

# George Ferard

## Winchester College: 1945 – 1950

**My memories of the school, my house, and myself in context**

### ***The School (Motto: Manners Makyth Man)***

Seventy foundation scholars (as prescribed by William of Wykeham) still lived in the old college buildings around Chamber Court next to the beautiful Chapel. Beyond the chapel stood a chantry within a cloister, and these buildings with some further courtyards and the school library formed the heart of the school accessed



from College Street through a fine gate. Across this road lay the city wall and the Cathedral. On the other side of Chantry was Meads (the original school grounds) separated by an old wall from the extensive water meadows of the Itchen - a chalk stream beloved of dry fly anglers.

Little changed until Victorian times! The only significant addition had been “School” - a palladian brick hall designed by Christopher Wren and used for plays and lectures. On one wall hung a picture of “The Trusty Sweater” - the model retainer with a pigs head carrying his symbols of stewardship (such as keys) and with a padlock on his snout (omerta!) and on another wall there was an inscription Aut disce (showing bishop’s mitre) Aut discede (showing soldier’s sword and lawyers wig) Manet sors tertia caedi (showing a three thong whip) - learn, go, or be beaten! With the needs of Empire came dramatic expansion, and between 1860 and 1910 ten new houses (A-I) each accommodating about 45 boys (Commoners) were established within a mile of chapel. Gothic brick class rooms (“Books”) were built around a quadrangle (Flint Court) near Chapel and other buildings evolved - a museum,

science block, workshops, music school, gym, outdoor enclosed swimming pool fed from the Itchen, fives and racquets courts and lots more playing fields. Wykehamists killed in Victorian wars were honoured in Chapel, but a fine memorial cloister was built on Kingsgate Street for the WW1 fallen with WW2 names added. Most commoners had to walk through this cloister (bearing my uncle George's name) to reach Chapel or Books.

Winchester was for clever boys expected to work hard. The brightest lived in mediaeval College - a rather cheerless place - no doubt glad of the heavy black gowns they had to wear. But even commoners faced a special entrance examination. One house master (Harry Altham, Secretary of the MCC for many years) used to trawl prep schools to maintain Furley's silverware somehow evading entrance standards, but the system often discarded his finds before they could fulfil their cricketing potential. The school had ten forms (divs), and to get higher one had to "raise a remove". At the end of term (half) the form master (div don) read out the final order and then said "there will be six (or whatever) removes" - if you came seventh, you stayed down. This made for a marks scramble. Scholars usually joined the school in the fourth bottom div (Middle Part 2), exhibitioners in the third bottom (MP3) and most commoners in JP (Junior Part) 1 or 2. Many scholars raised removes every half and could get to V1 Book 1 (the top div) in two years, where they spent three more years before leaving for Oxbridge (or National Service). In contrast a thick boy scraping into JP2 could be stuck there half after half until offered a "hot up" - moved up more in hope than expectation because he was too old for the class. This usually didn't work, and the boy was duly "super-jammed" (asked to leave). There were parallel ladders for science, languages or classics, and also "sets" for outside subjects like maths with graduated marks fed back to the div don. The timetable involved many "books chambers" - working

“up to house” - and we did a lot of walking! External exams (School and Higher Certificates) were taken ‘en passant’ with minimum fuss and academic success was judged by Oxbridge scholarships.

Scholars’ gowns apart, no uniform or tie was imposed - sports jacket with suits on Sundays sufficed - although straw hats (strats) with house colour bands were reintroduced in 1947. However dress codes (e.g. number of jacket buttons undone) and other practices were governed by “notions” which were savagely enforced - so school prefects could gossip in the middle of Flint Court between classes while lesser breeds could cut the corners or had to walk around the sides. Walking anywhere alone - if one could go with someone else - was a bad notion - “sporting one’s solo” showed one to be unpopular. Behaviour outside the house was controlled by the 28 or so school prefects, usually two per house plus around six from College with Latin names to match the ancient institutions they helped to run - Bib Prae, Cap Prae etc

The school was strong on ritual. Its slang was extensive and new boys (“men”) had to learn it within days of arrival. Parents were pitchups, prep schools were tothers, clever boys were jigs, tug meant ordinary, running was tolling, servants were sweaters, a lavatory was a foricus (fo for short) and so on. The Head of School, the “Aulae Prae”, a scholar, received notables “Ad Portas” with a Latin speech on Chamber Court. Once a year the whole school walked up St Catherine’s Hill (“Hills”) and held a service amongst the old roman fortifications at the top. Once upon a time those expelled were formally ejected through “Non Licet Gate” separating Meads from the Itchen water meadows but this custom had lapsed! The school’s Latin song (“Domum”) about the joys of homecoming, was sung heartily at the end of term. Religious observance was strict and Winchester had its own choir school - The Pilgrims School in College Street - which provided “The Quiribees”. As we could not all get into Chapel, juniors went to Chantry for a year and we had

occasional services in Cathedral. We attended Chapel every day and twice on Saturdays and Sundays, with house prayers (“preces”) at night. Being late for or missing chapel was a beatable offence - absences were noted and reported by the school prefect in the aisle seat. Although peals of bells summoned us to prayer, the school stood outside talking until bells went single “dong dong” normally for three minutes. But for some perverse reason they rang single for only two minutes on Saturday evenings and there was never enough time for everyone to get to their places before they “went down” (stopped) which led to an ungodly scrimmage. On about two Saturdays a term, a group of school prefects would hide inside Crimea (entrance to chapel and memorial to pre WW1 war dead) and when the bells went down they formed a cordon and forced all those not already in place back into Chamber Court. The prefects then took their aisle seats and noted names as latecomers filed in. Unless they happened to be house prefects, all were beaten by one of the two Cap Praes. This sacrificial rite never changed while I was at Winchester and I now wonder whether masters even knew about it! Despite such occasional terror, most of us enjoyed chapel - we had our own hymnal (partly in Latin) and the singing was excellent. I particularly remember Psalm CXXII “I was glad when they said unto me” sung by the choir every Saturday evening as they processed to their stalls.

When not working or praying, one was expected to be playing games or watching house matches. Success at games carried status and insignia - ties, blazers, socks, stockings, scarves. Summer was for cricket - the highlight was the Eton/Winchester match. Winter was for Win Coll football played on long thin pitches (canvases) with metal framed canvas sides maybe six foot high. Both ends were open and any ball over the opponents back line (Worms) scored. There was a scrum of sorts (a hot) after an infringement or when a ball went out, and backs (kicks) were

allowed to catch and then drop kick the ball. Within the canvas sides and a yard from them was a rope stretched between posts about stomach high, and good defence tactics was to “get it in ropes” where frantic scimmages arose and one could be dragged along by the weight of bodies and suffer bleeding grazes known as “rope burns”. Although we could not play other schools, six a side and fifteen a side matches were staged College vs five houses (Commoners) vs five other houses (OTH), which was tough on outnumbered College who rarely won anything! Other sports which “mattered” were Winchester fives, racquets and cross-country running. Rugger was not played, soccer was not taken seriously and tennis and squash were marginal activities.

The teaching was good - masters usually had first class honours from Oxbridge. There was no retirement age, and my first div don - The Revd. David - was about eighty and had been a house master and head of OTC when my father was in the school forty years earlier! I remember masters as courteous and helpful - their job was to impart knowledge, not to keep order - out of class this was a job for prefects. There was a notion that if a master came into a form without wearing a gown, one could throw books at him and I remember my French set assaulting Rockley Wilson, an elderly and distinguished cricket icon who had played for England, now semi-retired but doing a little teaching. Rockley lifted his hands as the books hit him knocking off his glasses and said “Gentlemen gentlemen please” and we stopped. The matter went no further and I think we all felt ashamed. I told my father, who had been taught by Rockley, and he was displeased.

### ***Up to House***

I was in E house, Morsheads, the fifth of ten houses to be established, nicknamed Freddy’s after Freddy Morshead, first house master. On St Cross Road about half a mile from Chapel and Books, it was a red brick

pile built on a slope with a lower ground and three higher floors erected circa 1865(?) and barely altered since. The house master was Colin Hunter, in his early forties with a wife and two small children. He had the right side of the house seen from the front, with a driveway and garden. Boys quarters were:-

### **Lower Ground (back of house)**

Hall was a big double-height room lined with open partitions known as Toyes, each with a bench seat, a working surface, and cupboards for books on the right hand side. The walls of Hall were gold painted with the names of all school prefects since foundation. Within Hall were two small open top studies and one shared study, a large table (used to support a table-tennis top) and a metal staircase leading up to Colin's study. He would descend after Toytime (prep) for Preces - prefects knelt around the table and rest of us knelt in toyes. After preces, Colin would speak (or not) to his prefects and leave. The Head of House would then say anything he wanted to, and the duty prefect would be given the names to be punished that night (see below).

The passage outside Hall gave onto the Locker room, changing rooms and Yard. Yard was a tarmac area roofed with wire mesh and here we played a football game called Uppers. At the far side of Yard was an unheated row of six (?) open toilet cubicles for use on all occasions except at night. During toytime only one boy at a time was allowed to the fo - he sported his roll by placing a piece of paper inscribed in Latin on a corner of the big table so that all could see that the toilet was engaged. Locker room was a dingy hole where senior boys could cook with primus stoves. The changing rooms gave onto a tiled washroom with round galvanised tubs.

## **Ground Floor**

Up the stone stairs lay Upper Hall, Ashton Library, the dining room and the kitchens. Upper Hall was a subsidiary hall, as Hall had insufficient wall space for all the toys and contained a study for the other two prefects. Ashton Library was a club room off Upper Hall for Three Year Men not yet prefects with newspapers books and a gramophone. The dining room looked onto the housemaster's drive. All meals were "up to house" - breakfast, lunch, tea and "Swipes" which was a snack half way through Toytime. We ate with our peers - Colin Hunter sat at the head of the prefects' table for Sunday lunch. The food was not bad for the times (rationing) - we often had roast whale on Sundays.

## **Top Floors**

These housed the five dormitories (galleries). We slept on metal beds with our chest of drawers beside us - prefects had curtains around their beds and a bit more space. Down the middle of each gallery stood a row of white earthenware jugs and basins and junior boys brought hot water in enamel jugs from a special tap miles away. There was no heating of any kind upstairs, and in the bitterly cold winter of 1947 the water in the jugs froze solid overnight. Matron had an office cum dispensing room at the front of the house, but kept to her quarters. Opposite the top gallery was a washroom with a stone floor and five round galvanised tubs fed from cold taps. Every morning we had a compulsory cold splash.

## ***Running the House***

The house was run by the prefects. Colin Hunter was a slightly reserved but generally respected maths don. I remember him as fair, he listened to what one had to say, and he could give good counsel. However he was not "hands on" and liked to delegate. If good order could be maintained by the boys he saw no reason to concern himself overly with their

mechanics of government. He made no informal visitations. He was almost never seen on our side of the house except at Sunday lunch, at preces, and during toytime when he occasionally walked round to talk to particular boys. As far as he was concerned the system - whatever it was - seemed to work and that was enough for him. His wife (nicknamed “The Bus” - no idea why) was a nonentity and she played no part in our lives.

Hierarchy in the house was as follows:-

- The Head of House and the 2nd prefect were usually school prefects, - and rarely the 3rd prefect. But “up to house” this made no difference. All 6 prefects could shaver (see below).
- Senior Inferior. Senior boy not a prefect - had a few special powers.
- 3 year men. Had various special rights and privileges. When I came, they could summon junior boys to Ashton Library and shaver them if they thought them cheeky or letting the house down. This was stopped the term before my fourth year!
- 2 year men. No longer men in sweat.
- Men in sweat. But when I came any boy with two or more terms seniority could punish more junior boys.

Physical Punishments were:-

- Beating. Rare and normally done by Head of House. Housemasters could beat, but Colin never did.
- Shavering. The victim had to bend over and a flexible bamboo cane was brought down vertically (top to bottom, not right to left as when beating). The idea was to tangentially shave the bottom but one



was often cut higher up. One was shaved for almost anything. If your handkerchief was found “down” in changing room, a prefect would politely tell you during toytime that you would be on that night’s list. Shaving was done over the end of one’s bed in pyjamas in front of everyone in the gallery, and the prefect on duty normally had about four a night to do. Three strokes was usual. We always talked after lights out (a good notion) but about once a month a prefect would patrol upstairs and open a gallery door, demanding to know who was talking. Two people, but never more (rotated) would always own up, walk to the lit passage outside and be duly shaved. The prefect would never return that night (a bad notion) and one was safe for several days. No ignominy was involved - I took my turn outside a term before I became a prefect - and there was no attempt to stop the talking, just a price to pay! Only Freddys shaved. I never knew when or how shaving started (or stopped), or whether Colin knew about it.

- Bubjabs, Chops and Biceps. When I arrived any boy with two terms seniority over any other could say “Sport Bubjabs (Chops or Biceps)”. He could then hit him on the chest (Bubjabs) or slap his face (Chops - or Double Chops if slapped on both sides) or twist his arm and then hit his biceps (Biceps). Normally it would be 3 times. No reason need be given and the junior boy was not allowed to resist - if necessary a prefect could be called to ensure submission. The institution ensured respect for seniority.

A Prefect did not have a personal fag. Instead he shouted “Man in Sweat” and the last boy to reach him got the job - delivering messages, cleaning corps uniform or whatever. Men in sweat had various other chores - for instance fetching hot water and making ritual calls to signal the time when boys were getting up or going to bed. New boys were given a minder (tege) to show them the ropes and teach notions. Three

weeks after the start of term there was a “Notions examina” when prefects tested the men in sweat - little groups in their pyjamas were circulated to each prefect in turn and were shavered for wrong answers. Boys who failed were re-tested a fortnight later. There was an enormous amount to remember - factual stuff (house colours, school colours, heads of houses, heads of games, names and nicknames of house masters etc) and a mass of fanciful meaningless jargon. Who is Mrs Bell? Strawberry nets down garden! What happens when Hochstappler sneezes? Schweppes goes cloudy! No one in the house had any idea what either of these notions meant until my father partly solved the second. Forty years before, the answer had been Swipes goes cloudy! Swipes for us was a snack in the middle of Toytime, but in my fathers day Swipes was the small beer boys were allowed in moderation at night. Prefects had an easy life. Chores were done for them, they could go to bed when they liked and their authority, backed by physical sanctions, was never questioned. They did not have to take exercise (the rest of the house had to take a minimum of 6 hours per week exercise, recorded in the Ecca Book) although they were expected to perform in any sport they were good at, and to join in the weekly house cross-country runs

Daily routine was:- breakfast, Chapel, then Books until lunch up to House, then games, back to House, Books then tea up to House then Toytime (around 2 hours) with Swipes in the middle and bed around 9.30 p.m. On Saturday before chapel, we read (approved) books in our toys for an hour. Between services on Sunday we could do what we liked - some Sunday papers were provided. No radios or gramophones were allowed (except for prefects and in Ashton Library). We could wander where we liked in our free time, although juniors needed permission to go into town. Bikes were kept in a central bicycle shed near Music School, and mainly used weekends or on “leave out days” (holidays when we could go home or do what we wanted).

## *My Time at Winchester*

My parents brought me from Bembridge, I.O.W. by train for tea with the housemaster and his wife (about the last time I spoke to her for five years!) with four other new boys and their parents. Parents left, and we were taken down the stair to Hall and handed over to our tegees. Mine was David Gow (older brother of Ian Gow MP murdered by the IRA) who did his best for me, but I let him down badly in the notions exam - by the end I was near tears with humiliation and pain and had to retake the exam. Trying to memorise endless lists of names and house colours while struggling with new faces and customs was beyond me - there were just too many things to take on board at once. But overloading new men was part of the system - an intended humiliation - 'maybe you were



someone at your tother, but you are nothing here’ And I agreed. I was small for my age, not good at games, had a painful stammer, and during my first two terms just wanted to go into a hole and die. I was teased about my stammer and remember breaking my right thumb trying to hit an older boy “brocking” (ragging) me (now High Court Judge Sir Michael Turner). I had no friends, a serious problem at Winchester, as I had no one to walk up to Books and Chapel with. One could walk in pairs or threes, but fours were not allowed. I would ask “Can I sport a line (make a three) with you and Jones?” to be told “Sorry Ferard, someone else is” Since one must not be seen “sporting ones solo”, I sometimes ran up to Chapel early as though carrying a message.

After two terms, things improved - I gained some confidence and in my first summer term (Cloister Time) set up shop selling oranges, which were at last becoming available. I found a source of blood oranges, which I bought fifty at a time, kept in my toyes, and sold orange by orange at 100% profit. It was good money but did not increase my popularity, and for a time I was called “Herod Ferod - the King of the Jews”. One night the three year men of Ashton Library summoned me down in my pyjamas, told me that I was a “money-grubbing disgrace to the house” and shavered me very hard. But by then I was case hardened and went on selling oranges to the end of term!

In due course I was a tege to a boy called Laidlaw, and I was playing table tennis with him in his second term (my fourth) when he surprisingly took a game off me. This was too much to bear so I sportingly told him to “Sport Bubjabs” and hit him three times in a friendly way. Although I was unaware of it, Colin had unusually opened his door at the top of the stairs at that particular moment and had seen me. A month later, Colin called me up to his study to ask my advice about Laidlaw who had said he was being brocked (bullied) - what did I think? I said I thought Laidlaw was not suffering more than anyone else

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in their second term. Colin then mentioned that he had seen me hitting Laidlaw, and to my amazement it transpired that he knew nothing about Bubjabs. That night after Preces, Colin spoke to the house and bubjabs, chops and biceps were killed stone dead.

I had joined the right form (Junior Part, Senior Division - JP1) and made my way up the school reasonably fast. I only raised books once (top in form order) - quite an achievement for a commoner - and was shattered when the div don said “there will be no removes this term”. Insult was added to injury when my report suggested that my position flattered me, and I coasted the following term when there were lots of removes. I liked having a ladder to climb, but having got to the science (chemistry & biology) top of the school with Higher Certificate behind me and a place at University College, Oxford secured - and with a year to work for a scholarship - I more or less downed tools. The Winchester system meant that the cleverest boys spent two years or more with little class work - scientists did their own projects in the laboratories with tutorials from masters and much reading done up to house. I read novels not textbooks, drank a lot of V.P “sherry” in my study, and duly failed to get a scholarship. I had the army to face in January and Oxford seemed remote.

By sixteen had lost my stammer, grown a lot, and found life up to house tolerable. I remember catching and cooking crayfish from Logie (one of the three branches of the Itchen which ran through water meadows), and built up a butterfly collection. Although still poor at team games, I played fives tolerably, and was the best cross-country runner in the house, duly collecting my house tie, socks, and sweater and my school running colours. In my last summer I captained the house second X1 - my kind of cricket - if we hit the ball into the river there was a notion that we could declare a draw and go home! I thought the OTC awful - after passing Certificate A (basic rifle drill), I joined an Internal

Combustion Engine course for several terms running. This was a soft option - one hour a week not in uniform - but as much soldiering as I wanted with National Service awaiting me.

I was only once beaten during my five years at Winchester - caught being late into chapel in one of the Saturday evening programs. It was the term before I became a prefect and I knew the Cap Prae socially. He apologised, I said it was not his fault; and he went through the motions without hurting me.

My parents only came to see me once, and I could not go home to Ireland on leave-out days. However I sometimes went to see my Ferard grandmother (Ida nee Deas) who was living in a cottage at Oxted, my godmother Elsie Spencer who lived at Haslemere, or a nice friend of my father's who used to ask boys out to tea (Dorothy Cowland). I also remember long bicycle rides to places like Andover and Petersfield.

I was a house prefect for a year and as third prefect was not expecting to become a school prefect, so was gratified when Colin informed me I was being made one for my last term. I told my friends, and felt very stupid when I found my name not on the list pinned up in Flint Court. Colin had tried without success to find me to break the news - for the first time ever, so Colin said, the headmaster had decided that there were too many nominations and mine was one of the names dropped.

### ***Connections with Winchester***

My father and my uncle George went to Freddys, and their first cousins to Kennies (D house). The latter, John, Geoffrey and Peter Haig were the sons of Sir Harry Haig who had married "Aunt Vi", my grandmother Ida Deas sister. Peter now lives in Tasmania. He went to Winchester in 1933; Val and I saw a bit of him in Guildford in 1961 where he was on a cramming course to become a solicitor (he had been a schoolmaster in

Malaya). Geoffrey was a senior civil servant - he was very friendly with his Ferard cousins: Agnes Reeve and my aunt Peggy and I saw quite a bit of him in the 50s.

I have not kept up school connections although I went to a couple of Old Wykehamist dinners in London in the 50s. My closest friend at Winchester developed mental problems and committed suicide in an institution. I have met a few contemporaries over the years at Oxford, in ICI, and in odd corners of the globe where business has taken me.

I am sure my son Dominic would have been more successful at Winchester than me – he was cleverer and more confident – but he was probably right to opt for St Paul’s. Talking to a close friend of his from Oxford, who is a master there now, the ethos of the school sounds little changed. If I was to fault the Winchester I knew, it would be on the grounds of isolation from the real world, lack of privacy, undue emphasis on conformity, and insufficient checks on potential abuses arising from self-governance by boys - *The Lord of the Flies!*

*George Ferard, March 2002*

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