

HAD WE BUT KEPT A VISITORS' BOOK!.....

A reflection, by former Second Master, Bob Williams, on the occasion of the school's 60th birthday, now with minor updates for its significant 75th anniversary. Bob looks back on an interesting assortment of celebrity footprints that have been identified over the years.

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I was only thinking the other day, how interesting it would have been had we established a tradition of keeping a **Brandeston Hall Visitors' Book** over the years. With hindsight, this was perhaps a sin of omission, as that list makes very interesting reading.

Even in the years before this elegant old building became a school it must have had its fair share of fascinating folk – famous and infamous, who made their way down the Front Drive here.

If you have actually had occasion to read *Norman Porter's 'A History of Brandeston Hall'* you will have come across mention that, immediately prior to the outbreak of the 2nd World War, an eminent German, who it seems had changed his name to **Leonard** had taken a rental tenancy on the Hall – and reputedly entertained to dinner, and some pheasant shooting here on the Estate, **Joachim von Ribbentrop, Nazi Germany's Foreign Minister** throughout the War Years.

It seems he was something of an Anglophile and, had Germany won the War, he had every intention of acquiring St. Michael's Mount, in Cornwall, as his personal stately home! As we know the 'cookie' did not crumble quite in his favour – and he was the first of the Nazi hierarchy to be found guilty, and hanged, at Nuremburg.

However, the moment Hitler's tanks rolled into Poland, in September 1939, Herr Leonard disappeared into thin air, thus narrowly avoiding being detained for being the spy that he undoubtedly was! Not quite 'Queen Elizabeth slept here' story - but a close second!

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A rich vein of **musical talent** has entered the portals of the school over the years, much of it in the context of our long association with the IAPS Orchestral Courses, where the cream of the nation's prep school musical talent was in residence, each July from 1972, for some twenty years. Over nearly two decades, myself, together with a number of colleagues, undertook pastoral care responsibilities, over the first week of the summer holiday. **Benjamin Britten** (together with **Peter Pears**) had first visited The Hall in the August of 1951, and gave a memorable concert of English Songs, as part of a highly successful International Summer School for amateur musicians. He returned, in July 1973, as **Lord Britten**, to cast his eye over the sectional rehearsals of the fledgling Symphony Orchestra, and took sherry with us on the Terrace... Very civilized!

In complete contrast, at a similar point in time we were much intrigued to see, among our visitors at a BH summer Team Tea on the Terrace, a couple attired in what might now be described as unisex, sheepskin body warmers and tight black leathers (certainly rather 'outré' for the Suffolk of the early 70s!).... They

were, in fact, Orwell Park parents!, **Bill Wyman**, of the *'Rolling Stones'* and his good lady. (His son was opening bowler for the Orwell Colts team that afternoon, for which I was standing as umpire). I well remember Richard Broad, the then Head and a stickler for Dress Code, whispering in my ear – “Who on earth are those two; should they really be here?”. Bill, who actually split from the *'Stones'* in 1993, is apparently a cricket fanatic and, well into his 70s, was still playing for the show biz, fundraising Bunbury XI! Sadly, much to the disappointment of all the BH pupils, no musical demonstration was forthcoming, on the occasion of his Brandeston visit!

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Comfortably bridging the considerable divide between Messrs **Britten and Wyman** was a young **Nigel Kennedy**, still, of course, pursuing his twin interests of Jazz and Classical. Kennedy spent some days with us on a later IAPS course, on arrival announcing that he required a room with a double bed, as he had brought his girl friend with him. I suspect that we failed to oblige! Nevertheless, his week's stay culminated with his giving a stunning performance of the Elgar Violin Concerto at Snape Maltings, as the guest soloist with the Symphony Orchestra. A string breaking, mid-piece, on his priceless 'Strad' fazed him not a jot!

Others, within the musical pantheon, to visit us here at the Hall, in connection with IAPS Orchestral Courses, were the late **Sir Colin Davis** and that great pianist **Alfred Brendel** (both parents of young and talented musicians on the Course) and **Imogen Holst** (daughter of Gustav), who wrote a specially commissioned piece for the Symphony Orchestra. **Jimmy Blades**, the charismatic percussionist and a wonderful coach of young musicians was another fascinating character (*....and responsible for the sound of the gong featured at the start of all those J. Arthur Rank films*), who regaled us, over dinner with wonderful stories of his professional career – including a war-time performance in front of George VI & Queen Elizabeth, at Windsor Castle, in the middle of an air raid!

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Two Suffolk **artists** held in high regard, who were moved to make fine paintings of the Hall, were **Leonard Squirrell** (*about whom Tony Martin O.F., is always happy to bend your ear!*) and **John Western**, with a studio in a restored Suffolk barn, in nearby Monewden. John completed a number over the years (including the large water colour that the school purchased - (until recently. hanging in the Entrance Hall, to the left of the front door.)

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Other names lodged in our Visitors' Book would have included, from **the world of sport** - **John H. Stracey** (World Welterweight Champion 1975-76) who was here to endorse an Olympic GB Team fundraising event, - **David Sheepshanks** (the then Chair of ITFC) - and **John Wark** also of Ipswich Town & Liverpool F.C. (PFA Player of the Year 1981 - and one of the genuine footballing talents who starred in the 1981 film, *Escape to Victory*) - and a couple who, in the early years of this century, offered their presence as Directors of Coaching for the BH Autumn Academies: Former England Rugby icon, **Roger Uttley**, in 2008; - **Barry Middleton**, in 2007 (Over 100 England Hockey caps and, following his recent tally in Beijing, a GB total approaching 70) - and, back in 1991, a coaching clinic with **Sean Kerly** (A

hat-full of G.B. hockey medals and, of course, gold in Seoul in 1988 - a match still remembered for its 'Where are the Germans? Frankly, who cares!' commentary clip).

Among our sporting O.Fs, of course, **Norman Porter**, author of the above-mentioned publication, and collective meander down memory lane, 'A History of Brandeston Hall', reflecting in depth on the first sixty years of the school's history, must also feature here. Not only was he, for many years, an outstanding Hon. Secretary to the Society of Old Framlinghamians but also represented Scotland, on twelve occasions, in Hockey.

The incredibly tall **John Larter**, who first demonstrated his cricketing skills on the greensward of the Brandeston Estate and went on to play for Northants and the England Test teams of that era (*His Caps & memorabilia were recently donated to the College – a fine gesture*).

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Among **our former parents, representative of the sporting world** was **Norman Borrett**, long serving Senior Master at the College and himself an O.F. and a CV that included captaining the GB Hockey Team, eventual Silver Medallists at the 1948 London Olympic Games. (A neat alignment of the stars here, in that the current incumbent of that important post is **Susan Wessels-Webber** – who, rather more recently has worn the badge of the National South African Hockey Team).

– **Christine Truman-Janes**, (winner, at aged 18, of the French Open Singles title at Roland Garros in 1959, when ranked World No.2; winner of the Australian Ladies Doubles, with Maria Bueno in 1960, and, of course, the 1961 losing finalist at Wimbledon – and her critical analysis is still very much valued, come Wimbledon fortnight).

- **Andrew Hancock**, himself an O.F., (For those old enough to remember, scorer of 'that' try, at Twickenham in the Calcutta Cup of 1965, to salvage a draw v. Scotland); he had two super lads at the school.

- As did **Kevin Horlock** (Man.City, West Ham and ITFC) and, perhaps, rather less successfully, in purely 'managerial terms' was the sometime man at the helm at Portman Road, **Roy Keane!**, although his two boys were, themselves, enormously good value during their time here at Brandeston Hall.

And from **the world of stage and TV drama**, **Neil Innes** the writer, comedian and musician, had a son, Barnaby, at BH for a while. Innes had first come to prominence in the pioneering comedy rock group 'Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band' and later became a frequent collaborator with the Monty Python troupe on their BBC television series and films, and was often called the "seventh Python". Among his many credits, Innes made a solo series in 1979 on BBC television, 'The Innes Book of Records', which ran for three series. He also wrote and voiced the 1980s ITV children's cartoon adventures of 'The Raggy Dolls'.

– the late lamented **Simon Cadell** and **Caroline Quentin** also felt that what Brandeston had to offer was just right for their off-spring.

Eminent former pupils of the College, **on official duties** here at the Hall, have, of course, included the late **General Sir Patrick Howard-Dobson, GCB** (a greatly respected former Head of School at Framlingham, Chair of Governors, SOF President, BH parent/grand-parent. A stellar army career, including war service in Egypt, Burma and Italy led to various pivotal post-war postings, serving also in retirement, as National President of the RBL). Back in the late '70s, when Speech Days were, briefly, an alfresco affair, held on the Terrace/Meadow, it was perhaps Sir Pat's arrival, as Chief Guest, by helicopter, in full military regalia as Her Majesty's Quartermaster General, that must rate as *the* real coup!

John Kerr (governor and also former Chair of ITFC), and **John Thurlow O.F.**, (High Sherriff of Suffolk in 2003). And the late **Lords Stradbroke, Tollemache and Belstead** were frequent visitors here in their official capacity on the Governing Body or Members of the Corporation.

Jonathan Adnams, a former pupil at BH, (MD of the Adnams Southwold Award-winning Brewery for last 21 years) was awarded an OBE for Commitment to Social Responsibility – in part acknowledging the green credentials of the company he has served for 43 years, and in recognition of his long years of service with the RNLi Southwold lifeboat crew.

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Those who came to earn a crust, or give generously of their time, gratis, have included **Freddie Grisewood**, who, in 1954 talked to the school on the theme '*Behind the Scenes at the BBC*' (How juicy would that be today!), **David Kossoff**, **Kevin Crossley-Holland**, **Gervase Phinn** and **Bruce Pearson** (Old Brandestonian, film-maker, author, conservationist and former President of Society of Wildlife Artists) who never failed to enthuse our pupils with stories of his exploits in remote and pretty hostile corners of the planet.

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From **the current world of the media and music**, we are proud to have played some small part in ensuring a rounded Framlingham education that has enabled **Dr David Bull**, **Lucy Verasamy**, **Charlie Simpson**, **Edward Sheeran**, all former tutees of mine, and **Laura Wright**, to make their considerable mark on the world.

Lucy, as the current Senior Anchor in the ITV Weather Room and **David** (now based in L.A. but with weekly stints on C.5's *The Wright Show* *) are both regulars on the small screen. **Charlie** originally made his mark with Boy Band '*Busted*' - now re-formed and, as is the custom with successful and gently ageing Pop Groups, feeling the need to top up the old bank balance, currently engaged on a UK Tour, to be followed by a series of concerts in Europe & Japan.

(* A 2023 update: **David**, while still maintaining a home within the village of Brandeston, is currently one of the hard working 'anchors' now presenting on the TalkTV Channel. He served as an MEP, for North-West England from 2019-2020 but is now Co-Deputy Leader of the Reform UK party). Mezzo-soprano, **Laura**, the 2005 BBC Young Chorister of the Year, and enormously successful with the popular 'All Angels' group, before carving out a successful solo career has, over the years also been widely used by

the FA, RFU, NFL, RFL, among others, to launch key sporting events. She is also, these days, a regular presenter on Sunday's BBC 'Songs of Praise'. In an increasingly busy life, she has been extraordinarily generous with her time regarding the College. One of her numerous contributions to Framlingham events, was to sing for us, here in the Rowley Hall, in 2010, the last occasion, I believe, that the SOF Annual Dinner was held at BH.')

Charlie was, perennially, my *bête noir* in that he was ALWAYS late for Geography lessons, having extended his personal Morning Break with those few extra few minutes, on the drums, in the Music Room! (Retrospectively, in career terms, probably a wise decision!)

Ed needs no introduction, once again sitting firmly atop the charts (and a new, 3rd album just released and going viral) – and, most importantly, successfully bringing that '*Castle on the Hill*', in Framlingham, to the wider world! Typically, he has, on occasions, found time to pop in, to Brandeston Hall, 'pour encourager' those with similar dreams...

Terry Hunt, with 21 years in the hot seat, established an enviable reputation in the Provincial Press world, as Editor of the East Anglian Daily Times... (Quote: '*It's been a huge privilege to do this job. I'm a Suffolk boy, and to be the editor of the newspaper which serves my home county, and the places I care about most, has been a great honour*'). His achievement was duly recognised, in 2011, when he was made an Honorary Fellow of the University of Suffolk and in 2018, when he was invited to address alumni, and assembled guests, over tea, at the gathering, to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Opening of Brandeston Hall as the College Junior School. In retirement, and under the nom de plume '*Northstander*', Terry is still reporting for the EADT, on the highs and lows of Ipswich Town Football Club. Happily, currently in late 2023, there is a marked emphasis on the former - and long may this last! Honorary mention should also go to his fellow O.F., **Paul Geater**, a still extant long server on the EADT, who gave BH fulsome coverage within its pages, both in a feature setting the scene for the 75th celebrations and in his subsequent reporting, on the Monday after the event.

The BBC Look East Newsroom has particularly strong ties with the school. **Stuart White** (Longest serving News Presenter, in the UK) is a former very supportive parent here..... while another well known 'Look East' face, **Jenny Kirk**, in a lightning raid, took a fancy to our Director of Sport which duly culminated in the 2010 wedding of the year, here at Brandeston Hall, when she tied the knot with the extremely handsome Carlos Reynell, Hon.O.F!

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Among other visiting luminaries who have passed through and made a particular impact on **Speech Days**, on young and not so young alike, were **Major General Jack Dye**, long serving Governor and devotee of Brandeston Hall, in July 1992, giving us some inkling, in that self-effacing manner of his, of the hell and heroism that was D-Day in which he played a pivotal role with the Royal Norfolk Regiment and then, in later years, being appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Anglians.

As I recall it would have been in 2000 that **Gyles Brandreth** (former Member of Parliament, broadcaster, raconteur, author (biographer of the late Duke of Edinburgh) and godfather of Patrick Cadell, Head of School that same year) took the place by storm with a rousing address, to the school, long remembered!

A useful prompt from Nigel Johnson reminds me that, preceding 2000, and during his period of tenure as Master, we also entertained a number of other 'notable achievers' as Chief Guests at Speech Day, namely - **Baroness Brenda Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde** (General Secretary of SOGAT 1985-91, and Privy Councillor); warmly remembered in that, subsequent to her visit, Year 8 were invited for a private visit, and had a great day out, at the Palace of Westminster. Also gracing the stage at our Annual Prize Giving have been **David Croft** (the 2003 recipient of the British Comedy Lifetime Achievement Award, co-writer of nine series of 'Dad's Army', also 'Are You Being Served', 'Hi-de-Hi', and 'Allo, 'Allo'), **Admiral Alan West**, subsequently elevated to become The Rt. Hon. Baron West of Spithead (1st Sea Lord, Chief of Naval Staff and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office and Security Adviser to P.M, Gordon Brown). Finally, it was a delight to welcome 'local boy', born in the village, **Sir Gillian Prance** (at the time, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew).

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Finally, pride of place in our imagined volume of important signatures would of course, go to our fondly remembered 'School Visitor', **Her Royal Highness Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone**, and also the worthy Duke; her presence linked to the historic Official Opening of Brandeston Hall, as the College's Junior School, on July 2nd, 1949.

The pivotal moment of the afternoon was the unveiling of the commemorative tablet over the front porch ...**(STILL THERE FOR ALL TO SEE)**...

*'It foretells of a great future for Brandeston Hall and records the pride and happiness occasioned when it was declared open: **The royal and gracious Alice, granddaughter of Queen Victoria, opened this venerable House**'.*

Memories indeed...

WITH APOLOGIES FOR ANY NOTABLE OMISSIONS... THERE MUST HAVE BEEN OTHERS, IN MORE RECENT TIMES, QUALIFYING AS PERSONS OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORT, WHO HAVE APPROACHED THE PORTALS OF THIS FINE BUILDING.

I RAISE MY GLASS TO BRANDESTON HALL ON ITS 75th BIRTHDAY – JUST A TAD YOUNGER THAN I AM!

RGW