

## Not a Third Edition

Not a third edition of *'A Short History – Manor Park Grammar School, Nuneaton, 1950-1977'*, but details and stories which have come to light since the second edition was published.



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## 1956-57



The school's first upper-sixth-formers photographed on 9th April 1957. Back row L to R, Geoff Owen, Gerald Fox, Anthony Biggs, K. Reading, Anthony Martin, John Watson. Front row L to R, Geoffrey Hudson, Olive Nicholson, Cynthia Matts, Keith Whitehall.

**1957-58**

Pupils took it in turns to prime with powder (it was a black powder but not gunpowder) musket ball and wadding, then fire, check and/ or clean and repeat, the flintlock musket in Mr. Mason's history lessons, studying the various Franco-Prussian wars and the lead up to the alliances which led to the First World War. It gave the class an idea of how little fire power there was if one person was doing the loading and the firing, a slick operator taking about 30 seconds to load, prime and fire. Meanwhile Mr. Mason would count down the yards the enemy soldier was away. Treatment of musket ball wounds and the havoc caused by misfires was also covered.

**1959-60**

During the spring term, as the eastern quad became first a hole in the ground and then a swimming pool, pupils were asked to contribute 1/6 a week towards its cost. Pupils donating were given a green card on which donations were recorded. Also at this time, with an increasing number of teachers driving into school, it was announced that, for safety reasons, pupils would no longer be allowed to enter and leave school using the main drive. Instead they would have to walk another 125 yards along Beaumont Road to a smaller, footpath entrance. Some pupils complained that this would take "at least another 5-10 minutes extra in the rain/wind/snow" and "It was unreasonable, what would be the next curtailing of our freedoms???" They protested by not paying their 1/6s that week. A compromise was agreed – pupils leaving school half an hour later could walk down the drive.

Replying to an advertisement by a penpal club, Marion Fisher acquired nine penpals: in Hawaii, Philippines, Germany, France, Japan, Jordan, South Africa, Malaya and Yugoslavia. After a couple of years these dwindled to three, one of whom was Steven Chan who would join Manor Park in September 1960. Another was Ute who lived in Bremen, Germany. Marion persuaded classmate Elvie Palmer to write to Gesa, also in Bremen. So it was, that with O-levels over, Marion and Elvie visited a local travel agent and made arrangements for their own exchange trip to Bremen, departing in mid-August: bus to London, train to Dover, ferry to Ostend, then more trains across Belgium and Germany. The girls were very popular among friends of the families and their time in Bremen included going to school, where they helped the German teacher of English with her pronunciation and taught her some English slang. With their respective families the cultural exchange included the English verses the German way of making tea. Early in the visit, Gesa went down with appendicitis, so left somewhat to her own devices Elvie took a chance and went to the US consulate where she explained her predicament and was given access to the library to borrow books. The girls were able to watch the Olympic Games broadcast from Rome, the first time that the games were televised live across Europe. A couple of days after a garden party organised by Ute's friends, Marion and Elvie returned to England, a journey which included a lengthy wait on a station in Germany for a connecting train, at midnight. Marion arrived home with a swollen leg, the result of an insect bite! Ute and Gesa returned the exchange the following year.

**1962-63**

Mr. Siddall, a gentleman of the old school of teachers. After presenting "The School for Scandal" in Roanne's theatre a group of the players were strolling back through the empty lamp-lit cobbled streets of the town to the hotel, hand-in-hand with girlfriends. A remark was made about how romantic it was and with feeling George Siddall said "At least you've got your girlfriends with you. I had to leave my wife at home."

**1963-64**

At around 8:05 David Lee used to be one of the first to arrive at school, not because he was keen, but because his father gave him a lift to the bus-stop on his way to work. Caretaker, Mr Kenning often employed David to take a sample from the swimming pool to check the chlorine levels and the temperature. Later David would become a victim of the pool when he broke his nose, showing off, doing a bomb.

One day a lower 6th former threw a lump of sodium, (or was it potassium?) into the pool. It whizzed about and caused quite a stir. The individual was not popular as it put the pool temporarily out of use.

Mr D. Prior, then head of physics, was responsible for arranging the science laboratories in the new building which opened in 1965: chemistry on the ground floor, physics on the first floor and biology on the second floor.

1965-66

In September Stuart Shaw was one of the new intake of 'sprogs'. After just two days he decided that school dinners were "not nearly as good" as those served at his primary school at Goodyers End and so got his meal elsewhere, including, on Fridays, at a local fish and chip shop. Although he had "learned a fair bit of French at Goodyers End", he found himself in a German group at Manor Park, where along with all other pupils in both German and French lessons, he was subjected to the slide projected pictures, sound recordings and repeated phrases in room 15. This would be replaced the following year by the rigors of the language laboratory.

They shut the road through the woods  
 Seventy years ago.  
 Weather and rain have undone it again,  
 And now you would never know  
 .....  
 The old lost road through the woods...  
 But there is no road through the woods.

I must have been in the third year when I arrived for one of Mr. Checketts' art lessons. On the board was chalked an extract from Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The Way Through the Woods' and our instruction was to paint it (the scene, not the board). After several layers of re-hydrated powder paint, as was my 'style', there it was - a lost road, so lost that it wasn't there.

Sixty years later the path, which pupils had been obliged to use since the spring term of 1960, would become just such an “old lost road”.

*Correction* (“Cooks tour” Second Edition p.204) The tour actually took place in April. After a cold ferry crossing from Dover to Ostend, where the first night was spent, the party travelled by coach to Rheims to visit the cathedral and then onto Dijon. The following day pupils explored Avignon finding its famous bridge and, eventually, their way back to the hotel. Three days were spent in Nice, on the beach and exploring the city. But at the hotel, pupils were horrified to be served whole fish to eat, with heads on! They were used to fish fingers and battered cod. On a visit across the Italian border into San Remo they witnessed women in traditional clothes gutting fish in a fountain. Then the party had to wait in the coach while Miss Collier retrieved her bag, containing the group’s identity cards, from a shop where she had left it. Returning north, an “excellent meal of chicken cooked in champagne” was enjoyed in Rheims where the party visited a champagne cellar and toured the caves where there was a demonstration of the champagne making process.

Those of us lucky enough to have been taught by “killer” Mason for three years had studied British history from the Romans to the run up to the Second World War. Our third year culminated in researching and then presenting a talk to the rest of the class on an aspect of World War II.

Mr. Mason’s teaching style no doubt influenced many to choose history as an option for O-level.

## 1966-67

Two 2nd year boys asked Mr Checketts if they could do some life painting. They were surprised to find two girl volunteers “as long as they wore swimsuits”. To complete the “artwork” Mr Checketts told the boys to use their imaginations. Stuart Shaw’s imagination wasn’t so good and so Mr Checketts completed the work, “His imagination seemed OK”.

## 1968-69

As usual, in May, letters were sent out by Nuneaton’s Education Department to parents of children in their final year at primary school notifying at which secondary school “a place will be available”, with places at the grammar schools allocated to “those who have obtained the higher scores in the selection tests”. For those offered a place at Manor Park letters signed by Mr Goodburn followed, one asking “If you wish him/her to accept it, please complete and return attached form without delay”. A second set out the times of the school day, “MORNING SCHOOL 8-40 to 12-15 p.m. AFTERNOON SCHOOL 1-25 p.m to 3.30 p.m.”, rules applying to illness, homework, bicycles and showers after PE, as well as asking for 4/- per term for school fund and 1/6 per day for “School Dinners”. A third letter, “TO BE RETAINED FOR REFERENCE” listed requirements for uniform, and clothing for P.E. and practical subjects, “Apron – obtainable at School for 8/-”. Further notes gave the house and its colour to which the pupil had been allocated and an invitation to choose between French and German, “this cannot be promised as other factors have to be taken into consideration”. Finally there was a letter inviting “all new parents” to a meeting in the school hall on 26th

June with a post-script that new pupils should attend school, in uniform, “for a little while” at 10am on Tuesday 2nd September 1969, the day before the start of term.

For pupils living some distance from the school, the time spent on a bus could be put to good use, despite the quality of the handwriting, by doing homework.

On one such journey one pupil asked the conductor, "Hey, are you a man or a woman?" (It was difficult to tell). The bus was stopped and all wearing Manor Park uniform were ejected from the bus, guilty for just wearing the same school blazer and tie.

## 1969-70

A birthday in February and playing rugby for the school was not a good combination. The pool was not a nice place to celebrate despite being insisted upon by so called friends. If mental health problems had been invented then Peter Boyce would have had them.

The woodwork room continued to provide many of the fixtures and fittings used around the school. Stuart Shaw made shelves to store the supplies for the tea/coffee vending machine in the quad. Like many pupils, Mr Dunkerley, made quite an impression on Stuart:

“In the waste and up to the line”, “I’ve seen more work ruined than improved by sandpaper”, “Don’t tell me ‘Please sir the wood’s gone red’ ”.

A request for new sandpaper would be met with “If you think that’s smooth, go and use it as toilet paper, then come back and tell me it’s smooth”.

After years practising mortice and tenon joints, tongue and groove joints, dovetail joints etc. when the O-level paper was turned over candidates were tasked with joining two pieces of wood with a slot screw joint. Mr Dunkerley must have paled a little as it was the one joint the group hadn't covered in the previous 5 years. Chisels and tenon saws were laid aside while he explained on the blackboard how make this joint. O-level passes in the bag, the joint was never used again.

Although he had not been able to get into the art class in his 3rd year, having to take music instead, nor taking art in the 4th and 5th years, Stuart Shaw sat the O-level exam, having paid his own fees. His exam piece, under the theme “The Crossing”, was the Isle of Wight hovercraft, enough to earn him a pass and a refund of his fees.

## 1971-72

The school production “Maria Marten or Murder in the Red Barn”, from March 1972 is recalled by Stephen Mills (William Corder), 53 years later:-

I have vivid memories of Maria Marten and have to say that reading the first page of the script did bring it roaring back! I recall slapping my riding boot with my riding crop in that scene and stroking my moustache as I looked with lascivious interest at Maria.

Nick Tebbutt’s instructions were definitely to play it up and we did just that. After all the piece was melodrama and needed a bit of “ham” in the recipe. I think that the melodramatic style of the piece was what suited it well to a school performance. Not to be rude to the skills of my fellow performers (modesty prevents me from thinking that I was

any good myself!) but you did not need to be the Royal Shakespeare Company to make the Murder in the Red Barn entertaining. You could play to the caricatures - villain, heroine, village idiot, salt-of-the-earth labourer etc. - and it did not have to be subtle. In fact it helped if it wasn't! There was no sense of the audience suspending disbelief and imagining they were watching real events. We were happy for them to boo the villain, applaud the heroine etc. and Nick encouraged me to sneer at the audience when they booed me. The themes produced by Dave Lees really added to the caricature aspect. He wrote a sombre entry theme for me and a tinkly one for Maria and dedicated theme-tunes for other members of the cast. A very gifted musician and a great admirer of Rick Wakeman (who had once given him, he told me, a can of lager which he kept in the fridge against the - unlikely - day when something good enough to justify opening it came along).

The piece had some interesting bits of staging and production which are worth mentioning. For the dream scene where Maria's mother had a vision of her murder we had strobe lighting which gave a really good evocation of a jerky old film. Effective and quite innovative for the time. The final scene was very well staged, Nick Corder standing on the scaffold awaiting the drop. I cannot honestly remember whether I had the rope around my neck. Something tells me I did (just imagine the risk evaluation that would require now). You could practically feel the audience thinking "How is this going to end????"

Just as I pronounced my last lines:

"By my example learn to shun my fate

For wretched is the man who's wise too late",

Maria appeared as a spectral vision at the side of the stage, the light went off the scaffold (allowing me to leave the scene unnoticed) and there was a thud as the trap opened. Fabulous....

The set for the play was at the back of the hall, because had the stage been used the gallows would not have been visible to the audience.

### **1972-73**

1973 saw the first educational cruise by pupils onboard the 'SS Uganda' visiting various places of historical interest in the Mediterranean. The ship, launched in 1952 as a passenger liner, sailed these cruises until called up as a hospital ship in the Falklands War in 1982.

### **1973-74**

In July 1974 a Mountaineering Club trip to Wales was recorded by Steve Casey.

We left MPGS at 1.30pm on Monday 8th July and camped beneath Cader Idris on the Tal y Llyn side. Mr Fulford and his son led the party comprised of Dieter Graw, Edward Musial, Kevin Towler and me. In the evening we took the minibus into Tywyn for a visit to the pub and fish and chip shop. Several pints of Guinness were consumed. On Tuesday, after first visiting Abergynolwyn for supplies, we left the campsite at around 10am. A long pull to the summit of Cader Idris (2,930 feet, one of the highest mountains in southern Snowdonia) saw us at the top just after 12 o'clock. We had a snack lunch at the

top before returning to the campsite. In the evening, we found a pub at the far end of Tal y Llyn. More Guinness was consumed. Heavy rain fell over night and so Wednesday was spent sight seeing in the minibus. We had fish and chips in Aberystwyth and visited Devils Bridge. Not surprisingly, the evening found us in the same pub as the previous evening. On Thursday we drove to Abergynolwyn where we left the Transit and took to the hills for a cross-country hike to Tywyn. I can't remember what we did for food in the evening but it probably involved chips and Guinness. Our bivouac for the evening was the verandah of a school sports pavilion; I wasn't convinced that we had any kind of permission. We woke at 5.30 am and made good our escape. One of the party, fearful that it might rain in the night, slipped his sleeping back inside his plastic bivvy bag. There was no rain but he was saturated with sweat in the morning. We left our sacks at the station for the Tal y Llyn Narrow Gauge Railway and had egg and bacon in a local cafe. We took the train back to Abergynolwyn and boarded the minibus for home. We broke the journey in Shrewsbury and were back at school for a little after 5pm on Friday 12th July.

## 1974-75

By 1974-5 a few teachers including Mr Craddick, head of science, and Mr Pepper, head of geography, were still wearing academic gowns, but the gowns disappeared completely by the following year.

Head of History Mr N J Davies, ran Chess clubs every Wednesday lunch time in the history rooms, now accommodated in the

ROSLA classrooms at the back of the school. These were often referred to as the cow sheds.

Cader Idris was once again the subject of an assault over the weekend of 18th - 20th April 1975. Eight sixth formers, Jill and Sally Lower, Steve Sarson, Stephen Bygrave, Kevin Towler, Karen Smith, Tina Fudge and Stephen Casey. from the school's mountaineering club, and Mr Checketts climbed in school issue orange waterproofs and heavy mist. Heavy rain showers were a feature of the weekend. The campsite became saturated and one of the girls' tents flooded. Rain continued through Saturday night and thoughts of climbing anything else were abandoned. Instead, the party travelled to Colwyn Bay for a walk along the pier and ice-creams.



“Sixth-formers in the mist”, left John Checketts. [Steve Casey]

Although he retired in July 1975, Mr. Dunkerley's legacy would live on for many years: measure twice, cut once (it's not like next door where you can weld a new piece on), referring to metal work with Mr Reece; fingers were "universals" a person's most important tools!

## 1976-77

Deputy Head Mistress, Miss M Palmer, taught R.E. sessions, which invariably were discussions around sex or drugs or both! She also had a mantra of repeatedly pointing out the health problems of chewing gum.

Mr Young joined the physics department after completing a PhD. at Sheffield University. A notable lesson was a discussion on electrical currents. He had two wires, live and neutral connected to a battery and apparently must have felt too far away from the group. So he came to the front of his bench and proceeded to tell the class never to put the two wires together and then demonstrated his point. He flew backwards right over the top of his bench. Members of staff immediately came to his aid, although he himself was laughing at what had just happened. A quick cup of tea and the lesson continued.

On another occasion Mr Young was giving a noisy, slightly disruptive lesson. The Head of Physics walked into the lesson from the adjoining staff room. The whole class got to it's feet and went silent. "I must get to know him", said Mr Young, smiling.

## Plus ça change

After 31 years and a term Mr Kirkbride retired in July 1984. He had been born in the mining village of Hordon in County Durham and applied to join the RAF when he left school, but was too young to be accepted. Consequently got a job with the London & North Eastern Railway and at the age of 17 joined the Home Guard. Less than a year later he did join the R.A.F. He was discharged at the end of 1946 and trained to teach P.E. He was appointed Head of Upper School in 1976. After retirement he wrote “Easter 1953 [...] was the beginning of many happy years in an environment in which I could develop not only an interest in P.E. but also an interest in other subjects. I found that it was a pleasure to teach young people who appreciated all that was done for them. Naturally there were exceptions to that statement and I did have some problem students from time to time. I started teaching Maths to the Lower School and developed an interest in practical Maths in the form of Technical Drawing. I had tuition in this subject and eventually taught the subject to ‘O’ and ‘A’ level G.C.E.”

He also commented on a noticeable change in attitude not only by the pupils, but also their parents, after Manor Park became a comprehensive school.

The swimming pool continued in use, both for swimming and for canoe lessons, beyond 2000.

## “News of Old Scholars”

Keith Stansfield served as a Magistrate in County Durham for a time where he bumped into another old scholar, Trevor Hewitt, who was working for the Magistrates Service.

One of the old boys and ex-“ditchers” to go abroad was Maurice Hurst, he of the rugby international, the hostelling trip to Germany in 1960 and climbing expeditions to North Wales. After teaching at Arbury School for a short time, he was employed by the army, with the honorary army rank of Captain, as a rock-climbing instructor. Later he worked in Colleges of Education, an Inspector of Craft, Design and Technology in Cumbria, Saudi Arabia and the Cayman Islands as well as the UK before becoming a headteacher. After retirement from education he worked in Portugal. Then after spells in Luxembourg and Germany he and his wife finally returned to the UK.

Malcolm Aldridge may qualify as one of the most travelled old scholars. He left school in 1966, before taking O-levels. He joined a Coventry band called ‘The Ray King Soul Band’ and had great fun working all over Europe, but soon became disillusioned with the ‘on the road’ way of life and “the gangster style manipulation and profiteering by the non musical folk who controlled the business”. He followed a pathway to become a ship’s house musician, becoming a merchant seaman: pianist onboard the ‘Empress of Canada’. So began a seafaring life, in what he called a “proper musical job” (with, of course, no agents!) that took him around the world many times on P&O ships, in a career that lasted from 1969 until all cruises were stopped by the covid pandemic in

2020. After this he slowed down a little, becoming shore based, doing the occasional gig and working as a music therapist.

Mr. and Mrs. Humphries (see Second Edition pp. 291-2) together with their two daughters, flew to England on 20th June 1986. The 'Nuneaton Evening Tribune' reported, under the headline "Classroom sweethearts seek old pals", that Edwin, manager of the pumping stations for the laying of the Alaska to Calgary gas pipeline and chairman of the 'Pipelines and Applications Committee' of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, had been attending meetings in Europe. Now the family were to visit Nuneaton for the first time in 14 years and hoped to meet up with old school friends. Three days later, together with family members from Nuneaton, they were entertained by the mayor and mayoress in a civic reception.

## 2024-

With the opening of 'Discovery Academy' in 2015, Warwickshire County Council redrew its plans for housing development on the remainder of the Manor Park site. But the "extensions", as they were known to generations of scholars, remained empty for another nine years. The 'Coventry Evening Telegraph' of 3rd July 2024 reported, "A demolition plan has been revealed for a large part of a former Nuneaton secondary school. It will see much of the last remaining parts of Manor Park School bulldozed to pave the way for new housing and a care home." In October Warwickshire Property & Development Group announced that it had joined forces with Seddon Housing Partnerships for the housing to be built. Then things moved rather quickly. After

standing empty for thirteen years demolition work began in November, the single story buildings including the new hall (built 1974) and the metalwork and woodwork shops (built 1955) being the first to disappear. By mid-December 2024 the skyline had changed completely. Both the two-storey and the three-storey blocks had been demolished and their fabric was being crushed into rubble. The 1974 built sports hall was the last building to go. The site was cleared leaving just bare earth and some of the foundations of the buildings while the site awaits redevelopment into housing, 13 years after the school closed.

Meanwhile the Manor Park Rugby Football Club, descendant of the Manor Park Old Boys RFC, continues to flourish. On 10th December 2024 the steam locomotive wheel which had stood outside the “extensions” since 1963, in at least three different places, was removed by them for restoration and display at their home ground at Griff & Coton Sports Club painted in red and black, inherited from the school and the old boys team colours.

Contributions from Malcolm Aldridge, David Barrs, Paul Bates, Peter Boyce, Steve Casey, Steve Compton, Steve Doughty, Marion Evans (Fisher), Gerald Fulleylove, Helen Jones, Trevor Hewitt, Stuart Hodgson, Maurice Hurst, Steve Pritchards, Jan Rigby (Kirkbride), Anne Lancaster, David Lee, Alan Merry, Stephen Mills, Vivienne Naylor, Bev Moore, Elvie Herd (Palmer), Malcolm Price. Stuart Shaw, Kathleen Bates (Wildey)