

## **Peter Simmons**

Depute Rector, 1977-1985

In August 1973 the RHS admitted - 845 years after its foundation - its first female pupils who formed about half of its first cohort of non-selective pupils. Both of those "firsts" had important social and curricular implications.

Firstly, the female factor. Many of the existing staff had not taught girls before. Their reactions ranged from excited anticipation to deeply guarded reserve. Their wish/expectation that the girls would exercise a civilising influence both in and out of the classroom was justified in the vast majority of cases. There were a few cases however where that view led to a quick and painful revision. As learners many girls were of the highest ability, outperforming the boys in many subjects and it became quickly clear that the era of a female Dux and/or Proxime was but a few years away.

Their main impact on the curriculum was to make the provision of Home Economics a priority. Since the Barnton building was not equipped for HE, pupils were bussed to Broughton High School for several years until the new block providing both for HE and Business Studies was built. The bussing arrangement provided a challenge for the timetablers at both schools, which they resolved by having the RHS pupils travelling between the morning break and lunch.

Within 4 years of their arrival, the issue of appointing girl Prefects was addressed effectively and the first appointees amply justified their selection. Immediately, the issue of the Captaincy arose. Opinions on the staff were divided between those who supported a change to a Head Boy and Head Girl structure and those who believed that the Captain's status be maintained, open to either gender on merit. The latter view prevailed and Jenny Muiry, the first girl Captain proved to be an inspired choice.

With the arrival of girls the RHS became a normal human community. Social events could be arranged without importing girls from other schools as had happened in the past. The full range of human giftedness was available. Dances, concerts, plays drew upon the full range of talent and creativity. And thus it remains.

The second element of the 1973 intake was its non-selective character. Pupils were drawn mainly from the local area and exhibited the full range of ability. Whilst all followed the same curriculum in S1 and S2 the challenge was to make what was taught accessible to all regardless of ability. Where it was possible, e.g. in English and Maths where staffing and resources allowed, pupils could be "set" according to ability, ie arranged in groups where the ability range was not too wide and learning could proceed at an appropriate pace for all. Where "setting" was not possible, teachers had to develop skills in mixed-ability teaching in an attempt to reach each pupil at his/her level of ability. Both of these strategies represented a radical new departure for the school and new challenges for the staff.

For S3, S4 and beyond the path for many pupils was towards O Grades and possibly Highers and was a familiar one to the school. Providing for those for whom that path was inappropriate but for whom some form of final certification was desirable led to courses being offered for the CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education) for several years until the advent O Standard Grade made provision for all available.

No one should under-estimate the radical scale of the changes which took place in the RHS in the decade after 1973. In terms of pupil population, premises, curriculum, facilities and physical resources, staff expertise, they surely surpass anything in any decade of its history.