



## Mark Alexander Wynter-Blyth

August 16, 1906 - April 16, 1963

Principal of the Rajkumar College, Rajkot - 1948-1963



MARK ALEXANDER  
WYNTER-BLYTH  
M.A. (CANTAB.) F.R.E.S.  
BORN AUGUST 16<sup>TH</sup> 1906  
DIED APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup> 1963

PRINCIPAL OF THE  
RAJKUMAR COLLEGE  
RAJKOT, INDIA.  
1948 - 1963.

ERECTED BY THE BOYS AND  
STAFF IN RECOGNITION OF  
HIS DEVOTION TO THE  
COLLEGE.



Entrance to Leysin village

At the dawn of Indian Independence and a crucial phase in RKC's seventy-seventh year, amidst the political turmoil and uncertainties of those times, the late His Highness Jam Shri Digvijaysinhji of Nawanagar appointed Mr. M.A. Wynter Blyth as RKC's ninth Principal. The late Jam Saheb's choice was a

fortuitous one and a formidable challenge for the young Principal.

An apparently solemn man of few words, he proved to be the need of the hour. With strong support from the late Jam Saheb, who was Chairman of the College's Governing Council, and with his indomitable will, Mr. Wynter Blyth set about the stern agenda he had drafted for himself. He was fearless. He had to be. "No!" was a word he had often to use. He said he was "Paid to use it".

With enrollment of merely sixty Kumars, finances were at their lowest and MAWB had to set his priorities. He did what was best. He invested in staff with potential to excel in a Public School. One of these was destined sixteen years on to be his worthy successor, the one and only charismatic, Peter Rogerson and the other equally worthy, Miss R. F. Cooper, who took over the baton in 1991.

Seemingly unsocial, Mr. Wynter Blyth was an incisive judge of character and during the course of his tenure he assembled a team that worked its wonders for the College for decades, long after he himself had passed away.

As planned, investment in good staff paid its dividends and confidence in the administration and the School's programme rose. The financial position improved and sanctions were given more readily to innovative proposals. One such from Peter Rogerson, then Housemaster, Seniors, was the programming of a Searchlight Tattoo, which received prompt and strong support from Mr. Wynter Blyth, which had a far reaching impact. First of its kind in the country, the Tattoo's immediate success gave rapid impetus to evolve into the non-stop, three-hour pageant it is today.

Studies were naturally given the highest priority and examination results improved considerably. As confidence in the school and demand for admissions grew and the financial condition improved, Mr. Wynter Blyth set about providing much needed infrastructure in the form of new buildings and various other needs. Some of these were the Atlee Block (1956) as well as new and well-equipped science laboratories, a hospital to provide proper medical care (1955), better quarters for staff including two bungalows for the Vice Principal and the Headmaster, expansion of the Mess, and renovation of old buildings and classrooms.

In due course he turned his attention to sport - mental and physical development going hand in hand in traditional Public school style - and, of course, it was cricket that received his best. He was





Mr. Wynter Blyth with Maharaja Jam Saheb

“Colin” after Colin Cowdrey to those closest to him. RKC was already holy ground where cricket was concerned - the great “Ranji” had made it so. Not long before “Colin” Wynter Blyth passed away he fulfilled his wish of building a pavilion in memory of one he held in highest esteem, veteran cricketer, Duleepsinhji. The Duleep Pavilion was opened in 1962. In 1991, it was on its steps, tragically, that Peter Rogerson breathed his last whilst addressing the Final Year boys and RKC staff.

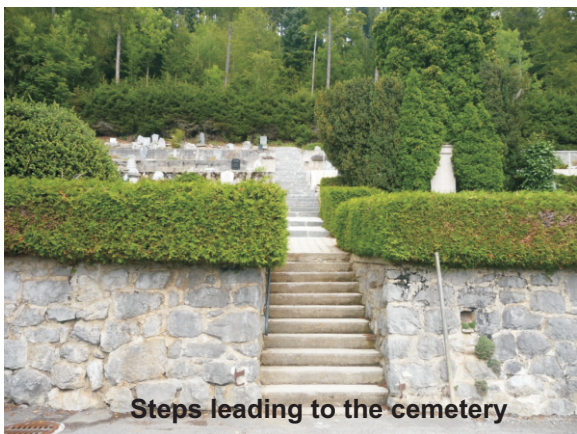
It was, however, as a naturalist, a great naturalist, that Mr. Wynter Blyth will forever be remembered by RKC and professionals in the field. He valued his award as Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society as much as his degree from Cambridge - if not MORE - and it was his pursuits as a naturalist that brought him tremendous satisfaction. He excelled at research and within a record period completed the only volume of its kind, “Butterflies of the Indian Region”, The Bombay Natural History Society published it and its demand was great enough for a reprint long after his death.

Along with Old Kumar naturalist, MKS Dharmakumarsinhji (Bapa) of Bhavnagar, and naturalists among the staff KS Lavkumar of Jasdan and Mr. Wynter Blyth conducted the first ever census of the lions of the Gir Forest - the only habitat of the Asiatic lion. The technique they used was to measure pug-marks. It was painstaking and required the censurers to camp in the forest for days but it brought an accurate count.

Not only did Mr. Wynter Blyth know the Gir area well, he made a study of the Saurashtra region. RKC published his, “Essay on the Geography of Saurashtra”. There is none other of its kind.

Located in the proximity of the Indus Valley system, Mr. Wynter Blyth gave serious attention to the Indus Valley Civilisation, travelling to Lahore, visiting Harappa and other sites and whilst doing so forging a link with Aitchison College, the youngest of the five Chief’s Colleges. A draft was being prepared for a volume on the Indus Valley Civilisation, but, sadly, Mr. Wynter Blyth passed away before it could be completed.

His thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. Old boys and some staff will remember weekend or Sunday morning visits to various parts of the countryside in search of information. They would set off with an old car packed full of boys and staff and Julie, his miniature Spaniel and life-long companion, Pratap, the School driver and the standard



Steps leading to the cemetery

breakfast of "parathas", boiled eggs, potatoes and tomatoes, A wonderful time was had by all. Savouring the hospitality of wayside farmers and sharing the cups of tea they offered with the local gossip, it was at times such as these that the boys and staff witnessed another facet to Mr. Wynter Blyth's personality, when he felt it was "safe" to shed his customary stern dignity.

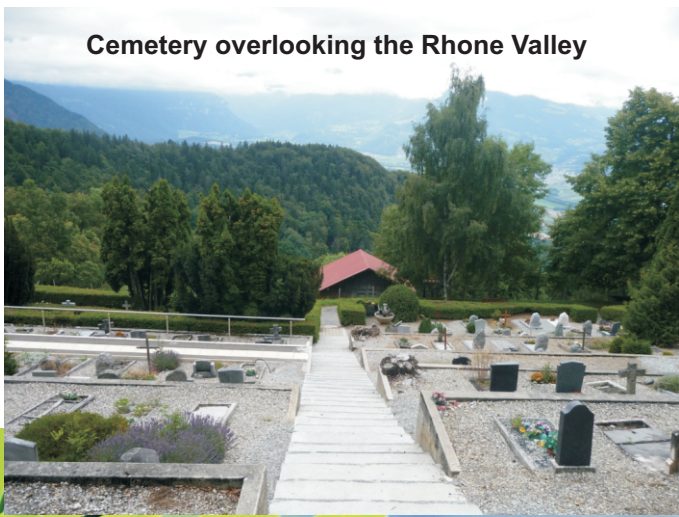
In fact, Mark Alexander Wynter Blyth was compassionate, generous to a fault and kind, as many of the past experienced, but he also had the strength to be unyielding and curt when the interests of the College were at stake. It was this attribute that helped the College to tide over from the dire straits it was in 1947, stabilizing it and setting it firmly on a course to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of its worthy Founders.

Mark Alexander Wynter Blyth lies at rest on an incline in the British Cemetery, an hour's walk from the tiny village of Leysin in the Swiss Alps. He loved the Rajkumar College, had quietly worn himself out in its service and gently slipped away of a cardiac arrest on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1963 whilst on leave with his family. The familiar figure in khaki slacks and blue shirt with a pipe in his mouth and Julie at his heels was never to be seen again, The memorable Wynter Blyth era had passed, leaving the Rajkumar College enriched and poised to celebrate its century old achievements with yet another great Principal at the helm.

I consider it very fortunate that I started my career with Wynter Blyth as my direct superior. Actually, I had known him before I joined the staff of the College. It was while I was at University that he had written to me inviting me to join him on a summer trek from Shimla to Sangla in the Baspa Valley of Kinnaur. How he came to know of me I do not know, but I readily agreed. Unfortunately, I came down with a very bad bout of 'flu' just before I was to join him at Rajkot and travel onto Shimla. Later I read his delightful account of the trek in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. The following year I did the same trek with a group from my college. In 1954, after appearing in my graduation, I had the very good fortune in being invited to accompany another great school master, Gurdial Singh on an extended trek through the Gharwal Himalaya and on into Tibet to Mt. Kailas and Man Sarovar. On my return from this adventure, my former teacher and the then Headmaster of RKC asked me to join as his assistant to teach Biology. It was all quite casual therefore, I was surprised to get a call from Wynter Blyth asking that I come onto the staff at the commencement of the 1956 academic year.

Earlier, I had met him holidaying in the Gir along with two senior boys ("to push this jalopy of a car should the battery run out!" was what he confided to me). When I received my teaching assignment, I found I was to teach Geography along with Biology; it was rather flattering, if a trifle intimidating to be underscoring the two top men in the establishment. Normally, fresh

## Cemetery overlooking the Rhone Valley



masters are given lower classes to teach, but my very first period was a Geography lesson with the senior-most boys. Frankly, it was the most difficult assignment possible since I used to be nervous addressing groups let alone the meanest boys that can make or mar the reputation of any aspiring young teacher. The two car pushers of the Gir were there and they were the big honchos in the school. The class went ahead like a dream! I am not sure much Geography was taught, I do recall a lot of discussion took place about lions and wildlife in general. Later, Wynter Blyth told me he had off loaded this particularly "backward" lot to ease his teaching load. This remarkable man's character is best understood by narrating such anecdotes.

It was in October of my first term as a master, one particularly hot afternoon, the "puttawala" respectfully told me that "Mota Saheb" was "remembering" me. In his forthright way, he informed me that at the start of the second term I would be taking over as House Master of the Junior Wing. "You will be designated as my assistant to overcome any objections that an inexperienced new comer is given this prestigious position". Over the years, I was to realize that this was the direct way he did things. There never were any justifications, he was the Boss and that was that. I had started to enjoy teaching and so when my duties as a House Master interfered with my assignments, I complained to him that I was finding teaching and running a residential section a trifle difficult. His response was typical of him "Your responsibilities as a House Master are more important". In the same vein, at the end of the second term I had been expecting a formal appointment letter failing which I had been toying with the possibility of leaving. When I broached the subject he looked up at me with a twinkle in his eyes "Is there anything permanent on this Earth?" And that was that. It is through such anecdotes that the man's unique qualities as a Principal will be gauged; a forthrightly direct man of authority who made administration effective without being oppressive. He never interfered or appeared to be supervising his subordinates. We all were aware that he enjoyed the fullest freedom from the President of the school and in turn, he extended that freedom to those who worked for him and yet the slightest negligence would draw immediate reprimand, even summary dismissal.

He had gone on a long furlough and on his return he found that there had been a fall in academic standards. He called the entire teaching staff of the senior school and as everyone stood before him like school boys on the mat he quietly suggested things improve otherwise the school would have to be closed. At another time, when one of us House Masters wanted greater freedom for the boys to "enjoy" themselves, his response was a terse "They are not here to enjoy themselves; we give them long enough holidays to do that".

I think it was in my fourth year that we started school under the anxiety of a drought. There had been no rains well into July. Suddenly during morning school, the rains came with a thunderous crash. The attendance register was making its round. When it was brought to my class, I signed it and then placed a note for him suggesting that we cancel school to



Bharat Avalani at the Cemetery



celebrate the arrival of the rains. Shortly, I heard distant cheers and I knew my suggestion had been accepted. When the "Pattawala" brought the Principal's book to sign, I read "There will be no classes after break". I signed the book and continued teaching to make the announcement only as the class bell rang.

Parents would often try going over House Masters' heads and get permission to take their wards out. Invariably, they found to their chagrin that he had approved of the leave "provided the House Master permits." Needless to say, I never failed to assert my authority to deny the permission. As the word went round, fewer and fewer parents bypassed me. I can do no better than cite a very personal experience to show how he strengthened the discipline of the school. The late Dr. Salim Ali had written to me to take leave and join him in the very first bird banding camp being organized by the Bombay Natural History Society in Kutch. Till then, I had never taken a single days leave and so I wrote to him requesting a week's 'leave without pay. Very promptly, the application was returned open and with a large scribble for everyone who cared to read, "LEAVE NOT PERMISSIBLE!"

My immediate response was to send in my resignation along with a month's salary in lieu of notice, but inside, in smaller, carefully scripted letters was a message "You will attend, representing the school".

M. A. Wynter Blyth was a man of discipline who made discipline the hallmark of the school he headed. He drew his lessons from Nature for he was an outstanding naturalist in his own rights. India owes him the seminal work ' BUTTERFLIES OF THE INDIAN REGION', and the methodology for censusing lions in the Gir Forest. It was my very great good fortune to have participated in the very first two censuses and for having started my career with him as my Boss.

**KS Lavkumar Khachar, Jasdan**

