



THE OLD EAGLE HOUSE SOCIETY MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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www.oehs.org.uk

SAGS

On Monday I will be attending the annual conference to catch up with archivists around the country to find out what they are doing to keep the history of the school alive. With 2020 approaching, our 200th year, this is very important. The Old Eagle House Society has already invested £15000 digitising our printed material which is available to all. Click [here](#) to visit the archive website.

“The School archivists group (SAG) was created in 1998 when a handful of archivists working in independent schools gathered at Christ’s Hospital to share their experiences and exchange views. Membership now comprises representatives from about 260 independent schools throughout the United Kingdom. They include librarians, teachers, support staff, volunteers and retired staff, all of whom have some responsibility for the historical records of their school and realise that this is an area requiring specialist knowledge which they then attempt to seek out.”

School news

Daunting Dragons Den visit

“Recently Year 8 (6th form) travelled to London taking their prepared Dragons Den pitches to BBH London, one of the world's premier advertising agencies. A group of Dragons, including the Chairman and CEO of BBH listened to the pitches and eventually chose their winner - an idea to have drones located around the world that allow you to see places from the comfort of your own home. All the ideas - teen make-up, bamboo clothing, children's cars, teaching robots - were presented with style and gained very positive comments from the dragons.

This was an amazing experience for Eagle House pupils to experience life in an award-winning ad agency. The group were given a presentation on the work of the agency and afterwards walked down to the Garrick Theatre to enjoy Young Frankenstein.”

The Gardner Singing Competition

This is in memory for past pupil John Linton Gardner (1925 – 30) who was, according to Martin Anderson (The Independent), “One of the best composers Britain produced in the past century.” We were honoured to host his 90th birthday dinner in 2007.

“The annual singing competition, The Gardner Competition, was an evening full of wonderful music from the nine finalists. Each taking two songs, the singers transported us away and there is no doubt that the standard was one of the best ever.

The repertoire was varied and well chosen by each of the singers. Adjudicator, Mrs Lynne Roper offered her expert advice after each soloist had performed and everyone could feel justly proud of their performance.

The singing teachers should feel very proud of their charges. The eventual winner was Emilie Harper who gave a very accomplished performance singing Chanson d'Amour by Faure and Out of My Dreams from the musical Oklahoma!”

Mick Ponting's memoirs (OEH 1935 / 41) – continued –

The war years

At the start of the war, to our disgust, our demountable and much-used stage had reappeared in the cellars of the school as beds for our air raid shelter. Our parents were bidden to supply us with air mattresses. My mother said, “she couldn't find one anywhere” which probably meant in our small village, 1 ½ miles away. Fortunately, a sympathetic under-matron did find one, since from Sept 1940 we used the shelters frequently. In the evenings, if the raids had already started, we descended to our mattresses; this was quite popular really, as the cellars were warm and comfortable. If everything was quiet, we went to our normal beds, but all too often we were woken from deep sleep to doze our way down to the cellars for the rest of the night.

We were intrigued to learn that there were ‘emergency supplies’ in the shelter. We never saw them though we guessed they included chewing gum but we never got our hands on them. A quarter of a century later I asked Paul Wootton about these supplies. After some thought, he agreed about the gum.

Another air raid precaution was our escape route. Each dormitory had a long rope, attached firmly to a radiator or heavy hook, leading to the ground. It was thickly covered with strands of wool to avoid burning hands of boys as they slid down. Unfortunately, despite continual pleas, we were never allowed to practise. Fortunately, the opportunity to use them for real never came off course, we had blackout curtains throughout and sticky tape over the windows to reduce blast damage. Gas masks, too, though we seldom carried them, even when going to away matches. We got blasé, I suppose, and we weren't in a town.

We started wearing blue boiler suits (overalls) for all our energetic outdoor activities, except formal games. These must have vastly increased the life of our increasingly rationed clothes and were I suppose the forerunners of track suits.

During the very serious part of the war, 1940-41, we weren't allowed to read daily papers (many of our parents were in the War and understandably the Woottons didn't want us worried). Instead they wrote us a daily bulletin which I can scarcely remember ever reading. We were in fact largely isolated from wartime activities and saw and heard much more in the holidays (I did know enough to write an essay in Latin about the Battle of Britain. '*Facts accurate, Latin awful*' I was told).

One peculiarity was that EH kept its own time. It was very soon discovered that when Double Summertime came into force in 1940 and we went to bed with at least 3 hours of daylight remaining, there was obvious potential for mischief midnight feasts (in those days of stringent rationing, little more than lemonade powder) and so on. EH sensibly adopted its own time, putting its clocks back an hour. This helped, though occasionally we ran into muddles of timing when in contact with the outside world.

One night in October 1940 as there had been no warning, we were in our own beds, quietly reading. Suddenly, an enormous bang. Everyone got down to the cellars in record time without further incident. Next day, we learnt that Wellington, two miles away, had suffered its only casualty... the Master himself, who had just said goodbye to some guests outside his house. I had met him a short time before when he came to EH to interview candidates for Wellington. Robert Paton Longden. A charismatic man.

Reflecting afterwards, it seemed strange that Wellington, a military school which would increasingly man the Services, wasn't attacked again and even Royal Military College, Sandhurst and the Staff College, only three miles away, also escaped attack. All of us in that small area were lucky. In addition, we were less than 30 miles from London and the Blitz. Some boys were sent abroad under a sort of refugee scheme, mostly to Canada, the US or South Africa, to return two years later with exotic accents.

Updating email addresses

This is the time of the year when we lose many members due to them moving schools or leaving university. Please do inform me of any changes so we can keep in touch. This is an exciting time for the school with us nearing our 200th birthday. A reminder that we, the Society, do not organise any appeals.