

## John Murray recollections

### The 1970's

#### Barnton at 50. Events and memories.

### The 1970's.



There can be little argument as to the outstanding event of the '70's since, following approximately 845 years of male monopoly and quasi-monasticism, in 1973 the school opened its doors to girls. Initial fears concerning the ability of the girls to flourish among the 700 boys and largely male teaching staff were relatively short-lived. They were welcomed by the only two female members of staff, Wynn and Flo, and it was the male sex that found itself under unaccustomed pressure. The male teachers struggled to adopt their teaching methodologies to the needs of the new pupils while the male students discovered the joys of "the younger woman". The effects upon the school buildings and curriculum were much more marked. Hutt accommodation mushroomed (indeed our esteemed editor Tom Bacciarelli spent several years in exile before being admitted to the main building) and over the course of the next few years new buildings dotted the landscape with new provision being made for business studies, home economics and the social studies. The school tuck shop yielded place to cloakroom and toilet facilities for the "new breed" - this was in the days before health and safety became the number one educational priority - and the entire timetable became skewed for a number of years in order to allow the girls to attend their home economics lessons at a neighbouring school. Inevitably this monumental change was very welcome to myself as a recently-arrived and relatively youthful principal teacher of music. A boys only choir had enjoyed some fine moments before the arrival of the newcomers. A morning service at the Kirk of the Canongate and a performance of a Palestrina mass at the High Kirk of St Giles remain in the memory although what the ghost of John Knox felt about the singing of a Catholic Mass in his church must remain a matter of arcane speculation. The new arrivals ensured that a much wider repertoire could be tackled and musical highlights of the decade included an 850th Anniversary concert at the Usher hall involving pupils, staff, primary school pupils, parents and former pupils, a performance of Verdi's "Va Pensiero" in the Hall of the Cinquecento in Florence and the initial concert given with our Bavarian "twin school", the Theodolindengymnasium of Munich. Annual joint musical performances with our Italian and German colleagues were to continue well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century alternately at home and away. A secondary motivation for applying to RHS was the acknowledged excellence of its sport. This was borne out at my preliminary interview for the position as Principal Teacher of Music when the first question addressed to me came from a gentleman wearing what I subsequently learned was a RHSFP tie. "I see that you play rugby for Waterloo RFC Mr Murray. If successful in your application would you be prepared to coach school teams?". I sensed that subsequent questions from the rest of the panel concerning my musical abilities were very much secondary. Consequently I enjoyed some twenty years coaching both rugby and cricket. During the 1971/72 season I was privileged to watch the first fifteen captained by Brian Scott and coached by the legendary Dougie Mitchell as they went unbeaten in their games and several boys were selected to represent Scottish schools. My introduction to cricket was a little underwhelming when the first fixture against Dunfermline High School was cancelled due to snow falling as the opening bowler was just beginning his run-up! Inevitably music and sport gave me a host of very happy memories. I remember rugby tackling Brian Scott during the annual staff/pupils football match - the look on his face made me wish I had a camera handy. I remember turning up at the Scuola Isolotto (the isolated school) during our second trip to Florence and waiting patiently for an audience to arrive. Unfortunately the school was much too isolated and nobody turned up. I remember Mary Bryden attempting to teach yoga to almost 100 staff and pupils in our overnight Swiss hotel. I remember a number of pupils (including K. Macintosh) attempting to feed German machines with coin of the British realm long before a European Common Market existed. I remember evenings in Munich when Scots and Germans attempted to learn the dances of the other country. I remember K.T. himself attempting to partner "Big Doris" in one such dance. All-in- all a very memorable decade.

## The 80's.

I was fortunate enough to obtain a couple of promotions during this decade and spent the first five years as an Assistant Rector and the remaining time as Depute Rector. My full title in the first post was Assistant Rector, Recreation and Leisure. I rather liked the sound of this title and had visions of spending even more time with music and sports. Unhappily this proved to be a false impression and instead I became admiral of the minibus fleet and tachograph supremo. I became very familiar with the route from Barnton to Shrubhill where I took our aging minibuses to be patched-up and used the healthiest one every week to pick up stores at our local Safeway supermarket on behalf of the Home Economics department.

The position as Depute involved the annual task of compiling the school timetable. This brought me into regular contact with the various Principal Teachers, in particular 'Sandy' Forsyth (P.T. English), Iain Dingwall (P.T. Mathematics) and 'Jock' Dewar (P.T. Classics). I thought that I had evolved a clever way of making things ideal for the first two of these departments by timetabling all the brightest pupils in one serialization and the less able in another column. 'Sandy' Forsyth took me gently to one side in the English study room and, over coffee and several cigarettes, explained that pupils who were good with words were not 'de facto' good with sums! I took the hint and proceeded upon a rather more usual approach. Iain Dingwall was far more interested in my musical abilities since his church choir were about to perform large sections of Handel's "Messiah" and he needed his copy of the work to be transcribed in tonic solfa. I presented my transcription to him and was surprised, and a little hurt, when he was unable to make initial sense of my labours. I had forgotten to tell him that I had been brought up on the Lancashire sola system (yes, it really does exist) which differs from the more normal version. 'Jock' Dewar divided his time between classics, rugby and his record collection. His Latin classes always tried to divert his attention from the 'Lays of Ancient Rome' by enquiring after the results of his B1 rugby team or asking his views on the premier recording of the late Beethoven quartets. In addition I was called upon in my deputizing capacity rather more than the norm since the Rector, Farquhar Macintosh was called away very often to chair or attend the various committees that he served. This earned him in certain quarters the soubriquet "the Tartan Pimpernel".

My most vivid memories of the 1980's inevitably concern the European musical exchanges which became annual events either in Germany and Italy or in Edinburgh. In 1980 I was accompanied by my wife, Joan, and my one year old daughter, Rachel, who spent most of the bus trip to and from Munich being passed around the bus from one adopted "uncle" or "aunt" to another. Other abiding memories concern singing Haydn's "The Heavens are telling" during a violent thunderstorm and being treated by our German hosts to a bus trip to Garmisch-Partenkirchen the highlight of which was due to be a view of the Zugspitz mountain. Unfortunately due to a very dense fog this sighting was denied to us. I remember the 1985 joint trip to Munich and Italy with a group from George Heriot's School, a combination which appeared to be as likely as a joint football team comprising both Hearts and Hibs personnel. I remember taking a small group from the Theodolinden Gymnasium for the first of our three way musical ties. I can not remember the names of all the churches in which we performed in Germany and Italy during this decade since there were just so many of them. A special memory is of trying to persuade my pupils and colleagues that my very late appearance to get to our coach for the return trip to Edinburgh in 1982 had been caused by a weasel biting through a pipe in the air cooling system of our Munich hostesses' Mercedes Benz!

## The '90's.


The nineties witnessed the arrival of The Royal High School Former Pupil's Club on the school campus, a positively profligate number of Rectors and Acting Rectors following the solitary seventeen year rule of Farquhar Macintosh and a comprehensive redesigning of the school buildings with a new school administration block and new provision for several departments and new locations in the older part for several more. A new all-weather pitch and floodlighting capacity were to follow in the near future. The emigration of the F.P.'s from their base at Jock's Lodge and arrival in Barnton was not achieved without one moment of pure drama. Neil Sutherland and I were walking past the school office one morning and were appalled to see the roof of the new clubhouse collapse within the new building. Mercifully there were no people inside at the time and the second attempt to achieve stability was much more successful. The great advantage of the proximity of the clubhouse from a pupil's perspective is that he/she can move from the youthful innocence of the schoolroom through the Memorial Door to the adult lure of the F.P.'s bar in less than 100 metres.

Farquhar's reign was succeeded by that of Matthew Maciver and George Smuga with myself providing three periods of "inter regnum" in and between. The position as Acting Rector is a strange one. I suppose that it is the educational equivalent of being a learner driver. One can have new ideas although there is always someone sitting nearby in judgement, it takes a Dickensian scale of committee to authorize such ideas and the new Rector can always kick such ideas into touch. However, I did experience some highs and lows. The latter were usually to be encountered in the bowels of the boiler room as I tried to fathom why one of the two boilers always went on the blink during the darker days of winter. The former were to be met with on the roof of the main school building. The views were terrific but how the architect was allowed to produce a flat roof on a large scale building in the East of Scotland will remain forever a mystery.

The new buildings and relocating of many departments involved disruption on a monumental scale and it says much for the patience of the pupils and staff and the understanding of parents that everything was achieved without mass breakdowns. I did find some of the movements a little odd. Why were the social subjects, business studies and home economics departments moved from their purpose built accommodation to newer purpose built accommodation? Expensive and necessary? Why were the English department moved from their ground floor base to the first floor while the Mathematics department performed a direct swap from first floor to ground? Who can attempt to discover the labyrinthine motives of planners?

The 90's saw further developments with our European musical links. In 1992 the school gained a prestigious European Curriculum Award for its ongoing European work. Thereafter new contacts were made with the Scuola di Musica "G. Verdi" from Prato and the Lycée Antoine de St. Exupéry from Lyons. The highlight of these 'twinings' was a concert at the Usher Hall in June 1994 when all four schools combined to demonstrate their joint talents. We also gave several joint concerts in the prestigious Herkulesaal der Residenz in Munich in conjunction with the Theodolinden Gymnasium. So many memories! There was Tom Bacciarelli's four laps of the walls of Prato in search of our buses which had been moved on by the local constabulary and the same colleague's method of dealing with a very long day in one of said buses by getting the passengers to make up limericks about their enforced idleness. On a more poignant note hearing June Rapson playing "The Floors of the Forest" in the allied graveyard at Castiglione die Pepoli, one of the final battles of World War Two in that area when so many very young men had lost their lives.

## School News article about John Murray on his retirement



# RHS News

Newsletter of The Royal High School

December 2003

Dear Parent/Guardian

As many of you will know the school recently lost the services of Dr John Murray through retiral. John had been Depute Rector since 1985.

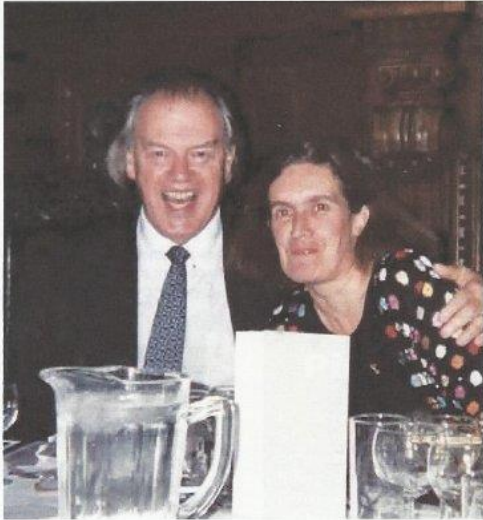
Dr Murray first came to the school as Head of Music in 1971 and then became Assistant Rector in 1979. In total, therefore, he devoted some 32 years of his career to The Royal High School.

John will be missed not just because of his length of service, but also because of the many areas of school life, which he supported:

- His devotion to music in the school
- His leadership for over 20 years of the KT singers raising during that time over £20,000 for charity
- His involvement with over 20 years of musical exchanges with our link schools in Munich and Italy
- His support for school rugby
- His contribution to school traditions and values, including his authorship of the official school history which is given to every sixth-year leaver on joining the FP Club
- And of course the many young people whom John has inspired and mentored through his twin roles of teacher and senior manager.

We wish John and his wife Joan all the best for a long and happy retirement.

## The End of an Era



*John Murray retiral reception at the City Chambers, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2003. John is flanked by two of his Rectors, Matt Maciver and George Smuga*