years that we have are:



Whole School 1920, 1923, 1926, 1935, 1957.

Senior School 1962, 1985, 2001

Junior School 1964, 1967, 1985, 2000.

6th Form 1996, 1967, 1999, 2000,

Upper Sixth 2001

Prefects 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001

INTERNATIONAL S



At the RGS
nowadays Swan
Colours are awarded

to those boys who have represented their country at National or International Level. It is

interesting to see the variety of talents for which the boys were awarded their Swan Colours: 2 members of the National Youth wind Orchestra: a member of the National Youth Choir: leading competitor nationally in MG Championships: winner of the Gold Medal in the double sculls over 2000m: National Junior Javelin champion and an England A XV rugby player: member of the Junior Men's Kayaking team. For full details [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#).

When you were at school were there any kayakers, or any who performed at the highest level in an unusual sport? Please let me know. Also if you have not given me the names of any OW who represented his country in any sport, please do so as soon as possible, as the school is going to put up an Honours Board for such achievements.

THE DATE OF THE NEXT ANNUAL DINNER OF THE OW CLUB IS SATURDAY APRIL 24th. THE GUEST OF HONOUR IS MIKE MOFFATT, WHO WAS DEPUTY-HEAD OF THE RGS FROM 1973-1996. BOOK THE DATE NOW AND CONTACT YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT IT!

THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL APPEAR ON NOVEMBER 10th and will among other things contain the memoirs of two OWs of the 1970s, and tributes to three RGS teachers who left in July. **Please continue to send in your letters, or memories.**

