

Matt MacIver Rector 1989-1995

On being asked to pen an article for the new Royal High School History, I looked in detail at my time at the Royal High School and tried to identify the main headings in these nine years. I decided not to include some

including curriculum and local authority cutbacks. These are covered in my Annual Reports and given that I will have the opportunity to enhance my article in future editions, I will exclude them for now. What I have done is to indicate a few headings which may be used as basis for moving on. I thought of the following:



1. The retirement of a whole generation of Senior Staff.

Many of the Principal Teachers of Subjects retired during my time at the Royal High. Among them were people like Jock Dewar, Bill Lornie, Sandy Forsyth, Iain Dingwall, Ronnie Graham, Douglas Macphail, Malcolm Macefield, Noreen Richardson, Glenn Peters, Archie Davidson, Eric Russell. Among senior staff who left were Meg Garvie, Peter Simmons, J.Y. Murray. They had been the senior staff who had managed the move from Regent Road to Barnton. I was the Rector who was, in many ways, appointing a whole new generation of senior staff. Looking back, I think that was my greatest professional challenge.

2. Closer links between the school and the FP Club.

The 1990s saw a significant move towards a closer relationship between the school and the F.P. Club. In 1989, just after I took over, the first turf was cut in the process that saw the building of a Clubhouse. This was a hugely important event. The Clubhouse opened in 1990 and I introduced the ceremony of the leavers going through the door in the school and then going directly to the Clubhouse. A Development Officer was appointed to bring the school and the Club closer together and I introduced the idea of the Captains and Senior Prefects going to the Annual Dinner. I also persuaded the FP Club to sponsor the Annual Prizegiving and invited the Club to chair the Ceremony on an annual basis. That, I think, is still the format.

In 1995 the all-weather pitch was opened. Raising the money had been a joint effort between the school and the Club. It was formally opened by the Director of Education, Liz Reid, the President of the Rugby Club, Hugh Mackenzie, and by the then School Captain, Shona Thomson. On a personal note, I was very proud of the fact that, on the strength of my efforts in raising the money for the pitch, I was awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to New Zealand in 1998.

3. Significant Events.

Arguably, the most important national development was the introduction by the Major Government of School Councils. Michael Forsyth was the Secretary of State at the time and saw this move as a step forward in bringing schools closer to their local community and away from local authority control. I still remember the very first meeting of the first RHS School Council.

Annual Reports are pretty accurate in recording important events such as the Prize-Givings. Some of the speakers at the Prize-giving Ceremony are interesting as are the school trips and musical events. I am also thinking of events like the 15th Anniversary of the twinning with Munich which was held in Munich in 1993. Other events included the success in the European Trophy in 1992 and success in the Pushkin Prize in 1994.

Annual Report, 1995

This extract has been provided to complement Matt's initial reminiscence. This was his last Rector's Report and encapsulates his thoughts on his years as Rector (Editor)

This year's report shows a school hard at work achieving success both inside and outside the school environment. But this has also been a year for looking ahead. Just after the New Year the school and the Former Pupils' Athletic Club embarked on a project which will benefit all pupils at the school and the community at large. The result is a magnificent international sized all-weather hockey pitch and a bowling green. I am confident that the sporting facilities available to pupils are now as good as any throughout the country. I certainly look forward to young people taking advantage of the facilities whether it be for participation or competition. Both the Athletic Club and the school are extremely grateful to Lothian Regional Council, the Trustees of the Athletic Club and the Foundation

for Sport and the Arts who provided the £500,000 which made this development possible. I hope that the school and the Club will, in the near future, compete at the highest levels in a variety of sports. A new era beckons.

For Lothian Region, of course, it is the end of an era. In April, 1996, new local authorities will emerge and the Royal High School will once again become the responsibility of the City of Edinburgh. I wish to express publicly how much the school appreciates the support given to it by Lothian Regional Council. In particular, I wish to thank successive Education Committees who pursued some fine educational policies. Like all those engaged in education I hope that these policies - especially those relating to young people with special needs — will be sustained, developed and resourced by the new authorities. In terms of the curriculum we look ahead with interest to the reforms which will accompany the "Higher Still" Development. These have not yet been revealed but it is apparent that there is a great need to bring some order into the senior school curriculum. We await the consultation papers with keen anticipation and not a little hope.

During this session I was very privileged indeed to be the recipient of the Robert Reid Fellowship which allowed me to be out of school for ten weeks during the second term. During that time I was based in Edinburgh University and was able to study an educational issue of particular interest to me. My field of study was "Schools and the Media within the context of Devolved School Management." I was very fortunate that funding became available which allowed me to visit schools not only in Scotland but also in New Zealand. In New Zealand I visited schools in the urban area of Auckland and in the rural area of Waikato. I also spoke to politicians and senior civil servants in the capital city of Wellington.

In New Zealand I discovered an educational system which is very well developed in the area of devolved financial management to schools. Some of the practices I encountered sit rather uncomfortably within the concept of a free state education system. Nevertheless I was intrigued by the fact that no Head Teacher I interviewed would contemplate returning to a system of local authority funding. That seems to me to hold important lessons for us in Scotland as we contemplate a new system of local authorities and a further development of devolved management to schools.

As we look ahead, therefore, we do so with hope and apprehension. Change seems to be the only constant we have in education and teachers have become used to living with uncertainty. It is time we had a little breathing space. But that is simply not going to happen.

(Matt MacIver, Annual Report 1995)