

ONIA

OLD NOVOCASTRIANS' ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



RGS ORGAN CENTENARY

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: THE GREAT BENEFACTOR | DECADES OF DUST | RGS ROMAN RUN

ISSUE 113/SPRING 2024

ONA is the magazine for the
Old Novocastrians' Association

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Please include relevant pictures if
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experiences, recollections and
memories of its contributors.

Front cover: Photos Ruth Gibson.
Artefacts from RGS Archive.

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PAUL HUDSPITH (92-99)

ONA PRESIDENT

Our latest edition centres on a remarkable object I am sure many of you would regard as the centre of the school, and certainly one of its most striking features. Whether or not the organ was more ornament than instrument during your time at Eskdale Terrace, I am sure you will enjoy the story of its hundred years, the remarkable related tales which the research for this edition has uncovered, and the personal recollections of those ONs who have had the privilege to play.

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WELCOME

GEOFFREY STANFORD

HEAD

It is a pleasure to introduce this edition of the *ONA Magazine*, celebrating the centenary of the school organ which was donated to the school as a war memorial by Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland. It stands proudly in our main hall, an impressive sight with its gold painted pipes and the names of those who have fallen in conflict carved into its wooden panels. It serves as the focus for our annual remembrance events but it has also played a key role in the various assemblies we have held to mark the Platinum Jubilee, the death of Queen Elizabeth and the Coronation of King Charles.

Learning the organ requires a very particular dexterity as it has three different keyboards played with hands and another played with the feet, even before one considers the range of different stops that allow the player to conjure a variety of different sounds from the instrument. One needs to be a reasonably competent pianist before venturing onto the instrument but, over the last four years, we have had three of our musicians reach a standard to apply for organ scholarships at Oxford with another trying in the coming year. As you may imagine, this means that they can be found practising before and after school and sometimes during break and lunchtime too.

Those schools fortunate enough to have such an instrument would most likely have a Christian tradition and the organ would typically be housed in a chapel. While the Royal Grammar School was originally founded in the precinct of St Nicholas' Cathedral, these days in Jesmond we are very much a secular school with representatives of all faiths and none. The RGS is also unusual in that the design of the main hall means it serves as a thoroughfare on both ground and



first floors of the building. This means the sight and sound of the organ being played is part of the normal lived experience of every pupil coming through the RGS.

At the other end of the school buildings, again in a main thoroughfare just outside the new library, is a new assembly space called the Agora which serves as a performance stage for regular lunchtime performances of a variety of genres, for example allowing aspiring singer-songwriters to share their talent. It is always impressive to see quite how many pupils passing, on their way to or from lunch, will sit and listen to the performances, bringing the experience of music into their daily lives. Such shared experiences are what make the RGS so special, helping build the sense of belonging that is a core pillar of our ethos.

Through supporting their contemporaries who stand up to perform, our pupils also learn to respect and believe in each other.

I often say that academic results should be the consequence of a good education, not the purpose of it. For the vast majority of our pupils, engaging in musical activities, whether as audience or performer has nothing to do with the qualifications they might pursue. However, music is so much part of humanity and these experiences develop a broad cultural awareness. As a consequence, our pupils will be far more rounded individuals. Most importantly they will be having a positive experience that is fun, perhaps learning to enjoy something that they will take with them for the rest of their lives.



Sketches by Edward Scafe Scorfield (ON 1897-) who fought at Gallipoli.
c.1914-18. RGS Archive [Ref: 54]

DULCE ET DECORUM EST... TO CELEBRATE THE ORGAN

BY JO LAWRENCE (RGS DEVELOPMENT)

Issue 113 of the *ONA Magazine* celebrates the Organ Centenary.

This edition acts as a palimpsest of RGS history: from the young men whose carved names are quiet reminders of service and sacrifice; the keen desire to memorialise this sacrifice 'lest we forget'; to the shaping of the hall and the waxing and waning of the organ's condition. Our story continues to be written, layer upon layer, as we uncover details of those who are missing from the Roll of Honour. As the present doubles back, we carry history forwards.

The message *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* across the organ's facade has moved through several contextual iterations. The 'sweetness' of dying for one's country is contested ground. Originally, the Roman poet Horace uses this message in his odes to underscore the strongest personal bonds of ancient patriotism.

In 1915, Jessie Pope writes her poem *Who's for the Game?* which appears in *The Daily Express*. Its bold, provocative manner and timely patriotic zeal ('Who's for the Game? Who's for the game, the/biggest that's played,/The red crashing game of a fight?') is well-received by readers and critics.

In 1917-18 Wilfred Owen's poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* (Owen, 1917, 1921) depicts the visceral suffering and indignity of combat. The poem is written in direct response to Pope's *Who's for the Game?* with the

original manuscript's ironic dedication 'to a certain poetess'. Owen calls the phrase *Dulce et decorum est* 'The old Lie'. A serving officer, he is killed in action on the 4 November 1918: a refusal to see war as a 'game' and collude in 'the old Lie' does not preclude patriotism or duty.

In *The Novocastrian* of July 1917, the editorial suggests: 'It is going to be a task which nothing but a stern national will can carry through—a task which has long ago lost much of the "heroic" in the old sense which it possessed...'

New stock for the school library, catalogued in July 1918, includes Siegfried Sassoon's *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, every bit as affecting as Owen's poetry.

In June of 1923, Major-General Montgomery, unveiling the organ as a guest of the school, gives a short address in which he calls upon the boys to be... 'worthy of England and to take as their motto 'Play the Game'.

So many reminders of how the voices of our past are as diverse, as combative, as urgent as those in our present.

In *Last Post* (Duffy, 2009) written by Carol Ann Duffy, then Poet Laureate, marking the deaths of two remaining British veterans from WWI, she imagines a reversal of the story – a post-modern way of writing back to the past where:

'lines and lines of British boys rewind back to their trenches, kiss the photographs from home - mothers, sweethearts, sisters, younger brothers not entering the story now to die and die and die. Dulce – No – Decorum – No – Pro patria mori.'

We 'rewind' with the instrument that JJ Binns built all those years ago. We remember the names and stories of boys; we play the music that has led the community through darkness, swirled around our celebrations, stuck in our collective memories, and is happening whilst this is being typed, on a quiet Friday afternoon after school, as someone the age of those boys practises the organ.

Read more here.



THE GREAT BENEFACTOR

BY DAVID GOLDWATER (51-62)

Students at the RGS in Eskdale Terrace throughout the first half of the twentieth century swiftly became aware of the extraordinary role **Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland** held in the development of the school's campus.

With World War I raging and an Army Training Corps flourishing at the RGS, Sutherland gifted a rifle range, which ONs may remember was situated on the south side of the school field next to the Geography and Woodwork block. As Lord Mayor of Newcastle (1918-19), he became a governor in 1919, and in 1923, he and Lady Sutherland gifted the iconic JJ Binns organ, so much an integral part of the school's main hall to this day.

As a registered war memorial, the organ initially commemorated 160 Old Novocastrians who fell in World War I. In 1948, shortly after the Second World War, a further 116 names were added. In June 1923, at the inauguration of the organ he and his wife had donated, Sir Arthur, knighted in 1920, told the boys that he had

started life as an office boy on 3s/10d per week (19p) and they should never be ashamed to start at the bottom. Soon after the school song was introduced in 1925, the words 'Motherland, King and God, were substituted jovially with 'Sutherland, King etc...'

Sir Arthur served as ONA President (24-36), became Deputy Chairman of Governors in 1930 and Chairman from 1935 until his death. In 1930, at a cost of £20,000 (the 2023 equivalent of over £1.1 million), he gifted the swimming (Sutherland) baths, now closed and replaced by the ultra-modern facility on the opposite side of the field, but in its day an amazing pool. The following year, he provided the cost of the school crest through the College of Heralds. This is still in evidence around the school, though the modernised badge is

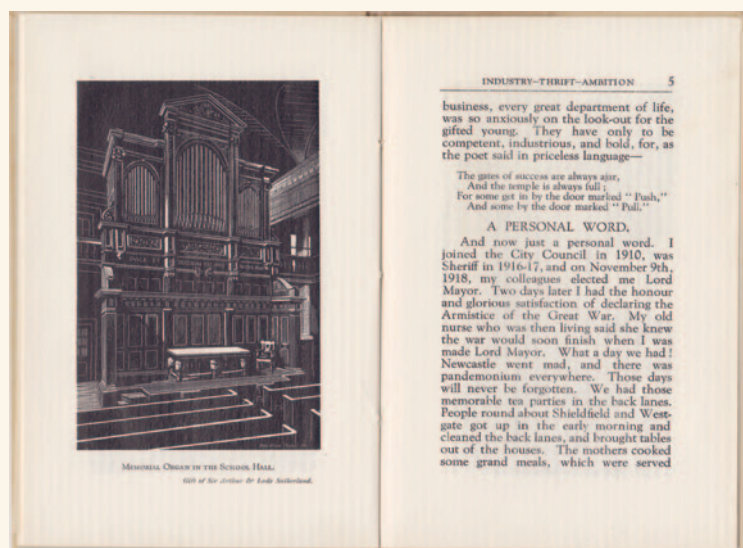


now widely in use. He funded a large gymnasium, which will be remembered by those who either excelled in strenuous exercise including boxing or, alternatively, suffered the tensions of the examinations regularly held there. An improved staff common room was also the result of Sir Arthur's generosity in 1936, as well as Sutherland Park in Benton, home of Novos RFC, purchased by the school with the help of a very low interest loan from his company.

Sir Arthur purchased Dunstanburgh Castle in 1919, investing large sums in its restoration before bequeathing the 14th Century gem to 'state guardianship' (now English Heritage). The nearby golf course in Embleton Bay was improved at his expense. He organised the funding of, and made the major contribution to, the city's principal war memorial in Old Eldon Square, unveiled by Earl Haig in 1923. Links with Scandinavia brought him an honour in 1936 from King Haakon VII of Norway – Commander of the Order of St Olav. After he was widowed in 1937, he married Ella Christensen, the widow of one of his great friends who was a former British Consul in Denmark.

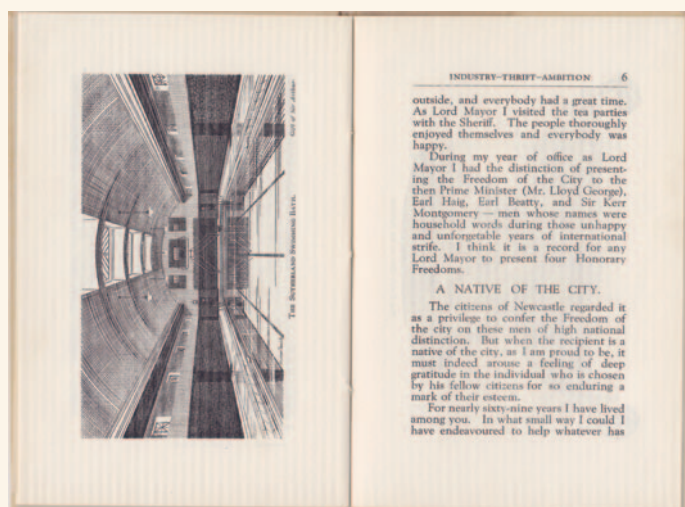
As well as Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland's generosity to the RGS, he donated very large sums to what was to become the University of Durham's King's College in Newcastle, establishing both the medical school (1936) at a cost of £200,000 (equivalent to £13.5 million today) and later the dental school at its original site at the RVI (1931) and still later, a larger building at Northumberland Road (1948). After a long and fulfilling life, Sir Arthur died peacefully in his sleep in March 1953 and was buried in Jesmond Old Cemetery, not far from his old school and family home.

One of the most prominent buildings associated with Sir Arthur was his home,



now the Mansion House in Jesmond, originally purchased by his father, Benjamin John. It was originally named Thurso House, reflecting the family's origins in northern Scotland. It was bequeathed to the city in 1953. In what is now the official residence of Newcastle's Lord Mayor, many original paintings and features remain to this day.

In preparing for this article, it was a fascinating experience speaking to William Sutherland, one of Sir Arthur's grandsons. He recalled visiting Thurso House as a boy and regularly receiving supplies of Jesmona Black Bullets (mint balls) from his grandfather. A significant member of the staff there was Mr Wallace, the chauffeur, who seemed to the young William to be forever polishing to a high gloss the motor cars AMS 1, AMS 2 or AMS 3. His other memorable task, recalled by William, was ensuring that all the clocks around the house struck at the



Pages from *Industry, Thrift and Ambition*, by Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland, 1936. RGS Archive.

same moment, according to Sir Arthur's wishes. Mrs Wallace ran the household and the couple were held by the family in such high esteem that Sir Arthur's will bequeathed them the right to remain in an adjoining cottage for the rest of their lives. The Sutherland sons and grandsons all attended The Leys School in Cambridge and in summer they would bring live lobsters down to Jesmond from Seahouses. William's father, Ivan Sutherland, farmed in Northumberland and William remembers his father's horror at being forced by his wife to don a suit for Sir Arthur's funeral in 1953.

For detail on Arthur Munro Sutherland's early life, see the article in *ONA Magazine* Issue 100, Summer 2017 *ONA 100* by RGS Newcastle - Issuu



SIR ARTHUR MUNRO SUTHERLAND PORTRAIT RESTORED

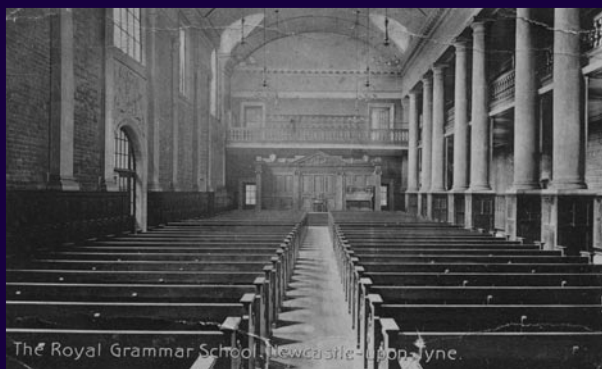
BY LOUISE PIFFERO ARCHIVIST

Many ONs will remember seeing the portrait of Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland on display in the main hall. Unfortunately, due to some water ingress, the frame was damaged and it was taken down. We can now happily announce that it has been carefully and beautifully restored to its former glory!

Conservation specialists undertook the painstaking cleaning and restoration of the frame, replacing missing sections and re-gilding. In the next issue of your *ONA Magazine*, we explore the restoration process and celebrate the return of our most generous of patrons. The portrait dates from 1931 and is by artist Howard Somerville (1873-1952). A 1936 copy of it is on display at Newcastle's Mansion House. The portrait will be back on display in school shortly – watch this space!

Portrait of Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland by Howard Somerville. 1931. RGS Archive. Photograph by Ruth Gibson.

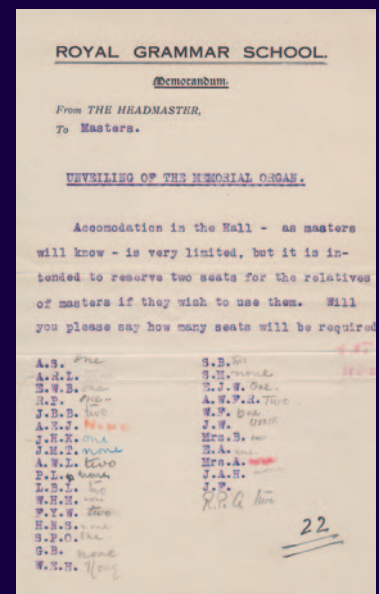




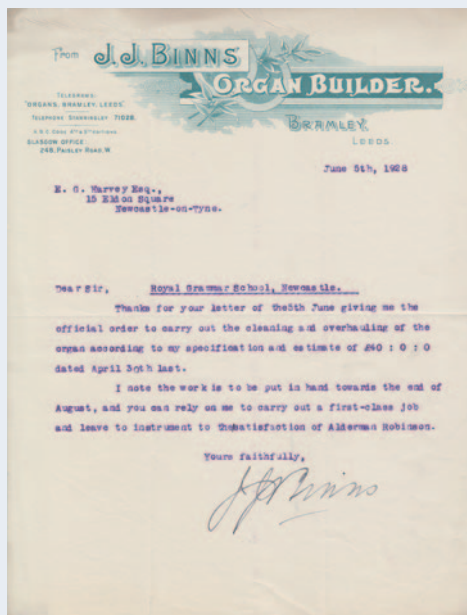
THE STORY BEGINS THE ORIGINS OF OUR ORGAN

BY **LOUISE PIFFERO**, ARCHIVIST (STAFF 21-PRESENT)
AND **MIKE BARLOW** (53-64, STAFF 79-95)

The Memorial Organ is at the heart of the school, watching over us during countless significant moments. It seems almost unbelievable that it hasn't been with us for our entire tenure of Eskdale Terrace and we were in fact 17 years without it.



Images, RGS Archives [left to right]: Page from the programme for the dedication of the organ ceremony, 1 June 1923. Postcard photograph of the Main Hall, without the organ, c.1910s. [Ref: 415] Photograph of the Main Hall during assembly, c.1930s [Ref: 150] Memorandum from Headmaster ER Thomas, sent to RGS masters regarding the organ unveiling ceremony. 1923 [Ref:790]



The devastating loss of so many Old Novos during World War I formed the beginnings of its story. Plans for commemorating the fallen at RGS were first raised at the May 1920 Governors' Meeting. Minutes from the time report on the completion of the written Roll of Service, a mammoth achievement by science teacher AR Laws (Staff 1892-1928), with plans to publish it. Governor Sir George Lunn, (1874-77, Governor 1928-39) also raised the question of a 'School War Memorial'. Discussions were then had between the then Headmaster John Talbot (Staff 1912-21) and the Old Novo community before it was decided to install an organ as a way of commemorating the fallen. The organ was generously funded by Sir Arthur Munro and Lady Sutherland.

It was built by JJ Binns, a prolific early 20th Century pipe organ manufacturer based in Leeds. The original company ledgers record that the order for the organ was placed on 2 September 1922, then completed on 2 May 1923. Every organ is designed to a set of specifications according to the sound the owner wants to make – different stops will make a different type of sound. Our organ was built to the specification of Alderman **Alfred James Robinson** (d.1930) (1865-1868, Governor until 1930), so the sound of our organ can be fully attributed to him. The architectural oak casing of the instrument was designed by Dunn, Hansom & Fenwicke and built by JR Rutherford & Sons. Woodwork teacher **Robert P Appleby** (Staff 1907-26) hand carved the panels with the names of the 160 Old Novos who died during WWI, as well as the inscriptions:

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori
It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country
hujus scholae alumni qui pro patria
decerant haud indecorae morti
occuberunt.

These are the pupils of this school who, fighting for their country, met no inglorious death
A.D. 1914-1918

An event to open and dedicate the organ was arranged for 1 June 1923 at 3pm. Students, staff, Old Novos and dignitaries were in attendance, as well as some families of those boys who had died during the war. We know who many of the audience were, as RGS Archives hold some original RSVPs for attendees.

Major-General Sir Robert Arundel Kerr Montgomery (1862-1951) was invited to unveil the memorial. During his visit he inspected our OTC (an earlier iteration of our CCF) as they gave a guard of honour outside of the front of the school. He remarked they were 'one of the best turnouts he had seen'. [Novo 1923]

Chairman of Governors, Sir Alfred Molyneux Palmer, Baronet (1853-1935) opened the proceedings, followed by Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland formally gifting the organ to the RGS. Major-General Montgomery gave a speech before pulling a cord to unveil the beautiful new organ, draped in Union Jack flags. The organ was

formally dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Newcastle Herbert Wild (1865-1940); Lay Clerks and Choristers performed the traditional hymn *Kontakion of the Departed*.

Now for the spectacular moment of hearing the organ for the first time.

The honour of playing the first ever piece was given to William Ellis (1868-1947) organist of Newcastle Cathedral. The piece was Chopin's *Marche Funèbre* (Funeral March). After a further organ recital, the event culminated with the *National Anthem*.

The organ as our symbol of remembrance continued after this prestigious launch in 1923. During the Second World War many more Old Novos gave their lives. A ceremony was held on 19 July 1948 to commemorate the fallen of 1939-45, with the dedication of a new memorial. The names of 116 Old Novos were carved into the organ panels and a new lectern unveiled. It had been designed by then Head of Art **Cecil Marfitt-Smith** (Staff 32-71), carved by woodwork instructor **Mr E Johnson** (Staff 39-48) of Penrith. Both would have taught some of the boys that gave their lives. The organ and the lectern now form our enduring RGS war memorial.

William Lough (1922-33) vividly remembered the installation of the organ, and his words ring true: 'The organ was a splendid acquisition. The hall became visually and musically unthinkable without it'.

Above: Letter to RGS from JJ Binns, organ builders, regarding cleaning the organ. 5 June 1928. RGS Archives [Ref: ER Thomas Papers] Below: Photograph of the Main Hall, c.2008, by Nick Posner (75-85). RGS Archives [Ref: 160]



GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

CONTINUING TO TRACE THE FALLEN

Research into those who have fallen whilst on active service continues, with key discoveries made from WW1 and WW2.

The ON community continues to support this work by providing information on individuals caught in conflicts post-1945. If you have a story to tell, or even the start of some research you have embarked on, do get in touch to let us know. The organ's roll of honour ensures that those who lost their lives in conflicts since 1918 are remembered as servicemen. The Archive ensures that they are also remembered as schoolboys. Letters, anecdotes, photographs and research from staff and ONs through the years have pieced together the stories behind the names and ensure the remembrance of our people in relation to world events.

RGS 1st XI Cricket Team, 1915-16. RGS Archives



Charles Montague Davison died of wounds in April 1918. His battalion chaplain writes: 'He was one of the most loved of our officers...some of us called him 'The Prince.'



NEW NAMES FOR THE ROLL OF HONOUR

BY **LOUISE PIFFERO**, ARCHIVIST (STAFF 21-PRESENT)

In recent months, David Goldwater has been offering his invaluable help with researching a Roll of Honour for those Old Novos who fell during World War II. During his research, he found a number of individuals who had not previously been included on our Roll of Honour and are therefore not on the Memorial Organ. We have also found this to be the case since reviewing our WWI Roll of Honour. The 15 new names to be added to our Roll are:

WWI

Gordon Kent
Boyce MS MacKenzie (Staff)
Alfred P Parmeter
Francis RB Parmeter
William A Pritchard
George Robinson
Sayed M Shehata

WWII

James R Askew
Charles B Marshall
Basil V Robinson
Kenneth A Robinson
David Stringer
Harry Waggott
Geoffrey H Walker
Ernest A Walker

A huge thank you to David for his exceptional work on this project.

RGS Old Novos Lost in Service Since 1945

This information came to us via a call-out in the *ONA Magazine* Spring 2021 [Issue 109] – see this issue for full details. Thank you to those who contacted us with these details.

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Details
Peter Michael Hoare (47-52)	1936	20 June 1967	Warrant Officer II with the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. Killed in an ambush in Aden.
Graham Miller Young (45-55)			CSM of the Army Section of the CCF. Served in the British Army in Germany. Killed in a vehicle accident probably in the very late 1950s or very early 1960s. Notes from Register: Prefect. Entering RMA Sandhurst in Sep 1955

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

A note from the editor

We rightly commemorate those who gave their lives in all conflicts. We should also consider those who chose not to. With no compulsory military service in Britain until 1916, the introduction of conscription is accompanied by a significant counter-narrative. Approximately 16,000 British men recorded as Conscientious Objectors during WWI; this figure rose to around 62,000 men who applied for CO status during WWII, when a different system of assessment was introduced and a wider range of alternative work was found for the men.

Given these numbers, there will have been those within our community who felt very differently about war. One such ON was **Bill Cuthbertson** (28-35 Staff 47-74). In an article in the *Novo* (p9-11 Autumn 1974) written on Bill

Cuthbertson's retirement, it becomes apparent that 'Having taken his Finals in June 1940, he registered as a Conscientious Objector, but a growing awareness of what was at stake and of the nature of the Nazi treatment of civilian populations led to his joining the Army in 1941'. The National Archives and the Imperial War Museum hold fascinating collections of those many unheard voices.



If you know of anyone who made the choice not to fight or who felt moved to object even after serving, do get in touch.

BITTERSWEET MEMORIES

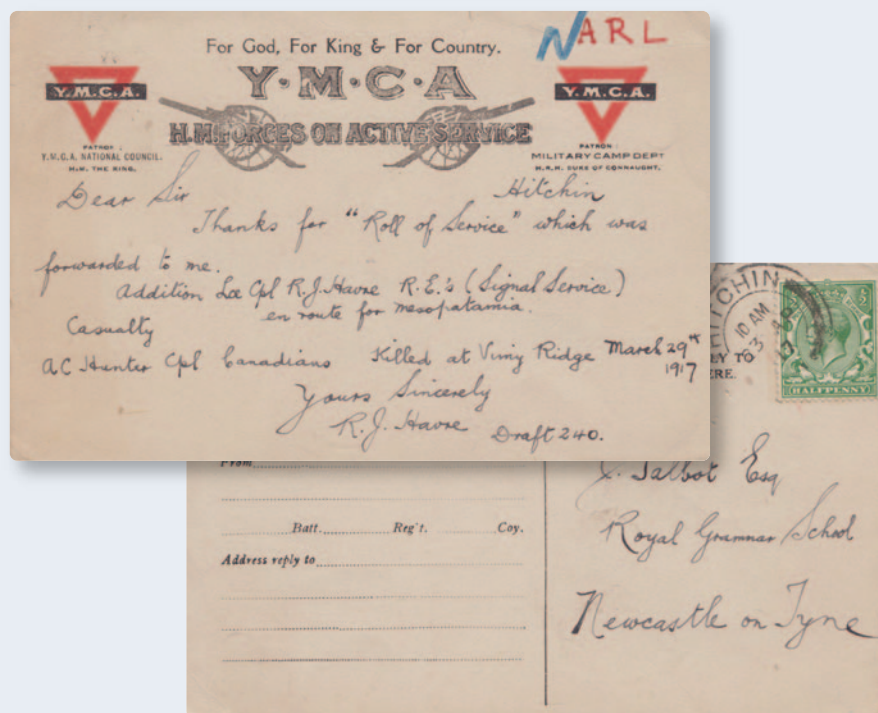
BY **DAVID GOLDWATER** (51-62)

‘Bittersweet’ might be an appropriate adjective to describe the feelings of many who attended the opening of the memorial on 1 June 1923. Here is one reply to the invitation from the parents of **Bertram Paget Ord** (entered school in 1905) and who was killed at Ypres, France on 2 October 1915:

Very many thanks for the Memorial Volume which you so kindly sent... I regret, however, that neither my wife nor I will be able to be present on the occasion of the dedication of the organ. It is nearly eight years since our boy was killed, but very little suffices to make it seem as though it were only yesterday. It would be too painful for us to attend. Very many thanks for your kindness,

Yours truly, Bert. Thos Ord.

Amongst the 283 names commemorated, there are some particularly poignant examples of individual loss which blighted so many families with sadness mixed with excruciating pride. Fifteen further names have been discovered by Louise Piffero and myself and hopefully will be added to the Memorial. Old Novocastrians served in both wars in the three services, including the new Royal Flying Corps and across every theatre of war. Here are a few examples picked at random:



WORLD WAR I

ALEXANDER FREDERICK BOOKLESS

(1910-15) joined as a Private in the 7th Northumberland Fusiliers in August 1917. He went overseas in April 1918 and was taken prisoner near Rheims a few weeks later. He died of dysentery in the Trelon Military Hospital on 10 September 1918, aged 19 years.

WILLIAM ALWYN PRITCHARD (1902-?)

Enlisted as a Private in the 3rd Batt. Northumberland Fusiliers in January 1916. He was wounded at the battle of the Somme in July 1916, and in November 1917 was gazetted Second-Lieutenant in the 3rd Batt. Durham Light Infantry. After the fight at Mont Kemmel on 26 April 1918, he was missing and the authorities have concluded that he was killed on that day. He was at the time attached to the 1st Wiltshire Regiment. On that same day, his brother, **Major Ralph Broomfield Pritchard** (also entered school on the same day as his brother in 1902), 27th Batt. Northumberland Fusiliers, died of wounds received in action. He [Ralph] had been awarded the Military Cross in 1916 and the DSO in 1918 and was twice mentioned in dispatches.

GEORGE RUSSELL BROWN (1909-12),

enlisted in September 1914, received his commission in the Northumberland Fusiliers a month later, and in November 1915 was ordered to join a battalion of his regiment at the Dardanelles. After serving for some time on the Suez Canal, he was in France in 1916 with a Trench Mortar Battery, and during the attack at Mouquet Farm was wounded and invalided home. In the following year he was again in France and served with his regiment in the fighting at Passchendaele Ridge and Cambrai. He attended a Lewis gun course at the base and returning to his regiment, served with it near Arras until February 1918, when he was killed while in command of his company. ‘He was a jolly good pal,’ an officer writes, ‘one of the very best, with ever a cheery word and a smile when the ‘dumps’ were prevalent.’ Among the men he was best known as ‘Old Cucumber’ on account of his coolness when under fire.

Postcard sent to RGS from Old Novo R.J. Havre, regarding both his and AC Hunter’s military service. 1923. RGS Archives [Ref: 54]

ARNOLD COLTMAN HUNTER (1903-?)

Emigrated to Canada after leaving school. After a period on a farm, he joined the Royal North-West Mounted Police for three years. When the King's proclamation of war (August 1914) reached Canada, he enlisted in the 152nd Batt. Canadian Infantry and was promoted to Sergeant. He reached France on the 16 February 1917. His last entry in his diary states: '28th March 1917. Practising going over to-day and left for trenches at 6 a.m.' He was killed the next day, 29 March 1917, near Villers-au-Bois in the Pas de Calais. His commanding officer writes: 'Although he had been with the company but a little time,' (he had been transferred to the 46th Canadians) 'I had come to regard him very highly. No task was too unpleasant, and everything he did was done cheerfully.'



WWI Medals awarded to Old Novo Arthur Lawrence Hunter (1903-09). RGS Archives.

A Note from the Archivist

SAYED MAHMOUD SHEHATA (1910-1911)

Sayed Mahmoud Shehata was born in Benha, Egypt, in 1893. It is unclear when he relocated to the UK, but he attended RGS between 1910 and 1911. Shehata was in the RGS rugby team in 1910, and there is a photograph of him with the team in the Archive. He left school in July 1911 and became an agricultural student. He was studying at the University of Reading. In the 1911 census, he is living as a boarder at Percy Park House, Tynemouth with another student. He is recorded as an 18-year-old Agriculture student. A few years later, on 9 July 1914 he left the UK from the Port of London, on a P&O ship Morea bound for Port Said, Egypt. He is recorded as 21 years of age, and an 'Agriculturalist'.

The next reference found on Shehata is sadly a record of his death, on 12 January 1919, 11:45pm. He died at sea on the ship Assaye, at Alexandria. HMHS Assaye was a hospital ship during this time period. He died of malaria. His occupation is recorded as Private in the Camel Transport Corps. He would have been only 26 years old.

The Egyptian Camel Transport Corps

Egypt was declared a British Protectorate in December 1914 and during WWI was part of the British military force in areas of conflict in the Middle East.

Two Egyptian Corps were set up in 1915 – the Labour Corps and the Camel Transport Corps. Most of the Camel Transport Corps recruits served in

Palestine. Although they were non-combatants, they were very close to the action on the front line and experienced high levels of casualties.

The Camel Corps were mainly involved with transporting water, food and medical supplies to the front, namely in Palestine, across the desert landscape. Between 1916 and 1918 there had been 170,000 Egyptian volunteers in the Corps, and 72,500 camels used.

The Fallen of the Camel Corps are commemorated at a special memorial in Giza, Egypt. It is at the Giza Eye Hospital and bears no name but depicts the work of the Corps in a bronze plaque. It is estimated between 10,000 to 50,000 men of the Labour and Camel Transport Corps died during World War I, but there was unfortunately no accurate record made.

and smoke which filled the cockpit, Wing Commander Robinson saw no hope of bringing the fire under control, and therefore ordered his crew to abandon the aircraft. While preparing to follow them himself, the fire abated. Undeterred by the difficulty of the flight which involved crossing the Alps and flying many hundreds of miles over enemy occupied territory, Wing Commander Robinson continued alone, completed the return journey, and landed his large four-engine aircraft successfully in this country despite adverse weather, accomplishing a most praiseworthy and skilful feat of airmanship. He was subsequently promoted to Group Captain and appointed the station commander at RAF Graveley. He died on the night of 23/24 August 1943 near Wensickendorf, Germany when his Halifax HR928 was shot down by a night-fighter during a raid on Berlin. He is buried in the Berlin 1939-45 war cemetery.

WORLD WAR II

GEOFFREY HERBERT WALKER DSC

(1924-28). Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. He was in command of HMS Bluebell when it was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine U-711 on 17 February 1945 off the Kola Inlet (Russia) in position 69°36'N, 35°29'E. His death is commemorated on Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

BASIL VERNON ROBINSON (1925-27)

Flight Lieutenant 1938; Squadron Leader 1940; Wing Commander 1941; DFC 1941; DSO 1942; Group Captain 1943 and Bar in 1943. One night in November 1942, during an operational sortie against Turin, this officer displayed great gallantry and determination when a dangerous fire broke out in his aircraft. Owing to the intensity of the flames

CHARLES BERESFORD MARSHALL

(1909-12) had, during World War I, fought with the 4th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers in France throughout 1917 and was twice wounded. During World War II he was killed on 23 February 1944 in an air raid on London whilst in service in the RAFVR at RAF Shepperton. He is buried at Shepperton Church Cemetery, Sunbury-on-Thames.

JAMES ALEXANDER HARPER (1919-24)

A prefect at school. After gaining his MBBS at Medical College in 1933, he practised at Carshalton in Surrey. He served as a Captain in the RAMC (Medical) XI 1924. Sadly, he was killed on the very last day of the war in Europe on the 8 May 1945 and is buried at the Brugge (Bruges) General Cemetery, Belgium.

THE BRITISH VICTIM OF THE CAMBODIAN KILLING FIELDS

JOHN DEWHIRST (1952-1978 ON 62-63)

PAUL HAGGIE (60-67)



The Sutherland Organ is a fine tribute to the members of the school who lost their lives in the two World Wars. But, as the present conflict in Ukraine reminds us daily, not all victims of war are service men and women. Indeed, in recent wars, military casualties have represented a small fraction of the overall loss of life.

This article recalls the fate of one civilian casualty, a young man who attended RGS briefly in the early 1960s and who, some fifteen years later, died at the hands of the short-lived but spectacularly brutal regime of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. His name was John Dewhirst, and his is a poignant story of what happens when a group of young people seeking fun and adventure fall into the hands of one of the most inhumane regimes ever to disgrace the planet.

John was born and brought up in Jesmond, the son of a local Headmaster, and attended West Jesmond Junior School before entering RGS in 1962. The following year the family relocated to Cumbria.

Here he attended Appleby Grammar School, enjoyed sport and outdoor pursuits on the Cumbrian fells and developed an interest in poetry and literature. From Appleby he won an English scholarship to Loughborough where he completed a degree in Education with English. His desire for adventure and his ambition to be a writer led him to Japan in 1977, to teach English in Tokyo. Whilst there, he also worked on contract as a headline writer for the Japan Times, the country's oldest and biggest English language newspaper. He was, by all accounts, an engaging, popular, laid-back young man.

In January 1978 he quit his teaching job to go travelling, telling a friend to whom he entrusted some of his belongings that he would return to Tokyo in a few weeks 'after having some fun'. He sailed to Hong Kong and visited several other Southeast Asian countries before arriving in July at the Malaysian port of Terengganu. There he met up with two other adventurous travellers, Canadian Stuart Glass and New Zealander Kerry Hamill, who co-owned a

small local sailing boat, the Foxy Lady. Shortly thereafter, the three men set off in Foxy Lady for Bangkok. At this point, they vanished.

At first, their families and friends were not too concerned. But as time passed, worries mounted. And when Stuart Glass failed to keep a pre-arranged rendezvous with his girlfriend, alarm bells began to ring. I was working in the British Embassy in Bangkok at the time, and I well remember the Consular Section trying without success to establish what had happened.

It was not until early in 1979, after Vietnamese forces had invaded Cambodia and overthrown the Khmer Rouge that the fate of the three men was established. Foxy Lady had been blown off course while transiting the Gulf of Thailand and was seized off the Cambodian island of Koh Tang by a Khmer Rouge patrol boat on 13 August 1978. Stuart Glass was shot and killed during the seizure; John Dewhirst and Kerry Hamill were taken to the notorious S-21 Detention Centre in Phnom Penh where they were tortured and forced to write false confessions that they were CIA agents. Then they were murdered.

News of John Dewhirst's fate, along with that of eight other western yachtsmen including Stuart Glass and Kerry Hamill, first broke in wire service reports at the very end of 1979 and in a substantive article by the American journalist Jim Laurie on 4 January 1980. A further article a week later by US photojournalist Ed Rasen gave more details, including photographs and extracts from John Dewhirst's 'confession'. The latter is a mix of genuine background and fantasy designed to appease his captors.

It is hard to imagine the depth of loneliness and mental anguish that John Dewhirst suffered in his final days at S-21. But there is an odd postscript to his story which demonstrates that, even in such dire circumstances, he remained both calm and memorable.

In 1999, the Administrator of S-21, who went under the nom de guerre of Comrade Duch, was tracked down by Bangkok journalist Nic Dunlop. Subsequently Nic and US journalist Nate Thayer interviewed him for the Far Eastern Economic Review. One of their questions was whether Duch recalled John Dewhirst. A long shot, you might think, since Comrade Duch had overseen the torture and murder of at least fifteen thousand people at S-21. But Duch did indeed remember John Dewhirst, more than a decade after his murder. He was, said Duch, 'a very polite young man'.

DECADES OF DUST!

RESTORING THE RGS ORGAN TO ITS FORMER GLORY

BY **LOUISE PIFFERO**, ARCHIVIST

The organ has not always been in as glorious condition as it is today.

In the first few decades of its existence, it would have been played daily during morning assembly. After the departure of Director of Music Jack Wolstenholme (Staff 48-75) it was played much less often, perhaps twice a week. Sadly, by the 2000s, the organ had fallen into a state of disrepair. Though time had taken its toll on the organ, it was not to be forgotten, and the instrument's future owed much to ON Mike Barlow (53-64).

It was not to be forgotten about though and the organ's future owed much to ON Mike Barlow (53-64). Mike learnt to play the organ whilst at school in the 1960s and continued to perform as an adult. Mike has recounted his involvement with the restoration for us.

Around 2008, Mike and schoolfriend Les Brunton (57-64) were trying to help with the upkeep of the organ in their spare time. Mike was then volunteering as CCF Officer, which he had done since 1979. They were able to get access inside the organ and were astonished by the thick layers of dust in there. It needed a lot of work.



He was asked by then Headmaster **James FX Miller** (Staff 94-08) to investigate the options and costs involved with restoring the organ. The impetus came as the school wanted to give a talented current student the opportunity to play it. Mike got an assessment and report from the organ builders John Lightbown & Sons, giving the full details of the physical condition. They found from their records that the pipework and soundboards hadn't been properly cleaned since 1973 – no wonder the dust was inches high!

One of the main tasks was to replace the leather on the motors, as this had not been done since it was installed in 1923. The pipework and soundboards required a thorough cleaning, and the drawstop actions needed to be restored. It was a massive and costly task, but a necessary one to ensure the longevity of this important part of RGS history.

The full restoration occurred over three stages. The first step was to replace the leatherwork, which meant the organ could be played again.

A wonderful concert was held to mark the occasion on 27 April 2012, part of the Jesmond Community Festival. **Brian Varley** (55-63) returned to the school to accompany the choir on the organ for Faure's *Requiem*, a piece he had played 50 years earlier as a student in December 1961. This concert was also held to pay tribute to departing staff member **Neal Parker** (Staff 99-12), who had been Head of Performing Arts and Director of Music since 1999.

The second stage of repair work commenced after the concert, supported by then Headmaster **Bernard Trafford** (Staff 08-17) and Bursar **Richard Metcalfe** (Staff 99-17). This was completed by summer 2013 and meant a WWI Commemorative Concert could be held on 1 May 2015 with the organ at its heart.

On 30 May 2014 the organ was awarded Grade II listed status by the British Institute of Organ Studies. This means it



Images courtesy of Mike Barlow

is considered to be 'an instrument of importance to the national heritage and one deserving careful preservation for the benefit of future generations'.

The final stage of restoration was to re-gild the pipes and the names on the war memorial panels, which was generously funded by Old Novo **David Mole** (56-61) and completed over Summer 2018.

Remembrance Day in 2018 was a particularly poignant occasion, in that it marked 100 years since the end of World War I. During the service the organ was rededicated by the Reverend **W Roy Large** (48-58).

All this painstaking work has been hugely rewarding for the school. For the last decade students have had the unique opportunity to learn and play the organ so its legacy can continue. It has been heard at annual Remembrance services and momentous historic events, such as the concert to mark the late HM Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. The use of more durable materials in the repair and regular servicing will make sure future generations can benefit from this important instrument.

‘THE SOUND OF THE ORGAN... IS AS SUBSTANTIAL AS THE COMMUNITY WHICH SURROUNDS IT’

DURHAM UNIVERSITY STUDENT AND RECENT ALUMNUS

ALEX ADAMSON (14-21) LOOKS BACK ON HIS TIME
AS RGS ORGAN SCHOLAR.

I remember my first introductory day at RGS in Y7 before term officially began. Dr Trafford was giving a welcome assembly and the entire year group was sat in the main hall. As I listened, behind and above his figure was a great wooden structure on which I noticed curious words stamped in gold. It sparked amazement and an appreciation of the magnitude of where my entrance into higher education began. Once term started, the year group discovered that the structure was, in fact, an organ. At that time, having rarely heard one, its musical impression on me was small: during my first two years, the organ was never played or, if it was, few were present to listen. However, I admired its scale, for the organ was always visible from the corridors through which I walked every day. Near the beginning of Y9, the then Head of Music Mr Fazlic introduced me to Mr Peacock, the organist at St. George's Church in Jesmond, and they agreed I should be taught to play.

Lessons took place every Saturday morning at St. George's. When I sat at the console for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised to discover the pedals of an organ are arranged in the pattern on a keyboard. I thought that the transition from three pedals on the piano to a few dozen on the organ would be hugely problematic: surely it must be difficult to coordinate hands and feet so precisely? However, I was as pleasantly surprised to learn and play pieces with no such difficulty; it 'clicked' instantly. During my time at school, I was extremely musically



active; playing the organ at school was unique, unlike my other musical activities, as nearly no one else I knew played it. It was always fascinating as there was something new to discover every time I sat at the console. There are many composers – hundreds – and so it was musically and intellectually rewarding to play new pieces. When I practised the organ after school, the smiles and compliments from teachers whom I esteemed indicated that after a long day, some light music was very welcome.

Every organ is a complicated instrument to play, and the school organ is no exception. As well as the pedals, it has two manuals (keyboards): the Great and the Swell. Each has various stops; a stop connects a manual or the pedals to a set of pipes from which sound can escape. The pedals have four stops, the Great has seven, and the Swell has eight. Therefore, the organ is versatile and is able to produce a range of sound qualities: some stops, like the Dulciana Mixture and the Super Octave, provide

light, high-pitched sounds that imitate birdsong; some stops like the Harmonic Flute and the Octave deliver piercing notes that announce thematic melodies; others like the Open Diapason create a warm, inviting sound. The best features of the organ in my opinion are the couplers: these connect the manuals and pedals to each other. A full, rich texture can be achieved with all the instruments sounding in unison, and the music resonates throughout the entire hall, every corner enveloped by sound. An aspect of playing which I particularly enjoy is the accompanying of a choir when they sing Christmas carols; it is for me a highlight not only of organ playing, but of the season as well.

One of my favourite pieces is the *Menuet Gothique* by Léon Boëllman; it is a marvellous piece on even the smallest organ. However, I also find it impossible not to be stunned when the hymn *Jerusalem*, whose musical arrangement for the organ is by Sir Hubert Parry, is played on an organ that is truly colossal.

The organ is a magnificent symbol within the school. Instantly recognisable, its towering stature leads those in the hall to gaze up in awe. The sound of the organ using the couplers is as substantial as the community which surrounds it. The academic standards at school are as high as the top C of the Super Octave, and the ambitions of its students are as lofty as the inscribed expression I saw on my first day. The height of one's aspirations at RGS is reflected by the vastness of the construction of the organ, as the height of achievement by the richness of its sound.

BACK TO BACH

MIKE BARLOW (ON 53-64 STAFF 79-95) SHARES HIS MEMORIES
OF THE ORGAN WITH ARCHIVIST LOUISE PIFFERO



My grandfather played the organ, my father the piano, so from any early age I had an awareness of these instruments. My family moved up to the North East when I was a child. We joined our local church in Ponteland and sang in the choir, which was always accompanied by the organ.

When I started at RGS I was aware of the organ as a daily feature of assembly. The Head of Music then was Jack Wolstenholme. He played a voluntary when students were getting seated for assembly, then one or two hymns.

I started piano lessons at school and always had a wish to play the organ. But we weren't allowed to learn organ until we could play up to Grade 5 standard on piano. I first played the school organ during Fifth Form. By the time I was in Sixth Form I had also been persuaded to play the organ regularly at St Thomas's Church (the university church) in the Haymarket on a Sunday, after the main service.

The hardest part of playing the organ is learning how to coordinate what your hands and your feet are doing! I had lessons every Saturday morning, followed by First Orchestra practice at Ilam, where I played violin. I never played the organ in concerts at school – both **Brian Varley** and **John Hastie** were the ones I remember playing in various concerts. I remember hearing Brian Varley play Fauré's *Requiem*, and that enthused me to learn to play the organ.

When I left RGS I went on to Queens' College, Cambridge. There, I was one of several assistants to the Organ Scholar and played regularly for the College Chapel.

Something Jack Wolstenholme said to me that stood out: 'You should learn as much as you can [on the organ] before you start work or get married, otherwise you won't have time to practise'. And he was right! It takes a long time to learn new

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The hardest part of playing the organ is learning how to coordinate what your hands and your feet are doing!

pieces, so you end up 'regurgitating' pieces you already know.

When I moved back up to the North East after university, it was back to the same parish that I had grown up in. I was the parish organist at the church there for 20 years, playing for a lot of weddings and such. I often played Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*.

I maintained contact with Jack Wolstenholme after I left school. I actually went back to him for organ lessons around 1969 as I wanted to keep it up. We did this at a church that used to stand at the top of Eslington Terrace in Jesmond. When I got married in 1970, Jack played at our wedding, which was held in my parish church. When he sadly passed away, I had the honour of being invited by his family to play at his funeral service (on 28 January 1988).

In more recent times I went on to help restore the organ after it had fallen into disrepair, alongside Les Brunton. We were determined to make sure it was looked after and kept being played.



IN CONVERSATION **BRIAN VARLEY**

His return to school for a guest appearance at the Organ Centenary Concert gave us a chance to catch up with ON organist **Brian Varley** (55-63). He speaks to a member of the Development team about his lifetime's musical journey.



I suppose I'd had a musical upbringing and attended a little Methodist chapel. I started learning to play the piano when I was six and was eventually asked to play for Sunday School, and if there were absences, for the service. There were some Damascene moments: one was in 1953, the year of the late Queen's coronation and there was a big 'do' in the City Hall in Newcastle, which all the primary schools attended. An excellent organist at the time played *The Hornpipe* from Handel's *Water Music*. I was completely bowled over by the sound of the organ.

Brian receives the Priestman trophy from Peterborough Cathedral organist, Stanley Vann.

Was that the first time you'd heard it played in such a way?

I think it was the first time I'd heard a big organ. Then I got a scholarship to the RGS when I was 11 and initially sang in what was known as the Treble Choir; there were concerts where the orchestra would also play – either in the first or second half. Another seminal moment I remember was that the orchestra played the overture to Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. It was the first time in my life that I'd ever heard an orchestra; it was a mind-blowing experience.

So, school really was a trip-switch for those first musical experiences?

Yes – really for all sorts of things. I suppose the organ was often associated with church music of one kind or another and the assemblies here had the character of a church service. The prefects were expected to read the lesson which meant that you stood up in front of eight or nine hundred lads and hopefully made a good job of it. When I was 14, the lady who taught me the piano gave up and there was the opportunity to have organ lessons at school, which I took. There were four of us generally who went on a Saturday morning for half hour sessions, which Jack Wolstenholme would teach. If you look on the organ console to the left-hand side, you'll see the burns from his cigarettes. They're the stuff of legend!

The truth was that Jack was asthmatic and couldn't breathe until he'd had his first smoke! He was also a very kind but exacting man. I had opportunities to play the organ in school concerts and one of these was repeated in the City Hall with the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra instead of the school orchestra, which was Benjamin Britten's *Saint Nicholas*. Apart from it being quite an experience for me, the union man in the orchestra insisted that I was paid Musicians' Union rates and so I got forty quid for playing – which was about three weeks of my dad's wages – a lot of money in 1960 or thereabouts. So, there were all sorts of opportunities and Jack also inspired my love of choral music, particularly from the Renaissance – and I've run several choirs over the years.

When I was at Oxford reading Chemistry, I had four years of organ lessons with a teacher very different from Jack. I would say he was not so good a musician but a better technician. After the four years at Oxford, I went to teach Science at the International School in Hamburg and sang in the city church choir; I was a little overawed really, because at 23 or 24 you

really think you're rather clever and I met not just one organist but many who could reel off the most incredibly difficult stuff which I didn't play. Later in my career I joined the Boots company in Nottingham and we lived in nearby Southwell. I was given free access to the cathedral organ there. I used to play the voluntary once every two weeks in the cathedral, which was good for me because there would be at least 20 people in the congregation who would know if you made a mistake; playing with the cathedral organist standing behind you meant that you really did sort things out! I did a lot of playing and performed a recital there in 1980.

Do individual organs have an identity, do you think? Their own idiosyncrasies?

Oh, they do, yes. The RGS organ is typical of an organ built by JJ Binns and it has a very bold sound – you haven't got ten million stops but it really makes a nice noise. It's enhanced by the wonderful acoustic in the school hall, which I think is one of the best places I've ever sung in live – it's lovely – a lovely location and because it's up off the floor as well, it has an advantage. On the swell organ, there's a 16-foot reed which gives a sort of thrilling sound when you use it.

When you first learned, was it important to use your feet and to think in a slightly different way?

Certainly, in the music book there were pedal exercises until you got used to where the pedals were and you weren't allowed to look at your feet. You'd have a book across your knees to encourage you to feel rather than see. There were manual exercises at the same time but the big thing about playing the organ, which is a difficulty, is to get independence between your left hand and your feet. Say if you were playing a hymn: normally, if you play it just on the manuals, the bass part would be in your left hand. Now, you've got to get used to playing the bass part with your feet (school scarf tied round your knees to prevent you looking between them!) the tenor and alto with your left hand, then the treble part with the right. You just have to work at it. Suddenly, after several months you think 'Ah – yes!'

How do you think the school community as a whole viewed the organ? Was it important to people who weren't musicians?

Although they wouldn't stand or sit in silence, people were aware that the organ was being played and it was making rather a wonderful noise – there would be something like *Toccata and Fugue*.



The RGS organ is typical of an organ built by JJ Binns and it has a very bold sound – you haven't got ten million stops but it really makes a nice noise.

Which were the pieces that were loved the most?

Probably a couple of pieces by a composer called Karg-Elert which Jack played, also the famous Bach *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* along with a whole range of Bach's music.

And what about hymns?

At the end of my last term, *Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing* and on Trafalgar Day, *Eternal Father, strong to save*.

What would you say to someone now who was thinking about organ lessons – who was may be standing looking up at the organ with no idea of how to start?

Just go and do it! You won't be a star in three weeks – you can't do that...

What is the trajectory in terms of time? To become proficient?

You would need regular lessons – and you would need to practise in-between three or four times, which means access to an organ. Fortunately, when I was here, I used to go across to Jesmond Parish Church in my lunch time. Jack tried to get me to do an RCO Diploma and I decided, before I was too old, that I was going to do it. You have to be able to write as well as play – part of a string quartet for example – so it gave me an idea of things that I'd only had an inkling of before. I did the Diploma and got it the third time – when I was 59.

'I THINK THE ORGAN MUST HAVE SEEPED INTO MY CONSCIOUSNESS'

DR WILLIAM ROY LARGE (48-58) DESCRIBES TO US
THE PART PLAYED BY THE ORGAN IN HIS LIFE – AND THE PART
HE PLAYED IN ITS OWN RE-DEDICATION FOR REMEMBRANCE 2018.

I think the organ must have seeped into my consciousness; I became fascinated by it... I came from a musical family – my father played the flute and piano and my mother played the piano and sang – my paternal grandparents were involved with music. I would have come across the organ at the church we used to go to and I knew as soon as I had the chance I would want to play. I still have the primer that we used and I was fascinated by the organ. I'd already had piano lessons – not at the school – so of course, as soon as I could, I immediately asked for organ lessons. I must have been about 13.

Did you learn to play feet first?

Yes! Here in the primer there are... [turns to the page] exercises for the free use of the ankle joint! So, you work your way through that and Jack Wolstenholme has written 'plenty of ankle movement!' and 'practise away from organ!'. You had to keep your eyes up – you were meant to play with your feet without looking. Some contemporary composers can be fiendishly difficult, with four-part chords in the feet sometimes, so you're not getting one note at a time, you've got clusters of chords. It's a physical challenge as well as a musical challenge. I used to practise at Jesmond Parish Church round the corner – I knew the organist at that stage and had access to the organ – it was a large, four manual organ which is rather like the one at St George's, Jesmond. So, lessons were at school, I used to practise at JPC and then on a Friday I used to practise at the Church of the Divine Unity in Newcastle: three different kinds of organ.



Do they all feel different to play? Is it a very different experience?

That's a huge question! Organs vary enormously and you have a range of organ builders who have their own style and character. Now, Binns built the JPC organ and one for the school. Binns tended to go for a big sound; here, the purpose of the organ was to accompany large numbers of boys singing so it had to be quite robust. One thing I do remember particularly liking was the tune

Thornbury which we sang with *Thy Hand, O God, Has*

Guided. At the end, the concluding bars are actually for the organ, so you heard it over or independently from the singing. The other thing I remember is Jack Wolstenholme playing the organ before assembly; a lot of things he played were what I subsequently went on to play. Perhaps once a term he would play Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue* as the masters all processed in. As soon as they were in, the Headmaster, who was Mitchell, of course, came straight in and Jack [usually] stopped playing. When he played the *Toccatina and Fugue* if he hadn't got to the end, Mitchell would stand just out of sight; he used to wait until the playing had finished – just for that particular piece.

Did the playing affect the way people behaved generally?

Well, there were always masters on the platform – usually the Second Master as it was in my day, and they stood to make sure everyone was behaving. I remember distinctly on one occasion a master who was notoriously bad-tempered; there must have been a boy who was talking or misbehaving and he FLEW down from the platform to stop him. So, the organ music might have had some sort of calming effect – but in those days you didn't misbehave in the presence of senior masters!

What did you end up enjoying the most about playing?

I suppose accompanying – I'm not a soloist – you have to know how to play pieces at the start and finish of the services. After I left school, I took lessons for two or three years, then I got a job as a lecturer at a College of Education and I really didn't take any more lessons after that, although I did occasionally play in the college chapel. Funnily enough, it wasn't until I was retired that I started lessons again with a very different technique! But I've helped out and deputised.



This organ has a very distinctive case and I suppose that awareness came later. Of course, Dulce et Decorum est is emblazoned across the front and in my head...!

How was it that you ended up being invited back post-restoration?

It was known that I was ordained and that I was an old boy of the school – and also that I was an organist, so with all those things put together...

When you were at school, do you think there was a general awareness that the organ was a war memorial?

For me, primarily, it was a musical instrument. I think I became conscious of the architectural element gradually. This organ has a very distinctive case and I suppose that awareness came later. Of course, *Dulce et Decorum est* is emblazoned across the front and in my head...!

What part do you think an organ plays in where in a multi or non-denominational society?

As the liturgy has changed, the location and positioning of organs has changed. And organs are not just in ecclesiastical buildings. There's one in the City Hall, for example. In terms of the role of the organ, it has a place in concertos and symphonies – one thinks of the Vaughan Williams' *Sinfonia Antartica* and then, of course, as a solo instrument. At one time, the organ was sometimes used in place of an orchestra; in the old Town Hall in Newcastle, between the Bigg Market and the cathedral, there was a concert hall with a three manual organ which was used to accompany choirs because it was cheaper to pay an organist than the separate orchestral musicians. This disappeared as people became more aware of the need for musical authenticity. At Newcastle University in the King's Hall, there is now an organ – a French organ very much in the 18th Century tradition – used for recitals and some choral works by the Bach choir. So, there are many, many uses for the organ in a secular environment and in a school as a teaching instrument. It needs to be a situation where people hear it played – it's not a private thing – and that's how you become inspired to learn.

What really stays in your mind from school days?

The school choir was established and their purpose was to sing an anthem, gathered in the gallery. We used *The Oxford Easy Anthem Book* and that was an innovation; we practised once a week and sang on a Friday morning. I also had to play for an assembly once. There was another boy who used to be called upon to play if needed, but on one occasion Jack Wolstenholme was ill and the other boy was unavailable, so when I turned up at school – I was 17 – I was asked to play. The hymn was *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* which I know by heart. It was the most unnerving experience!



SPOTLIGHT ON DOROTHY LIU

(2019-PRESENT)

We caught up with L6 student Dorothy Liu to find out how and why her journey with the school organ began.

How many years have you been playing?

About five years. My piano teacher was also a church organist.

How did you manage with the transition from piano to organ?

Well, it's practice makes perfect! When you learn the spacing of the keys on a piano keyboard, your fingers know where to go for a note and that's the same with your feet on the organ – you have to let your feet learn that spacing – that distance.

What are your ambitions?

To continue playing the organ in a church setting whilst moving on to study Computer Science at a university. Maybe I will become a part time organist at some point too!

Do you prefer accompaniment or solo performance?

They're both enjoyable in different ways. Solo performances allow me to add my own interpretations and emotions into the piece, while accompaniment is interesting because you have to pay a lot of attention to listen out for the choir. You need to adjust to their pace and also prompt them to sing. For example, the introduction to a hymn needs to suggest the pace, remind them of the tune and lead them into singing.

Which particular memories of the school organ will you take with you?

I really like the texture of this organ. I have played on organs in church and at home and this one is my favourite, since the keyboards and pedals aren't too stiff or too light. One of the lower keys doesn't work properly and one stop doesn't pull out, but you learn to work with the imperfections!

I think I've always been aware that the RGS had an organ, perhaps from the Open Day I attended when I was in Y7. I was surprised, because I thought I could only find an instrument like that in a church or a cathedral. I was even more amazed after finding out that it was playable and not just a decoration.

THOUGHTS FROM AN **ORGAN SCHOLAR**

BY **WENDY DENG**,
RGS ORGAN SCHOLAR (2019 – 2023)





I remember my first lesson vividly. I had wanted to play the organ since joining the RGS in Y9, so when I was offered an organ scholarship along with the date of my first lesson, I was over the moon. I remember climbing up to the organ stool and finding it really tall. I had a play around on the organ first, learning about what sounds the different stops made and having a play around with the pedal, of course. One of the things I find interesting about the organ at the RGS is how the acoustics work. The organ isn't located in a chapel but in the main hall, the heart of the school. It is also the first organ I've ever played that has the organist positioned on the balcony without their back to the congregation. The RGS main hall is structured like a chapel but is bigger, so practising alone when it's empty, it's interesting to see how different the sounds are where I'm seated, and where people might walk past in the corridors. I think the organ is the best instrument because every organ is unique. **When I'm playing, I'm not only playing the set of keyboards or using the registrations that are available on the organ, I am also playing the building. I love how differently I have to register the same piece on different organs.**

I started learning the organ when Covid regulations were still not fully lifted so I didn't know how it felt to play in a hall full of people until much later. We used to have virtual assemblies and I played the organ in some of them where I would be streamed. Although it wasn't playing to a real audience, it was still scary but exciting to play on such a big, loud instrument. The first main event I've played on the RGS organ was for Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee assembly, where the benches were filled with students and there were teachers and speakers standing at the side. The main hall was full and it was the first time I'd ever heard the organ played in a hall of people.

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When I'm playing, I'm not only playing the set of keyboards or using the registrations that are available on the organ, I am also playing the building. I love how differently I have to register the same piece on different organs.

More recently, I've played a solo piece and accompanied the orchestra and choir on the organ for the organ centenary. It was the first time I'd played with an orchestra, although I couldn't hear exactly what the congregation were hearing. Due to the unique positioning of the organist on the balcony and the choir being almost directly underneath where I was sitting, it was an interesting situation, as the sounds of the organ and the singers were coming from almost the same place. This posed a slight challenge for me as it was hard to tell how well the sounds were balancing. It's often been a two-man job, with my friend running up and down the stairs and telling me how the organ sounds from the position of the congregation! It was a fascinating experience as I got to feel how the organ provides support for the orchestra. I think the most important thing I've learned from this experience is that it is so important to learn to 'breathe with the orchestra'.

One of my favourite bits about practising on the RGS organ is that sometimes you have friends or students from lower years approaching you and asking about the instrument. I find it very fulfilling to introduce them to the organ.

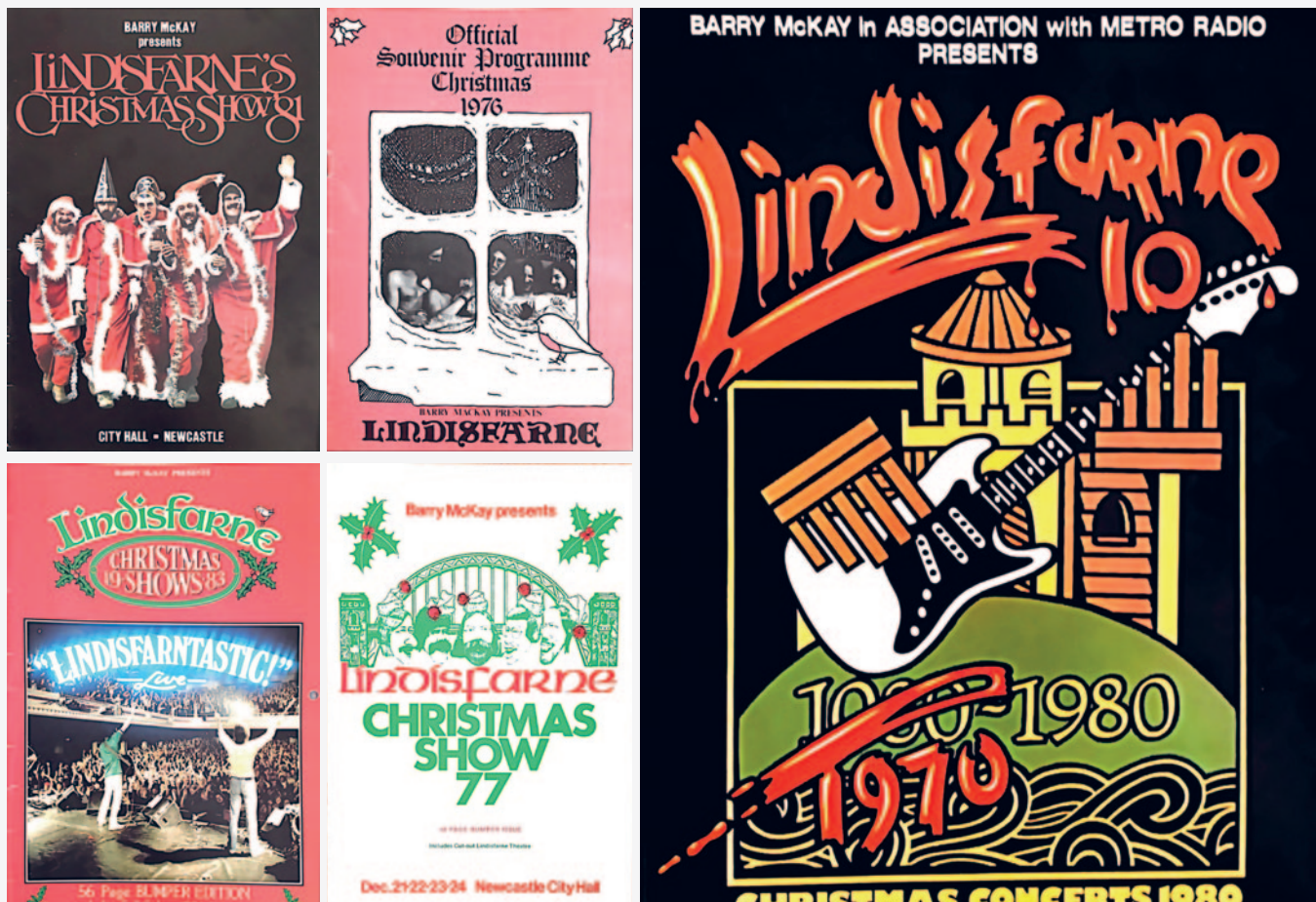


‘I ALWAYS HUNG BACK UNTIL THE VERY LAST NOTES FADED AWAY’

BY **BARRY MCKAY** (68-73)

Barry McKay was able to give us a truly unique view of the RGS organ’s influence on celebrity culture. Little did he know that hanging back to hear the last notes of his school organ would inspire the flair and drama of iconic Lindisfarne concerts at Newcastle City Hall.





Lindisfarne ephemera used with kind permission of Barry McKay

It was the RGS music department and the school organ played by Jack Wolstenholme, that influenced the choice of organ music at around 135 performances by Lindisfarne at Newcastle City Hall, and at hundreds of their other Christmas Shows around the UK.

I started promoting popular music concerts at Newcastle City Hall back in 1971 while I was in Lower Sixth. Jack Wolstenholme's masterful and at times dramatic organ performances so influenced me that when I organised the first ever Lindisfarne Christmas Shows in 1976 I had the band walk on to Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor*. This was belted out at high volume on the City Hall organ by Russell Arthur Misson, who was the Organist and Master of the Choristers of Newcastle Cathedral. Bach's *Toccatina* was preceded by Widor's *Toccatina* from *Symphonie No. 5* (another Jack Wolstenholme special) during the build-up to the band coming onto the stage. The two pieces went down so well they became a tradition, playing at every single Lindisfarne Christmas show for more than

a decade. Christmas at the City Hall meant the audience in party hats, a large Christmas tree, and 200 audience members sitting behind the band on the stage... and once Widor's *Toccatina* started everyone present knew that the party was about to begin. Had I not been a pupil at RGS and influenced by JW, I would never have heard the wonderful Widor's *Toccatina*. Whenever JW played it – be it at end of Speech Day or on the RGS organ – I always hung back until the very last notes faded away before leaving. JW never knew I was a fan... and he never forgave me for giving up trombone lessons at RGS and going in a different direction. I couldn't stand attempting to play the trombone, much preferring guitars. In 2013, when Ray Jackson and I resurrected the Lindisfarne Christmas show following the unveiling the previous year of the Alan Hull memorial plaque at Newcastle City Hall, we of course brought back the very same organ music. Sadly, the Newcastle City Hall organ was by then in such poor condition that we ended up with somebody in black tie sitting at the organ,

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At the Bach climax, we put a spotlight on the imposter who then exploded, vanishing in a plume of stage smoke and staged explosion... and Lindisfarne were straight into their first number.

pretending to be playing, in true Dr Phibes style. At the Bach climax, we put a spotlight on the imposter who then exploded, vanishing in a plume of stage smoke and staged explosion... and Lindisfarne were straight into their first number. A few RGS boys from my class of 1973 were back in 2013 for the show including Jonathan Dunkley (63-73) with his family, and Christopher Topham (63-73) with his wife Debbie. In fact, it was at a Lindisfarne City Hall show that Chris first met Debbie, who was performing on stage with a troupe of Morris dancers. Happy days.

EMOTION RECOLLECTED

IN TRANQUILLITY

Back in April, we called upon the wider RGS Family to reminisce about their experiences of the organ whilst at school. These are some of the responses. It's been a delight to read and share them: thank you, ONs.

“

I well recall entering the RGS hall for the first time, in January 1968, to sit the entrance exam and being completely in awe at the sight which awaited me. As an 11 yr-old from a small Northumberland state primary school and who attended our local Methodist chapel each week, my only experience of buildings such as was laid out before me had been when visiting the likes of York Minster! In addition to the throng of hundreds of other small boys, the spectacle of the organ which dominated the space was really quite intimidating.

“

Highlights of my time in the choir, as well as the bonus of being allowed to skip a lesson each week as we rehearsed the hymns and anthems, was the lovely anthem *Lead Me Lord* and Mr Wolstenholme's rendition of the Widor symphony, in which he really put the organ through its paces! Those days were so important for me and have left an enduring impression on my memory.

“

As a senior prefect I was usually on duty at the start of the school day and would chat with Jack [Wolstenholme] while he warmed up the organ prior to assembly. I asked him if it only played solemn stuff, or could it play Blackpool Ballroom? Jack rose to the challenge and launched into a spirited rendition of *I Do Like to be Beside The Seaside*. Unfortunately, the organist has only a partial view of the hall and I had omitted to tell him that most of the school was already assembled. His recital was received with loud applause.

“

I have within me the bass line of many hymns all learned in the choir there. In those days, O-Level music was not available and A-Level only for the specially gifted. But I sang Handel's *Messiah* there and not only once. Good, strong memories with much gratitude.

“

Les Brunton (57-64) tells us: 'Yes, I know a little bit about the school organ... I know it is a very good instrument by Binns of Leeds, particularly valuable as it survives in pretty much 'as built' condition and to the original specification. My involvement nearly 20 years ago was in the initial inspection and cleaning prior to the partial restoration undertaken by John Lightbowm. This started with an approach from Mike Barlow (53-64). He assembled a small team of volunteers (mainly fellow engineers) who spent several grubby Saturdays in the deepest interstices of the organ, cleaning, assessing and detecting air leaks and faults. We were also helped by Brian Varley (55-63) who has played the RGS organ for decades now.



Drawing courtesy of Commander Phillip Newell (81-86)

“

I remember the school organ well from this drawing I did in 1984-85. From it the school motto has stayed with me through 30 years in the Royal Navy.

“

Burland Jacobs (44-49) writes: On entering the RGS in 1944 I found myself sitting in the front pews of the main hall ready for assembly. The masters would walk from their Common Room and proceed in single file to stand in front of the lockers. The Headmaster, Dr ER Thomas would enter from a side door, mount the steps in front of the organ and the assembly would commence. If my memory is correct, he would, on a Monday morning, announce the weekend rugby results as the ‘football’ results which I initially found bemusing.

As the years rolled by and I progressed through the school I sat further back until on my final day I was at the very rear of the main hall singing *Lord, Dismiss Us* from a blue covered hymn book. This hymn made me finally forcibly realise I would be departing from a safe and pleasant place to an uncertain world. In fact, it was not long after that I found myself in basic training as a national serviceman. There a drill instructor on occasions informed me and others around me in a loud voice that he was not impressed by our attitude or performance in a form of language not heard at the RGS. My training and experience gained as a member of the RGS CCF certainly eased this passage of basic training.

“

Dr David Carr (54-62) recalls the powerful fireworks of a fugue and the lasting pleasure given by playing:

The organ at the RGS remains on the official list of British war memorials. The motto it displays - ‘Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori’ – is perhaps less fashionable today but is a poignant reminder of its time.

The organ’s main purpose, certainly during 1954-62 while I was a pupil at RGS, was to accompany singing each morning before lessons at assembly. Usually, the whole school of about 600 would join with the choir to sing a hymn, or occasionally a psalm. As organs go, the instrument is a small one, with only two manuals and pedals, 19 speaking stops, seven couplers and a tremulant. However, its well-chosen specification, its voicing, and its commanding position in the school hall meant that it served its purpose admirably.

A bonus, provided in my time at RGS by Mr Wolstenholme (‘Jack’), Head of Music, was the daily organ voluntary played as the school gathered for assembly. The music would often be a work by JS Bach, Mendelssohn. or Brahms, but occasionally perhaps by Arthur Milner (a respected composer in Newcastle and previous head of music at RGS). A particular favourite was Bach’s *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*; this tended to overrun slightly. The headmaster would be compelled to wait before starting to lead the assembly until Jack had got through the fireworks at the end of the glorious fugue, and the applause that followed!

I was fortunate to have organ lessons at school; these took place in the otherwise empty hall on Saturday mornings. Jack would typically stand somewhere along the upper balcony, probably smoking and leaning over the rail, from where he would call out encouragement or criticism as I played my scales and set pieces. I am so glad I had those lessons. I never took any exams in organ-playing – this was at my request and Jack never insisted. My A-Level studies were in science and my career was in medicine, but now retired and in my 80th year, playing the organ remains one of my most abiding passions and pleasures.

“

When I was in the second form at morning assembly the Head was dissatisfied with our singing of the school song. He handed over to Mr Wolstenholme, who spent the next half an hour ensuring that we would not disappoint the Head ever again. Our efforts improved from a lethargic dirge to a rousing and uplifting whole school chorus backed by Jack on the wonderful organ.

Fortiter defendant triumphans



More memories can be found on the RGS website here.

A MOVE TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD, SEVERAL MUSICAL HATS LATER AND AN ORGAN CALLED NORMA...

RGS ORGANIST **DAVID BURCHELL** (74-84) TELLS HIS STORY



Apart from public schools with their chapels, very few secondary schools possess a pipe organ. I consider myself greatly blessed that not only does RGS boast the historic war memorial instrument, but that my school career (74-84) coincided with that of **Martyn Lane** (75-90), inspirational Head of Music whose enthusiasm both for the organ and for choral music led me into a varied career centred on just these facets of music.

Early in my childhood I heard someone playing the organ one Saturday while passing through the RGS hall with my father Howard Burchell (Staff 66-99), and I was immediately attracted. A budding pianist by the time I arrived at RGS, I was soon playing the piano at junior school assemblies, and after I had progressed to the senior school – on a bus returning with the school choir from singing at Carlisle Cathedral – Martyn Lane asked if I'd like to learn the organ.

The RGS organ makes an impressive centrepiece for the hall, but its location is hardly convenient for practice, and I had to wait until about 4.30pm when most people had left for home before unlocking the rather unwieldy lid of the console. Exam season made for an even longer wait, as the Plender Library was used for A-levels until 5pm; I may have unwittingly provided musical accompaniment to the last half-hour of at least one paper! I also practised on Saturday mornings, before or after attending orchestra practices with my violin. The organ had a few quirks, including one loud stop that shut off very slowly, with a curious doppler-like effect if you continued playing. For a while Martyn taught me alongside with **Martin Cooke** (82-89); my younger brother **Andrew** (76-86) also had organ lessons from **Frank Bowler** (75-83).

My first public organ performance at RGS was at a school Open Day, and I went on to perform items in orchestral concerts – then held in the hall – and to play hymns at Wednesday assembly (my first attempt being a very turgid *Lord Jesus, think on me*); at Founders' Day and carol services in Jesmond Parish Church; Britten's *Noyes Fludde* in St Nicholas' Cathedral, for the



choir's visits to Bristol; Carlisle cathedrals and the Malverns; and the Max Planck Gymnasium in Gelsenkirchen. The third German trip was memorable for my first floral bouquet, after a concert including Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb* in the large adjacent church, which I accompanied from an organ sited a considerable distance from the choir.

Soon after I'd started learning, the school was treated to a performance in assembly by **Tom Mohan** (70-77), who had won an organ scholarship to Oxford. It became my goal to follow in his footsteps. When I was about sixteen, Martyn Lane arranged for me to have bi-monthly lessons in London with David Sanger – the solo journeys by train were a bonus! I auditioned for Oxford in the September following my A-levels, the last year of 'seventh-term' entry for Oxbridge and won a scholarship to New College. This absolved me from sitting any exams, so I spent the rest of my last term at RGS doing morning prefect duties, developing my skills as a conductor with the choir, and going off to practise the organ elsewhere. The following summer my parting gift to and from the RGS was to play and sing solo (in Spanish!) on the choir's LP carol recording.

At New College I accompanied and conducted the professional chapel choir of boys and men, recorded eight CDs as organ accompanist, and we toured Europe alongside top-level instrumental groups such as the Academy of Ancient Music; somehow, I also obtained a degree. I then spent a year working for organ-builder William Drake and later assisted with several organ installation jobs alongside research work towards a thesis.

Cutting a long story short, since 1999 I have lived in Dunedin, New Zealand, where I currently wear several musical hats, including Organist and Choir Director of the Catholic cathedral and Director of the City Choir, and I perform as City Organist on the fabulous Town Hall organ 'Norma' – an instrument of almost identical vintage to the RGS memorial organ, though significantly louder!

THE RGS BOAT CLUB

SCOTSWOOD, SUMMER 1961

BY **PETER ROBINSON** (54-60)

The life of ON **Geoff Wilkin** (54-61) was celebrated in the last edition of the *ONA Magazine*. **Peter Robinson** (54-60) provided us with some additional memories prompted by a group photo of the RGS Boat Club.

Peter explains: **Geoff was Captain and Secretary in 1960-1961 at just the moment the club was facing uncertainties ahead. The old Scotswood Bridge and the boathouse itself were about to disappear.**

Geoff Wilkin (Captain and Secretary) is seated centre front, flanked to our left by an unidentified cox with trophy (possibly **Donald J Skinner** 59-62) and **Joe Liddell** (Vice President, Staff). To his left and our

right are **Jimmy Nichols** (Vice President, Staff 50-86) and **John Dunstan** ((58-61) - cox, with a second trophy). Left to right on the second row are: **Geoffrey Ford** (54-62), **Keith Shotton** (52-63), **David Carr** (54-62) and **Roger Elphick** (51-61), with **David Guy** (58-62), **David Parkin** (51-61) and **Neil Hill** (51-61) left to right on the back row.

Rowing brought individuals together from groups and years who might not have otherwise met. So, the club was a mix and it presented a welcome opportunity to take a closer look at the Tyne. The boathouse – a converted tram from recollection and little more than a shack – was just beside the former Scotswood Chain Bridge. A downside was that the river was filthy. We kept our special kit there, including old plimsolls too unwholesome to take home, while exposing ourselves to a lifetime's worth of improbable infections.

Geoff represented the school many times as a coxed four crew member, moving

round the north-east regatta circuit on summer weekends, enjoying the company of other local rowing clubs and occasionally succeeding against generally older and stronger crews. His report of the 1961 regatta season, a snapshot in time and coinciding with the photos, is worth reading in full, published as it was in the *Novo*. Read more by scanning the QR code below.

My thanks to Louise Piffero for tracing the report and to rowing survivors David Carr, David Parkin and John Dunstan for identifying individuals.



Boat Club A and B Crews with Vice Presidents Joe Liddell and Jimmy Nichols. Probably summer 1961





OVER ANCIENT WAYS

EDWARD WATSON (57-67) DESCRIBES
THE ADVENT OF THE RGS ROMAN RUN IN 1990.

In the spring of 1990, I was invited by **Richard Best** (57-66) to join the team of Old Novos in a race against a team of staff/parents from the Palace of Westminster in London to the Gateshead International Stadium.



I was initially reluctant as I was running in the London Marathon late in April, the preceding month and I may not have fully recovered. On reflection I decided to accept the invitation, bearing in mind the two charities that we were supporting, namely Barnardo's and the school (towards the refurbishment of the old swimming pool, where I sent many 'happy' hours training) and that it would be damned good fun! Paul Ponton (Staff 71-09) had proposed the initial concept, and the route was refined by Jon Punshon (Staff 82-96) along former Roman roads: so, the Roman Run emerged. Gerry Keating (Staff 72-04) was the captain of the Staff/Parents' team and Howard Gold (56-62) of the Old Novos' team.

The two teams of 12 runners set off from Newcastle in minibuses in glorious weather, which was a feature of the weekend. We overnighted in sleeping bags on the floor of the gym of Mill Hill School, North London. The race was started early next morning 5 May 1990 by Tim Kirkhope ON MP (now Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate) outside the Palace of Westminster. The teams were split into early and late shifts and ran in total for about 15 hours to Sleaford, staying in The King's School, Grantham. Due to logistical problems both Paul Ponton and I had to run double shifts (in total about 20 miles), which left us rather tired. Someone unkindly took a photo of me at the end of my second session wearing only my fluorescent yellow running shorts, which for obvious reasons is not reproduced here!

Pages from the Roman Run programme and certificate, May 1990. RGS Archives [Ref: Acc 0167]

On the second day we ran up to Helmsley in a similar time and hot conditions and stayed in the Catterick Garrison with hospitality of Lt-Colonel Peter Durrant (60-67), a school contemporary. It was great to catch up with him. His staff were not at all perturbed by our request for a very early breakfast at 4am.

On the third and final day we ran up to the Gateshead International Stadium, where we had a tremendous welcome in the late afternoon. An event had been arranged for all, including parents, boys, staff, Old Novos and friends. Anyone was invited to run four laps of the tartan track for £1 and then receive a Roman Run Certificate. David, our son, had just been accepted for the Junior School the following September and received his certificate with great pride.

For the record, the Old Novos team won the race by a mere 17 minutes.

I must confess that I have little recollection of all the details of the run but have thoroughly enjoyed the research necessary prior to writing this article, including a review of the *Souvenir Brochure* (sold for 50p) and discussions with old friends Paul Ponton, Howard Gold and Melvyn Wallhead (56-66).

I do remember the tremendous bond between all the runners, and their bond with the drivers and others throughout the whole event. Without their support we would have been unable to complete the challenge and raise considerable funds for our two charities. And it certainly was damned good fun!

STOP PRESS! At the end of September, Chris Purdon got back in touch to tell us a grainy video of a part of the run was found in his attic. There were rumours of the full-length version with a printed inlay sleeve possibly being uncovered. Keep in touch with our social media to find out what happened next!

ON Chris Purdon (69-80) also remembers the run vividly, adding:

In recent years I've donated my Roman Run vest and shorts to the Archive and the certificate that everyone (including friends, families and RGS pupils) was presented with for running a mile around Gateshead track where the run finished.

The finish of the run at Gateshead Stadium on one of the May bank holiday Mondays was covered by Tyne Tees (or possibly BBC) on their evening news. We participants were also given VHS videos of the event. The two teams on the race were RGS Staff versus ONs. The ONs won by minutes, which was actually very close over a total race distance of over 300 miles. I have more memories of the run, including cycling about 120 miles along the course on the Saturday and arriving very late at The King's School, Grantham on the Saturday evening. Another is running over the North Yorks Moors at about 5.00 or 6.00am on the final Monday morning (we had to be up early to run to Gateshead in time). I was quite alone and the sun was coming up; it was absolutely glorious and one of the runs that sticks in the memory.

This year I am celebrating 50 years of competitive running, which started in September 1973 when Gerry Keating formed a cross country team for us First Formers (11-year-olds) to race against other Newcastle schools. I haven't stopped since!

FEET FIRST

INTO THE FUTURE

SIXTH FORM STUDENT **TIGER LI** (22- 23)
TALKS CATHEDRALS, CHOIRS AND ORGAN TLC



Tiger described the background to his study of the organ – he was a pianist and a Durham Cathedral chorister from the age of eight, with rehearsals morning and evening and music at the heart of the day at The Chorister School.

The start of Tiger's love for the organ began with the inevitable but significant breaking of his voice. Whilst having to negotiate different territory while singing, he began page-turning for the organists of the cathedral; the inevitable fascination with this most unique art was to become an absolute passion. Organ lessons started aged 13 and Tiger was soon to learn that an organist is not necessarily a pianist. 'They're very different instruments,' he says firmly. The act of playing is intensely physical, and the organ is a dynamic space, with adjustable benches and extremely active feet; this is where, Tiger says with a grin, his teacher started him in a bid to 're-wire' the co-ordination required for maximum dexterity.

What are the most important skills needed to accompany a choir?

So, the key skills are to never stop playing – under any circumstances – and to understand the general shape of the music so that if something goes wrong you can hop back on. You're on a continuous train and you can't stop! Also, to understand the emotions and the nuances of the music. If I'm performing, I mustn't play robotically, just prioritising the right notes; I have to adapt what I'm playing to the different phrases that are being sung.

So, you learn to manage the instrument in many different contexts. What do you enjoy the most?

Well, it's quite specific but the thing I enjoy the most is accompanying psalms; although it's quite repetitive the text is different for every verse, so you can play the same music but change the interpretation, adapting the registration to reflect the tone. Also, as a chorister, my favourite thing was singing the psalms, so I really enjoy playing them and keeping that connection.



Because the RGS doesn't have a long tradition of choral or church music, how do you feel the organ fits into that slightly hybrid environment? It's not a 'church' organ.

I think the organ serves more of a purpose in school as a celebratory instrument and a symbol of unity. Obviously, it's a memorial but it's also something that brings people together – every end of term assembly, every Christmas service, the organ is at the beginning and end as a unifying force and also a celebratory fanfare. People recognise: the organ is being played – this is the whole school sat down for an important assembly.

So, you might think that it's a sort of 'clarion call' for other students who may not register the organ on a day-to-day basis but recognise it as a symbol of some kind of family gathering?

Yes. When the organ starts playing, there's the hush and people are quite aware of it. I've recently noticed younger people from different year groups playing too. I think they're having lessons and more and more people are taking it up – I didn't notice that when I first joined.

You have a whole wider world opening up for you because you're involved with the community and not just the school. What does the future look like?

I've decided not to study Music at university but I'm definitely keeping the organ up and I'm applying for organ scholarships as part of my university applications. I want to be involved with music-making, although it doesn't have to

be choral music. Many of the universities have very beautiful organs with only a few people playing them and it would be really nice to make the most of that. There are many courses and opportunities, and I would say the organ is becoming more popular because of social media. I know this is quite strange as there's a tendency to think that the organ might be dying out but because of organists showing their work on social media – there's a very famous organist called Anna Lapwood who's at Cambridge – this has broadened the appeal of the organ and made it more accessible to all.

You know that the organ has been a memorial and has had an interesting trajectory since its installation. Do you think about it as a war memorial or have we moved away from that message of *Dulce et Decorum Est*?

I think that it is important to honour and respect the dead, but I also believe that the sentiment of *Dulce et Decorum Est* is divisive. We can offer organ recitals and a music programme which allow the organ other ways of being integral to the school.

What do you think you'll remember about that particular organ? Presumably all the instruments you play are slightly different – what will stick in your mind as you move on to greater things?

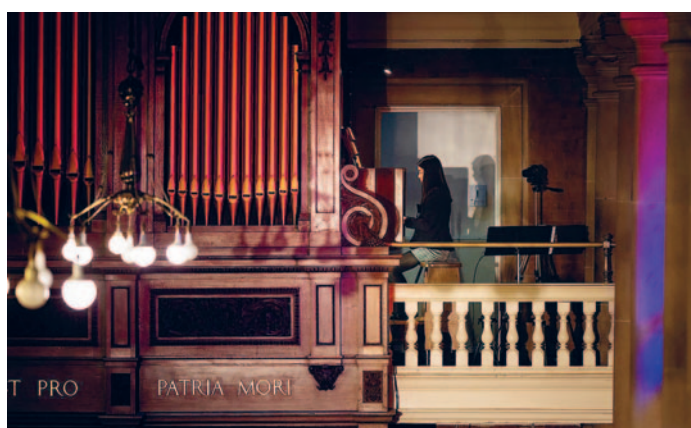
I think the organ we have here is historic; it's actually been given a 'listing' and it's the same builder as the one at St. George's in Jesmond. I'll remember it for its historic value, the weight of the keys – it's got very nice action so when you're playing, it's very tactile – and I'll also remember a few of the stops not working, so maybe it needs a little TLC! You have to learn to work with what it offers.

I'll certainly remember it.



THE ORGAN CENTENARY CONCERT

Heralding the start of our organ centenary celebrations, the organ memorial concert embraced those who have a range of investments in hearing it played. As Archivist Louise Piffero and **Mike Barlow** suggest in their introduction to the programme, 'The Memorial Organ is at the heart of the school, watching over us during countless significant moments.' This was such a moment, with **Brian Varley** making a guest appearance alongside Sixth Form organists Tiger Li, Wendy Deng and Dorothy Liu, guardians of the Sutherland legacy.



We opened with the brass ensemble and Dorothy performing two pieces from Susato's *Danserya*; the bright start of a regimental tambourine and brass on the balcony was followed by the warmth of the organ's steady bass. Brian Varley then addressed the audience, outlining his own trajectory as an organist, both at school and throughout his career. 'Just look up at it,' he urged, describing the instrument's beauty and its power over him as a young boy 'completely enthralled' by Jack Wolstenholme's use of the pedals. Brian spoke touchingly about Mike Barlow and his regrettable absence from the concert, citing his fellow ON as an 'inspiration'. The music continued with Wendy Deng's piece from Bach's *Fantasia in C Minor*, graceful hands conjuring high, melancholy notes, followed by Tiger Li's choice of Louis Vierne's *Cortège* from *Pieces en Style Libre* first published in 1914. Tiger's absorption in this bold piece culminated in a resounding last chord, moving us into the traditional remembrance territory of *O Valiant Hearts*, the hymn originally sung at the organ unveiling ceremony in 1923. Contemporaneous ON William Lough 'recall[s] the sound of that sad hymn' beautifully echoed by the RGS community choir nearly 100 years on.



Dorothy Liu harnessed the organ's power into Bach's pacy, playful *Prelude and Fugue in C Major BMV 553* and was followed by a change in mood with Brian Varley's performance of extracts from *Organ Sonata no.2* by Gustav Merkel, with a full spectrum of sound and musical texture leaving the hall reverberating. It was the perfect moment for Sixth Former Joe Wright to marshal the audience with the thunderous words of Kipling's 1896 *Hymn Before Action*. Spoken with dignity and passion, the closing lines 'Jehovah of the Thunders/Lord God of Battles, hear!' set the tone for the opening bars of Karl Jenkins' *Choral Suite* from *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace*. The low, sinister start of the *Kyrie* progressed to the *Sanctus*, *Hymn Before Action*, *Agnus Dei* and *Benedictus*, depicting the full panorama of war. Performed by the RGS Symphony Orchestra, the Senior and Community Choirs, accompanied by organist Wendy Deng and cello soloist Daniel Johnson, we were reminded through the vitality of this music that, although the organ's epigraph *Dulce et Decorum est Pro Patria Mori* is part of our history, the playwright Bertolt Brecht's riposte that 'It is sweeter and more fitting to **live** for one's country' is a good message for our future.



MY BURSARY STORY

Many of you will remember reading the bursary journey of Organ Scholar **Katy Silverman** (06-08) in issue 105 (Spring 2019). Katy says: 'I applied to study Music at Oxford University and gained an organ scholarship at Worcester College, something I don't think would have happened without the great teaching and support I received at RGS... I am so grateful to all of you who support the RGS Bursary Campaign, as I really believe that my time at RGS has changed my life.'

Read the full story here.





WHY I GIVE

PETER S WALKER

A REMARKABLE JOURNEY FROM RGS TO PIONEERING ORTHOPAEDICS, AND HIS ENDURING LEGACY

In July 2023, **Peter S Walker** (52-60) returned to the RGS with his wife Wuliang, a 'fleeting' 63 years after he departed the gates of Eskdale Terrace bound for Cambridge.

Peter and Wuliang are already honoured as 'Fellows of the RGS', in recognition of their support of the RGS Bursary Campaign. But the purpose of this visit was to view the progress of their more recent support, funding essential repairs and maintenance to the oldest – and most cherished – parts of our building.

Like **Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland** (ON 1878-1883) Peter and Wuliang have invested in the fabric of our almost 120 year old building, enabling us to refurbish the original lockers, wooden sash windows and essential pointing and stone masonry. We are indebted to these great benefactors, who have made their indelible mark on RGS and our future generations of students.

In his own words, here is Peter's story.

My memories of RGS include the dedication and skill of the teachers, the opportunities to participate in a wide range of sports and special interests, the guarantee of being able to swim, the enduring friendships that were formed, and the school buildings themselves. From an academic point of view, the classes that were the most influential to me were mathematics under **WB Macro** (Staff 1936-62), and Engineering Drawing under **Colin 'Claude' Dales** (Staff 1950-86); while appreciating extra English tuition from **MG Robinson** (Staff 1934-72), art from **C Marfitt-Smith** (Staff 1932-71), and sport from **Bill Elliott** (Staff 1952-88). Staying for an extra term in the third year of the sixth form enabled me to sit the Cambridge exams, from which I gained a place at Gonville and Caius College to study Mechanical Sciences, a broad-based engineering syllabus.

Before 'going up' to Cambridge in 1960, I spent several months in engineering factories at the Team Valley Trading Estate, becoming quite expert at machining, while appreciating being dressed in a boiler suit. Following Cambridge, for three years I was a trainee at Dunlop on the Coast Road in Newcastle and found that I had some aptitude for inventing devices and formulating research projects. While at a conference, I was informed about a PhD



Fellowship in the new field of Bioengineering at Leeds University, under Professor Duncan Dowson. During the final months of my PhD in 1969, a surgeon from New York visited and asked if I might be interested in working there, where I would have the opportunity to put into practice my knowledge of joint biomechanics. Professor Dowson advised me to take the job in New York. It was a completely different proposition compared with taking up the consulting engineering job in London that I had been offered. After a lecturing tour to the USA, I decided to take the chance of working in New York.

By that time, artificial hip joints had been developed in Wrightington, England, by Sir John Charnley, while knee joints were in development in both Wrightington and London. The USA felt the need to enter this new area of artificial joints. In my first year at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, I was assigned to work on a new hip design. However I then proposed to the Surgeon-in-Chief that the lab should begin to work on artificial knees. He supported the idea and the next few years the senior knee surgeons and I worked together to produce some of the earliest artificial knee designs, the most notable being the Total Condylar, a design based on engineering principles and backed up by our laboratory experimentation. Later clinical follow-up studies showed that the design performed very well in patients, most knees lasting for 20 years.

During my stay in New York, I married Elizabeth Mitchell, a previous Newcastle Central High student. In the following years in the USA, I worked at a prominent implant company, as well as at the Brigham & Women's Hospital affiliated with Harvard Medical School in Boston; at each location I worked with surgeons on advanced types of artificial knees and on other joints.

Then in 1987 we decided to move back

to England. I was fortunate to obtain a Professorship at University College London, in the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital located at Stanmore. The department carried out basic research, as well as designing and manufacturing custom artificial joints for difficult cases of hips, knees and other joints, but especially for bone tumour patients. During all of this time, I continued to be a Consultant to international orthopaedic companies on design teams, producing new artificial knee systems.

Eventually however I felt the need for a change, and in 2000, I returned to the USA, where I became a Professor at New York University, working at the NYU Langone Orthopaedic Hospital, remaining there until this day. I have been working on new concepts of design, including in a design team with a major orthopaedic company on the most recent artificial knee system with new surgical techniques. One of these

New, double glazed wooden windows ready to be reinserted into the original sash windows, thanks to Peter and Wuliang's gift.



“

On discussing options with the Headmaster and the Director of Development, we decided upon funding for the renovation of the impressive traditional fabric of the school.

artificial knees was inserted into my own leg early this year! I have also written a book on the 50 year history of the artificial knee, and have served on the boards and committees of orthopaedic societies, organising conferences, and involving younger investigators.

Looking back, there have been a number of influencing factors on my career. But it is certain that my RGS experience has been a major positive influence. It is difficult to imagine a better high school than the RGS. What I learned there was to be open to new options and experiences and to make the most of what abilities I had; this was useful preparation for navigating the various options which occurred during a professional career.

Some time ago, my wife Wuliang and I decided to see how we could thank the school in an appropriate way. On discussing options with the Headmaster and the Director of Development, we decided upon funding for the renovation of the impressive traditional fabric of the school. This would enable students and staff to appreciate the physical space of the school for many years to come. The donation is made on behalf of my wife Wuliang and me and it's a privilege to be able to give back.

NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS



MBE AWARDED TO IAIN

ON Iain Mackinnon (65 -74) was awarded an MBE in the 2023 New Year Honours 'For Services to the Maritime Sector'. This was based on Iain's work as Secretary to the Maritime Skills Alliance (2013-22), as a Commissioner with the Maritime Skills Commission (2020-22) and in related roles. We send warmest congratulations to Iain and his family.

THE BEST MIRROR IS AN OLD FRIEND

Burland Jacob (44-49) wished to mark a life and long friendship with fellow ON Peter Rogosinski (45-51) by the placement of a Friendship Seat in Peter's memory. Sitting in pride of place at the front of school, overlooking a delicate cherry-blossom tree, the seat will, as friendship does, weather and endure.

POETRY PLEASE

Former ONA President and Cricket Historian **Bryan Stevens** (44-49) has recently published his second volume of poems entitled *Second Thoughts*. This is obtainable only from Bryan at 2 Orchard Gardens, Haltwhistle NE49 0DE telephone 01434 321314, price £7.00.

RGS ORGAN CENTENARY CONUNDRUM: CAN YOU HELP?

Whilst digging through the Archive for organ ephemera, we came across this wonderful cartoon from the 1987-88 Yearbook which caused a bit of a conundrum. Composed by **ERM Porter** (80-90) of 5T, it may have referred to the Great Storm of 1987...or perhaps it was a more RGS-specific reference. We needed help! Posting this on social media, we received some ON insights into this lovely piece of school satire. And then, at around the time of the organ centenary, we were delighted that ERM Porter got back in touch.

[Read more about this story here.](#)



"I know it's an emergency. Mr. Armstrong but what about assembly?"

E.R.M. Porter (5T)



THE ONA LONDON DINNER, THURSDAY 9 MARCH 2023

In amongst the opulence and muted splendour of The Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, the London dinner was once again a roaring success. Guest speaker **Jim Ryan** (68-78) entertained the throng and old friends, good friends and new acquaintances sang, talked, listened and dined, sharing memories and discussing future plans.

BUSINESS, MARKETING AND LEADERSHIP: ON SHARES HIS STORY

It was an honour to welcome **Jerry Hogg** (74-81) back to school to talk about his almost three decades at Procter & Gamble, followed by his journey at Kellogg Company, ascending to VP Sales for Europe, Middle East and Africa. RGS Economics Society students were treated to Jerry's case study on his leadership of Pringles, our students' favourite hyperbolic, paraboloid-shaped, potato-based chips! Absolutely fascinating to talk about Jerry's approach to business, marketing and leadership. Thank you, Jerry!

ON RECEIVES CBE

We congratulate **Peter Kellner** (62-65), awarded a CBE in the 2023 New Year Honours List for Charitable Services. Peter is a political analyst and lately Chair of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. He is also an active political journalist, writing for publications such as *The Sunday Times* and *The New Statesman*, was a former *Newsnight* reporter and former chairman of YouGov.

CORRECTIONS

Page 11 'Computer Room' photograph. The photograph we featured on page 11 of issue 112 was labelled 'RGS Computer Room'. This was a mistake – it is actually one of the Technology rooms and shows a set-up from a later theatre lighting project from 1987, which reached the final of the 'Young Engineer for Britain' Competition. With thanks to Mike Barlow for the correction information.



STAY CONNECTED

Please join us by becoming a fan of the Old Novocastrians Association on our Facebook page, Twitter page and LinkedIn Group – Old Novocastrians' Association (RGS Newcastle)

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

www.facebook.com/OldNovos

www.linkedin.com/groups/95129

www.twitter.com/RGSOldNovo



NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS

WILLIAM HENRY HALL



The story of William Henry Hall has been unearthed as part of ongoing research by **ON David Goldwater** (51-62). David writes: The *NOVO* in June 1923 reported the death of an Old Novocastrian, as had been customary in that publication and is now in the *ONA Magazine*.

William was the son of Reverend JNO Hall, vicar of St Bede's in Jarrow. Leaving school in 1850, he took the brave step of travelling overseas to America. He found employment as a grocer in Memphis, Tennessee but soon after, the Civil War broke out.

After enlisting in the Northern Army of Potomac, he was placed in McLellan's Dragoons, a cavalry unit. An accident which occurred whilst disembarking from his horse saw him sent to Chestnut Hill Hospital in Philadelphia to recover. Still in uniform, he visited Ford's Theatre in Washington on the same night Abraham Lincoln was there watching a play by Sunderland playwright Tom Taylor entitled *Our American Cousin*. He was sat almost directly under the President in his uniform when he heard the fatal shot fired by assassin John Wilkes Booth. William, along with three other men, immediately ran to the injured President's aid. Lincoln was lifted on to a shutter and transported to a nearby lodging house for medical attention given by William and the others. Unfortunately, the President's wounds proved fatal and he died the following day.

William Henry Hall passed away aged 89 at Seafeld Terrace in South Shields. He is buried at Harton Cemetery in South Shields, beneath a military gravestone which details his involvement in the United States Civil War.

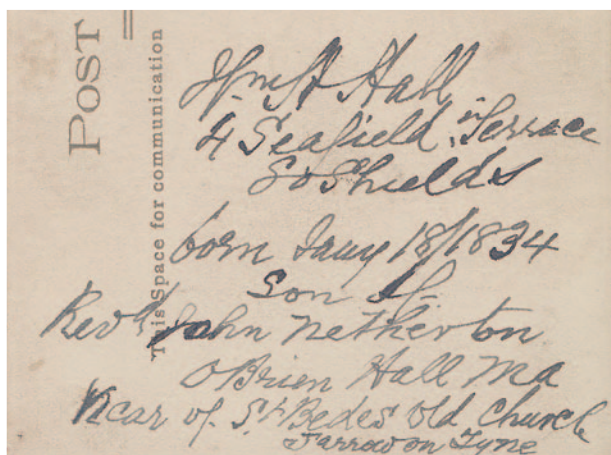
Below: Extract from *The Novo*, June 1923, on the death of William Henry Hall. RGS Archives. [Ref: RGS/NOV/167]

Letter from and photograph of William Henry Hall, sent to RGS in 1921. RGS Archives [Ref: 54]

Old Boys.

We regret to have to announce the deaths of the following Old Boys:—

WILLIAM HENRY HALL, age 89 (attended school about 1842), died recently at his home in South Shields. Mr. Hall was one of the four who carried President Lincoln from his box at Ford's Theatre on his assassination in 1865.



COMMERCE, CAREERS AND THE KARDASHIANS: PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM AN ON

The RGS proudly hosted an inaugural President's Supper for the North East Chamber of Commerce back in April. Guest speaker and RGS alumnus **Leo Pearlman** (87-97), co-founder and managing partner of television and film production company Fulwell 73, completed a celebration of northern spirit and aptitude on this significant occasion. Leo followed up this visit with a talk to students the following week, focussing on the forging of a career in the creative industries. He talked about his time at school; his adaptability in the face of uncertainty about his chosen career path; and offered reassurance to students worried about making mistakes. His description of an entrepreneurial pathway with a love of the North East signposting the way was an inspiration for young people. Enormous thanks to Leo for harnessing such positive forward momentum within the school and business communities.

Scan the QR code to read more.



ONS REUNITE FOR FOOD, FRIENDS AND A VITAL CAUSE.

Fast becoming Jesmond's social event of the summer, the RGS Garden Party welcomed over 300 guests to dine and dance the night away all in aid of the RGS Bursary Campaign.

Old Novo reunion groups (Classes of 1993, 2003 and 2013), past and present staff gathered on a balmy summer evening in early July for cocktails served on the rugby pitch, followed by a relaxed three course meal served by Sixth Formers.

RETIRING STAFF



Graham at the RGS Remembrance Service 2022. Photo: Ruth Gibson.



Steve Corrigan taken at Junior School Final Assembly

Head Caretaker **Graham Fuery** (Staff 11-23) retires after 12 years of dedicated service and no small number of his signature jokes. Wise as well as wise-cracking, Graham's work around school is prodigious and he made the most moving contribution to last year's Remembrance Service as a former member of the armed forces. A tour de force of rattling keys and instant solutions to almost every problem, Graham guards the corridors and by-ways of school as our own Angel of the North (albeit as a southern exile). One message on his retirement card speaks for staff and students alike: 'You will be missed more than you know.'

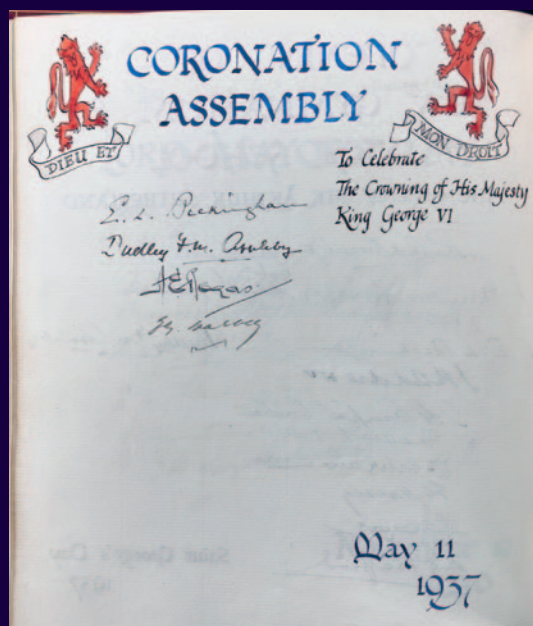
We also say goodbye to another colossus, **Steve Corrigan**, after a tremendous 38 years' service at school, initially as a chemistry technician and more recently, working wonders as Audio Visual manager. Support and teaching staff turned out in force to say goodbye, with more formal thank-yous made at Junior and Senior school final assemblies. Described as a person 'who makes things happen' the applause for Steve was loud and long.

From our Personalised Learning department, we bid farewell to **Hilary Hardy** who joined us in 2017, working with many students as a learning support assistant in this multi-faceted role.



ON HELENA STRETTE-DAVIS JOINS RGS EXTERNAL AFFAIRS TEAM

We caught up with **ON Helena Strettle-Davis** (01-03) as she re-joins school in a very different incarnation as Development Manager (Digital) with the External Affairs department. Read the full interview with her here. We wish all the very best to Helena as she joins our team.



THE CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III

Some beautiful images and ephemera from Coronations-gone-by were unearthed from the Archive and Louise Piffero provided ONs with a feast of riches on social media. She writes: 'When King George V was crowned in 1911, an RGS student was in London to see the procession. Here is an extract taken from his letter published in the *Novo*, our student magazine:

"I was surprised by the apparent apathy of the London people, who are not in the least enthusiastic. A Newcastle crowd would have created twice the amount of noise..."

A special assembly was held to mark the 2023 Coronation and with neat symmetry, 86 years ago, we held one to mark the coronation of his grandfather, King George VI, on 11 May 1937. This is a page from our stunning Visitors' Book, illustrated by then Head of Art **Cecil Marfitt-Smith** (32-71). The page has four signatures, one of which was EL Beckingham, our Vice-Chair of Governors.

RGS Visitors Book, page from the Coronation Assembly, 11 May 1937. RGS Archives [Ref: 319]

RECORDS LOST – AND FOUND AGAIN

INTRODUCED BY **LOUISE PIFFERO**, RGS ARCHIVIST

Readers of Issue III of the *ONA Magazine* would have read of the sad passing of **WG 'Bill' Elliott** (52-88). His papers were generously donated to the RGS Archive, where we can preserve the record of his exceptional impact on our school.

Bill pioneered the introduction of Track and Field events at RGS. His papers, along with a further donation to the Archive, shed light on the early days of Athletics here. **Ron 'RS' Hindmarch** (48-59) was one of Bill's first athletics pupils and has given us some fascinating material on his sports experiences.

Using his own notes as well as researching Bill Elliott's papers here in the Archive, RS describes uncovering two best performances from 1956 athletics events which were not formally recorded by RGS.

RS 'Horace' Hindmarch (48-59) continues the story.

A very short perusal through some of **Peter Allan's** (49-60) meticulously scripted handwritten records compiled in the mid to late 1950's and now in the Archive, of Sports Days and other athletics events, has identified at least two best performances which would have been lost but have now been brought to light again. A prompt to some of the athletes mentioned during that short review has produced photographs of those records together with other events and illustrates how important it is to contribute to the Archive and enhance its collection.

Bill Elliott (Staff 52-88) had joined the teaching staff in 1952 and within a very short time had set about radically changing the athletics at school, particularly the 'Field' events which were almost completely

absent in the early 1950s. With the assistance of a number of enthusiastic boys, Bill measured, dug out and then filled a sand pit, specifically for the pole vault. **Jim McManus** (45-55), already a good gymnast, took to the event immediately, established a school best of 11 ft 3 inches in 1955 and then went on to represent university and country (photo on the 'wall of fame').

Within Peter Allan's notes he lists that the Inter-House Athletics Sports were held on Wednesday, 9 May 1956 at 2pm and that 'Event 18 was the 100 yards Under 17'.

His neatly filled programme lists the result with Robson's time recorded as 10.6 seconds:

Robson (Stowell) 1st
Hindmarch (Horsley) 2nd
Crosier (Horsley) 3rd
Parker (Eldon) 4th

Frank Robson (48-51) and Hindmarch then, in June on a perfect sprinting day, represented RGS in the Newcastle City Schools Championships in the Under 17, 100 yards. Yet again, Robson beat Hindmarch but, being very close together, both were given the same time of 10.1 seconds. That time of 10.1 was recorded nationally as being one of the ten fastest times in the UK during 1956 for Under 17s. That time beat **RE Markham's** (24-32) 10.2 seconds school best, which he set in 1931. Not being achieved on school Sports Day meant it was not accepted as a 'best'; unfortunately, Bill Elliott's persuasion had not yet included all

the track events – and that record, or best performance would have been 'lost' forever without Peter's intervention.

In that same 1956 Sports Day, Peter records that in Event 21, Throwing the Discus Under 17, Hindmarch won with a throw of 161 ft 7 in. (49.25 m). I had been coached to copy the technique of **Al Oerter** (1936-2007), the four times Olympic champion, by **Dennis Watts** (1920-2005) – one of the national coaches who had first visited RGS by invitation of Bill Elliott in 1954. That 161 ft 7 in throw was never converted to its metric equivalent and, most likely, remains as an Under 17 Discus School best performance.

Not lost!

Twelve athletes from the touring Oxford and Cambridge Achilles Club were invited to visit RGS by Bill Elliott in 1955. They coached, demonstrated and 'competed' against a school team. Their visit sparked huge interest and resulted in rapid improvements in almost all events. **David Law** (51-59) followed the footsteps of the Achilles Kretzschmar, the German National Champion in the Javelin, with a throw of 151 ft 11 in, **John Farthing** (50-59) leapt 20 ft 5 in in the Long Jump, Peter Allan himself reduced the 440 yards time to 52.5 and **Mike Collins** (48-58) and **Kit Coleman** (49-59) vied with each other in the 880 yards and mile, with times of 2mins 3s and 4mins 26s respectively. Kit Coleman later took to the steeplechase and won a first-class event in Manchester, in a time of 4 mins 27.6s.

All in all, without Bill Elliott's archives, Peter Allan's notes and subsequent donations of photographs from those who had been mentioned, the Archive would not be such a rich source of information.

The RGS Archive receives a steady stream of donations from Old Novos throughout the year. We're so grateful to our community for contributing to the history of our school and keeping memories alive.

Image sourced by **Ron Hindmarch**



OBITUARIES

ALISTER COX

(HEADMASTER 72-94)

DIED 7 NOVEMBER 2022, AGED 88

Alister Cox became the new, young Headmaster of the RGS just over 50 years ago, in 1972. Then, and throughout his 22 years as Head, first impressions were of a traditional Headmaster, tall, distinguished, serious, academic, unselfconsciously dignified. We were all to discover that two of his most distinguishing characteristics were his humanity and his consideration for others, pupils and staff.

I remember Alister addressing the new boys (all boys then) before the start of their first term. Searching for an idea to enliven his Headmasterly advice he quoted a safe-driving campaign poster he'd seen. 'Join the CATS' (the poster said): 'Concentrate, Anticipate, Tolerate'. Good advice, he thought, for schoolboys as well as drivers. Work hard, think ahead, be tolerant – and tolerable.

However Alister also admired and encouraged other qualities less obviously associated with safety: the creativity, inventiveness and spirit of inquiry of RGS pupils and staff. His approach was forward-thinking. He promoted breadth in the curriculum, such as three sciences to O level/GCSE, keeping options open. He enthusiastically pioneered AS levels, that fourth 'half' subject in the Sixth Form, when these came in. He supported the wide diversity of activities beyond the curriculum, music, plays, sport, language exchanges and much else. And he loved school lunches, not least traditional school puddings.

His approach, described by one colleague as rational liberalism, defused the confrontational attitudes of the seventies. From the first he gave Sixth Formers the freedom which had been denied them to leave the school premises in free time during the school day. Fifty years ago Heads of Years were unknown; Alister soon created two new pastoral posts, Head of Years 7 and 8 and Head of Years 9 and 10, such an essential first step

towards today's arrangements. Staff also welcomed the ending of the so-called 'flyers', that fast-tracking of a class of selected pupils to O level in four years instead of five; educationally questionable and a divisive system.

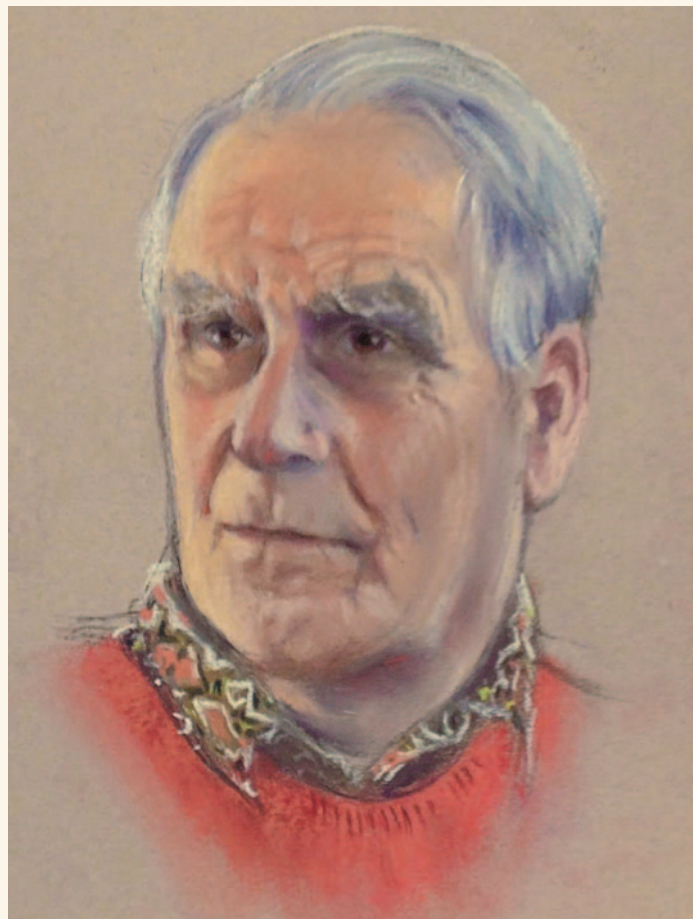
His was a collegiate and humane ethos. From the teaching staff point of view he generated a greatly-valued atmosphere of collegiality and mutual professional respect. He was also necessarily and reassuringly well-organised. From that now forgotten world of manual typewriters and duplicating machines, when cut and paste meant scissors and glue-sticks, all of us from his time remember Alister's characteristic monthly 'pinks': briefings on two sides of pink A4 paper, masterpieces of clarity and compression, giving us all sorts of practical information we needed to know. Long before the age of emails, they appeared at regular intervals in our pigeon holes in the common room.

A surprising thing is that Alister's 'pinks' didn't stop when he retired. **Howard Baker** (Staff 77-03) suggested Alister should continue them and keep in touch. So they

came every month by email and by request to family and friends: a balance of ideas, thoughts, news of social activities. In truth, Alister and Janet were the most sociable of people, whether choral singing or giving Christmas supper parties, devising memorable celebrations or enjoying informal lunches.

When Alister retired in 1994, he and Janet made the inspired decision to move to France, to settle in the small house, in a village on the Loire, which they'd bought not long before almost on the spur of the moment. For 20 years they immersed themselves fully in the communal life of their village, speaking French well and making good friends with their neighbours, being active in the community's cultural association, finding an excellent choir to join in Tours. It was a liberation from the headmasterly role for Alister. Then after their 20 years based in France they returned to their house in Ambleside, and enjoyed being near to their much-loved family and their six grandchildren.

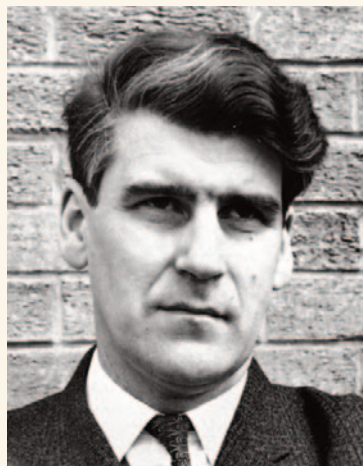
John Armstrong



Drawing by Hilary Moore, Janet Cox's sister and Alister's much loved sister-in-law.

OBITUARIES

TRIBUTES TO ALISTER COX



Alister Cox – Nov 1972

I'm very saddened by the news of Alister's death. He was the best Headmaster I've had the privilege to work with: his thoughtfulness and easygoing manner provided inspiring leadership and excellent support. In spite of being a classicist, he realised the importance of bringing RGS science teaching in line with mid-20th century thinking and set in motion the expansion which resulted in the Neil Goldie STC. He was the last Headmaster to occupy the house which the school owned in The Grove (Gosforth) and the parties which he and Janet gave there brought together interesting collections of staff and friends. It was typical of Alister that when he left the RGS, his last formal action was to hand his MA gown to a young member of staff who did not own one (gowns had to be worn at Prizegiving and the Founders' Service in those days!). I will always retain fond memories of the years when Alister was Headmaster because he not only featured in my life at school but also at Northern Sinfonia concerts (no 'Royal' then) when we would all meet in the bar at the City Hall after he and Janet had been singing with the NS Chorus. I think I probably caused him some headaches but he was such a gentleman that he never allowed these to influence the even-handed way he dealt with everyone, whether erring pupil or troublesome member of staff.

Tim Bolton-Maggs (Staff 74-04)

I was very sorry to hear the sad news of Alister Cox's death. I have many fond memories of singing together with Alister and Janet for many years in the Northern Sinfonia Chorus, and also for several of those years with our quartet 'The Grove Singers' (with Gill Brunton, and a.k.a. 'Les Chanteurs du Bosquet' when we performed for the Alliance Française) who met and sang together at the Headmaster's house in The Grove for our own pleasure, as well as for several performances at school and the Lit & Phil.

Peter Carey

I guess that, strictly speaking, I'm not qualified to pass any comment on Alister Cox or on his tenure of the post of our Headmaster, since I left RGS only a year after the arrival of his predecessor Bill Haden!

However, I did have the pleasure of meeting Alister at several Scottish ON Dinners during the 1980s, and I was struck on each occasion by his warmth and approachability, his obvious commitment to the school, and the ease with which he interacted with former pupils. His Headship spanned a period of quite dramatic social change and from what little I know of him I would suppose that he steered the RGS through those times with a calm purposefulness. It's just a pity that he did away with the school song!

John Smithson (55-61)

I was sorry to read that Alister Cox had died. I left school at the end of 1973, so I only had a year and a term with him in command.

Before he arrived, there was a rumour going around that he was a disciplinarian and especially tough on long hair, worn by probably 75% of pupils at that time, myself included. We concocted a rather vulgar slogan objecting to his appointment, which I will leave to the imagination.

It turned out that he was a very thoughtful and humane leader with absolutely no interest in hair length. I still don't agree with his abolition of the school song, though!

David Hood (67-73)

I was saddened to hear of Alister Cox's passing and send deepest sympathies. He was a man of great dignity and set a striking example through his leadership and engagement with pupils.

Tim Wilson (85-92)



Sitting in a café in Amsterdam, very much enjoying three of his favourite things – coffee, travel and the company of his family

I was saddened to hear of Alister Cox's death and hope you will pass on my sympathy and the assurance of my prayers to the Cox family.

My late husband, Howard Burchell, worked happily in the RGS physics department for the whole of Alister Cox's headmastership, and, like him, sang in the senior choir. The school was a friendly place as well as a well-run one.

Our two sons, David and Andrew, both appreciated having a headmaster who valued music and encouraged musicians, including his own family. The Coxes' daughter passed her violin on to our younger daughter, Hilary, who still plays it from time to time. Our elder daughter, Susan, then at Dame Allan's, played her violin in the RGS first orchestra when it was first opened to females, who were sometimes referred to as 'Cox's Pippins'. All four of our children are still making music, though only David does so for a living.

One of my happiest memories of the Coxes' arrival in Newcastle is of a sunny summer afternoon when the wives and pre-school children of the staff were invited to the headmaster's house and garden in The Grove. Janet made us all so welcome. Some years later, the Coxes offered members of staff the use of their house in Ambleside: we had a most enjoyable fortnight there.

I remember Mrs Cox as a soloist in Gilbert and Sullivan when Howard and David were in the chorus.

Margaret Burchell

Very sorry to hear of the death of Mr Cox. Not only my Headmaster but an extremely tolerant father of contemporary friends (with whom I have lost touch) and took his turn at driving us home from teenage parties. May he rest in peace and if any of my contemporaries who remember sharing the back seat of his car would like to get in touch it would be great to hear from them.

Ted Fenton (73-80)

I was sorry to hear of Alister's passing. He was a truly remarkable person, as you know better than any. I have been re-reading staff recollections of him in the 80th birthday tribute booklet which **Brain Mains** (76-05) produced and was struck by how well it captured the man and his time.

In his introduction Brian wrote 'We have a vivid awareness that he was the real source of the considerate and good-humoured relationships, as well as the worthy and worthwhile values that were fostered at the RGS during his time as Headmaster'.

I totally agree. I much appreciated him as my Headmaster in my last year at RGS as a student which was also his first year in post and as my Headmaster in my early teaching career when he invited me back to be a member of the Geography Department.

Dave Merritt (63-73)

J CHRIS ALLCOCK (40-51)
DIED 7 MARCH 2023, AGED 90

RICHARD CHARLES BARBER (64-69)
DIED 25 DECEMBER 2023, AGED 71

JAMES BARROLL (67-68)
DIED 5 FEBRUARY 2024, AGED 71

PETER ROBERT ANTHONY BENNETT (52-62)
DIED 9 JANUARY 2023, AGED 79

PETER GEOFF BRITTON (49-59)
DIED 8 APRIL 2023, AGED 83*

R TONY BURKE (56-58)
DIED 4 DECEMBER 2023, AGED 85*

GARY ALAN BUSH (65-74)
DIED 3 FEBRUARY 2024, AGED 67

DR NIEL LAWSON CUMMINS (45-53)
DIED 17 MARCH 2023, AGED 87

JEREMY 'JERRY' CURRY (60-70)
DIED 11 NOVEMBER 2023, AGED 71

EDGAR FRANKOWICH DAHLIN (38-47)
DIED 4 MAY 2023, AGED 92

HOWARD CARLTON DAWE (57-60)
DIED 6 FEBRUARY 2023, AGED 78

W PETER DICKINSON (39-48)
DIED 4 FEBRUARY 2024, AGED 92

J ANTHONY DIXON (47-52)
DIED 28 AUGUST 2023, AGED 84

ROGER ELPHICK OBE (51-61)
DIED 25 OCTOBER 2023, AGED 80*

IAN CHEYNE GATENBY (50-61)
DIED 1 JANUARY 2024, AGED 81

ALAN J HANSELL (60-70)
DIED 23 JANUARY 2023, AGED 71

DENNIS HARRY KILNER (57-68)
DIED 14 OCTOBER 2023, AGED 74

PETER LITTLEFIELD (97-06)
DIED 2 OCTOBER 2023, AGED 35

* indicates that a full obituary will feature in the following edition of the magazine

OBITUARIES

JOHN KEITH MOODIE (42-50)

DIED 29 DECEMBER 2022, AGED 91



Keith was a man of many parts and his career in teaching was probably the best he could have chosen. At school he excelled in every subject, but his speciality was languages, for which he achieved a State Scholarship, an accolade very sparingly awarded.

He was captain of cross-country running, but he stood out mainly as a musician of remarkable versatility, seemingly able to master any instrument he had a mind to, from the organ downwards. He achieved membership of the prestigious National Youth Orchestra. There are few virtuosos on the bassoon, but Keith was one and he was often in demand, long after leaving school, to help out the First Orchestra and many other orchestras. In retirement, he played the organ at All Saints', Rothbury and played in a recorder group until the Covid pandemic intervened.

Keith was commissioned into the Royal Artillery for his National Service (which he hated) but escaped to take up his scholarship at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. After graduating in 1955, he taught modern languages at Rutherford Grammar, Newcastle until becoming Head of Modern Languages at Dame Allan's School in 1962, where he spent 30 years (Deputy Head from 1978). Disciplinarian though he was, he was held in high regard by his pupils and shared with them his musical interests and his love of the outdoors, especially Lakeland, the Scottish Highlands and the Alps. Choral singing became a favourite, which his wife Doreen shared. As a lifelong learner, he mastered Spanish and apparently Gaelic. During his holidays in the Italian Lakes, which he loved,

I have no doubt he will have picked up more than a smattering of their language.

His long retirement was marred by Doreen's descent into dementia which took its toll upon him and his lifelong good health deserted him in his last couple of years, but he never complained. He was able to enjoy his 90th birthday, organised by his son Alisdair and daughter Fiona, for which many friends came together.

His life and example will long be remembered by his friends, colleagues and pupils.

Bryan Stevens (44-49)

COMMANDER ROBERT ADAMSON RN (46-53)

DIED OCTOBER 2022, AGED 87



Robert Adamson, who attended the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle 1946 – 1953, died in October 2022 aged 87.

He enjoyed and greatly appreciated his time at the school and vividly remembered playing his flute in the first orchestra and in frequent chamber music sessions in the Sixth Form. He swam for the school, (a member of the Newts Club) and joined the CCF.

In 1953, he won a place at Emmanuel College, Cambridge to read Mechanical Sciences (now known as Engineering). At the same time, he applied for and was accepted for a cadetship in the new Electrical Engineering Branch of the Royal Navy.

So, in September 1953, he arrived at the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth to start his naval career. Some 19 Electrical

Branch cadets constituted Long Course 9. They spent one year at Dartmouth and at sea before proceeding to Cambridge University to read Mechanical Sciences and then on to HMS Collingwood, the RN Electrical School.

Several years of RN Officer training included extended time at sea, followed by electrical engineering training. In 1960, Robert joined his first air squadron in the Fleet Air Arm as an Air Electrical Engineering Officer. He quickly learned the ropes, working with Whirlwind helicopters – a couple of months 'working up', then off to sea in HMS Hermes heading to the far east.

Robert loved the Royal Navy and was always so proud of it. He served for 35 years until his retirement in 1990. He worked with helicopters and fixed wing aircraft – his undoubted favourite was the Buccaneer. After his retirement and right up to the end of his life, he followed closely the activities and progress in the service.

After leaving the Royal Navy, he took up studies with the Open University. He began an interest in geology, which he studied at great length – a fascinating subject. He also studied History and Astronomy.

Although he spent most of his life in the south of England, he never forgot his roots in the north. He had a love of the hills and coasts of Scotland and northern England, and the majority of family holidays were spent up there!

He was a loving family man and is much missed by his wife and two daughters.

Molly Adamson

DR PETER MASON (STAFF 83-90)

DIED 16 DECEMBER 2022, AGED 72



Peter was born in Rochdale at the start of the 1950s and he attended the Boys' Grammar School in Rochdale where he became Head Boy and captain of the 1st XV rugby team. He then went on to study Chemistry at Newcastle University where he graduated with a first class honours degree and gained his doctorate. After a short spell of teaching at Rutherford School, a large inner city comprehensive, then Lancaster RGS, he arrived at RGS Newcastle in 1983 as Head of Chemistry.

Chemistry thrived under his leadership despite the national turmoil in the subject: Chemistry teachers were becoming an endangered species! He was house master of Collingwood and looked after the UI4 XV.

He was widely liked by his colleagues and he will have left fond memories with everyone who knew and worked with him. His calm, open, honest, supportive and friendly (but never intrusive) approach was combined with him always having time to listen and advise. His Christian beliefs were evident in the concern and consideration that governed his relationships. His 'thought experiments' could produce unexpected solutions to problems. He was always happy to join in and become closely involved with whatever was happening. He was totally unflappable and had the ability to see through problems with a clear view of possible solutions. Peter wanted to share his interest in and enthusiasm for Chemistry with his pupils and there are many former RGS students who will have Peter to thank for his inspiring lessons and interest in them as people.

He was drawn away from the RGS by the prospect of the challenges of a headship and in 1990 he moved to Reading

Grammar School (another RGS). This was a traditional selective boys' grammar school with a boarding section and operated within the state sector. By using the grant maintained system, he was able to expand the premises and hence broaden the curriculum and increase numbers, improving staff morale in the process. When he left in 1997 it was thriving and at the top of the state school league tables. As a former colleague at the school said, 'I was a better teacher and it was a better school for his leadership'.

The challenges at Stamford were totally different. He was appointed as Principal of three separate endowed schools: a junior school, a girls' high school and a boys' grammar school, each with their own head. This was a huge and challenging job for him. Effectively, he became Chief Executive and was charged with bringing together the three schools, encouraging greater co-ordination and cooperation and merging the teaching as far as possible.

The junior school became co-educational and a nursery section was added. The senior schools remained single sex for the 11-16 age range but co-educational at Sixth Form level, where the teaching became integrated. He carried these changes through, despite the predictable opposition, to produce what was probably one of the early examples of the 'Diamond Structure'. Probably as a result of his pioneering work, both senior schools will become fully co-educational later this year.

When he retired in 2008, he and his wife Sue moved to their holiday home near Ripon. His wide and varied experience in leading schools, examination work and his work for the HMC, combined with his obvious leadership abilities meant he was widely sought after. For a while he was a governor of MGS (vice chair) and the British School of Brussels and was rapidly recruited by Ripon Grammar School (yet another RGS!) where he soon took over the chair of governors. He oversaw several major developments, and his guidance was widely appreciated and valued.

During his all-too-short retirement he was able to exercise his personal interests: the North Yorks Moor Steam Railway, walking and fishing, his love of sport which

he enjoyed with his son, and with his wife, involvement in village life and church work.

He and Sue celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in August. He died peacefully at home in December with his family around him after a short illness. The world is poorer without him. We send Sue and their children, Elizabeth and Oliver our condolences and best wishes.

JK Lawrence and W Collins

DAVID 'FRED' KILBORN (53-63)

BORN 20 AUGUST 1944,

DIED 15 OCTOBER 2022, AGED 78



David died after a two-year fight with cancer.

He joined the junior school in 1953, travelling up to Jesmond with a crowd of coastal pupils on the electric train every day from Monkseaton. He was a member of the school's Combined Cadet Force, playing cricket and rugby, excelling as a heavy-weight boxing colour and a school prefect. He then moved onto Nottingham University as a straight A student, graduating in Mechanical Engineering.

Subsequently, David commenced work for the Cardiff Harbour Authority, before moving onto British Ship Research in Wallsend and then working for the MoD at Bath, Portsmouth Dockyard and completing his career as director of Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth. He always loved the sea and sailing, which he had learnt at Tynemouth Sailing Club whilst at school. David played for the ON cricket team against his brother in 1967 and attended the 1963 leavers' 50-year reunion visit to the school. He is survived by his Plymouth born wife of 55 years, Hilary, who he met at university, and their three children, Catherine, Duncan and Hannah.

Roy Kilborn (59-69)

OBITUARIES

DR LEON LE DUNE (44-51)

BORN 24 OCTOBER 1933, DIED 4 OCTOBER 2022, AGED 88



Dr Leon Le Dune was born in Felling, Gateshead in 1933. He was the son of a Belgian asylum seeker in the First World War who had fled from Mons in August 1914 during the early days of the invasion of Belgium. His father lived with his family alongside 5,000 Belgians in the camp in Birtley, set up to provide workers for the ordnance factory supplying shells to the front line.

After the war, his father Marc married a girl from Gateshead and Leon and his two sisters were born shortly afterwards. He grew up speaking fluent French as well as English. He joined the RGS in 1944, where he was taught by Jack Wolstenholme and Bill Cuthbertson among others, the former encouraging his love for music, and then went to King's College, Durham to study medicine.

He married his wife Linda in 1961 and had one son before adopting a daughter, Margaret. Their home was a place of refuge for many. Drug addicts, asylum seekers, alcoholics and people suffering with mental health problems were often given board and lodging until their situation improved.

He practised medicine as a General Practitioner for 32 years in Birtley, the same town where his Belgian family had lived when they first arrived in the United Kingdom. He was well loved by his patients, who felt he was a trustworthy member of their community, someone in whom they could confide their deepest secrets. His son, **Philip Le Dune** (70-80)

enjoyed working alongside him in the same General Practice for three years before ill health required Leon to retire.

He was always fascinated by cars, clocks and watches, and short-wave radio, becoming the European Director for Radio station HCJB, a Christian radio station and medical mission based in Ecuador. For many years, and long before auto-cue, he was invited by Tyne Tees Television to produce the epilogue, becoming the last voice people would hear before the station closed at midnight. His patients were avid viewers, enjoying the fact that he was one of the first TV doctors.

His Christian faith was the one thing that gave him purpose in life. He led a church for over 30 years and helped many people find faith in Jesus as a result of his pastoral input. Into his eighties, he was still travelling to Chad, Nigeria and Burkina Faso to encourage the churches there, making use of his ability to speak French clearly to share his heart with them.

Sadly, he developed Alzheimer's disease and became increasingly frailer, eventually dying just before his 89th birthday. He is survived by his wife Linda, his son Philip and daughter-in-law Allison, their five children and nine great grandchildren.

Philip Le Dune (70-80)

ROBIN DUNS (57-61)

BORN 25 AUGUST 1943,
DIED 30 NOVEMBER 2022, AGED 79



Robin died peacefully in November 2022. He was born and brought up in Gosforth and attended Ascham House School before joining RGS at 13.

Robin went to agricultural college at Kirkley Hall upon leaving school. However, he decided not to pursue that career and went to work at upmarket car company Rossleigh. He was able to drive many of their luxury cars in his spare time, including a Ferrari Dino which he drove a tad over the speed limit!

Robin was a man of many hobbies in his spare time. He made wine, beer and remarkably, grew tobacco at his home in Stannington, Northumberland. He was at his happiest with a pipe in mouth and pint of real ale in hand.

He found great comfort in Christianity and was a sidesman at St Nicholas Church in Gosforth for many years and he was also in the Royal Naval Reserve.

A shy man with a good sense of humour, he was disappointed to have never married. However, he is remembered fondly by his family which includes old Novos **John** (76-81), **David** (78-82), **Alex** (59-61) and **Sophie** (17-22) Duns.

Jon Duns

JOHN KENNETH IRVING (66-76)

BORN 1 JANUARY 1957, DIED 11 MARCH 2023, AGED 66



John started at the junior school in September 1966, shortly after England won the World Cup – an event which pleased most and delighted John! He started in JIX which was taken by Mrs Knowles. The headmaster at the time was Mr Bertram.

He did well throughout school both academically and athletically. In the final year before senior school, he was captain of 'blue' house at sports day. He was editor of the *J3X* magazine, a weekly publication that all contributed to; each Thursday, pages were posted around the classroom and perused by Mr Bertram.

In senior school, John's life was much enriched by his introduction to rugby! He had been an enthusiastic and skillful soccer player but rugby soon became a passion – he excelled in almost any position in the backs, from fly half to winger.

John was very loyal to the school. When the also very much missed Graeme Twaddle and I challenged the 3rd XV to take on our own team comprising pupils who had given up rugby, he was very interested: we called our team the Kings of Oblivion and the game was surprisingly hard fought. It was watched by a band of supporters but our friend John was very vocal in his support for the 3rd XV!

John acted in several plays, including a lead in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and the Holy Roman Emperor in *Dr Faustus*. His father tutored him well in cricket and he was an elegant opening bat for House and school. As captain of the school 2nd XI he donned a white bucket hat and patrolled the outfield looking much like Bob Willis, whom he much admired.

He was an enthusiastic member of Eldon, loved all sport and was skilled in most. John almost single-handedly made the volleyball team a force to be reckoned with. His enthusiasm was infectious and his determination to help his team unmatched.

John read Law at Manchester University. Rugby and volleyball featured strongly, both of which he played to a high level. After his Law degree, John went to Guildford College of Law and trained as a solicitor with Stanton Croft in Newcastle. Two years after qualifying he moved to London in 1986 where he worked for a couple of different firms of solicitors as a partner.

John and Johanna were married in Kent in 1987 and lived in Tonbridge. In 1999, John started work at BPP Law School as a Professor of Legal Practice, teaching post-graduate students before he moved into training and coaching roles.

John completed a diploma in sport psychology in 2001. He left BPP after 15 years to set up a coaching and training business in 2015. This enabled John and Johanna to travel widely and continue charity work, training students and staff at the Law School of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam.

John's sporting prowess continued in Kent with cricket, tennis and volleyball where John was Chairman of Tonbridge Volleyball Club. The club became successful in the local and national leagues for women and men as well as at county level, thanks to John's expertise both as a player for the men's team and as coach for the women.

John was diagnosed with advanced cancer in May 2019 and died peacefully at home on 11 March 2023. He was an enthusiast for sports, for people and for life. He is greatly missed.

Compiled by **Nick Chadwin** (66-76)
and Mrs Johanna Irving

MAX MESSING (47-53)

BORN 17 JULY 1934, DIED 11 JANUARY 2023, AGED 89



Max was at the Royal Grammar School between 1947-1953. He had many fond memories of his time at RGS, including his five minutes of fame following his application to Oxford! After sitting the entrance exam, Max received a telegram which informed him that he had been awarded the first Open History Scholarship to Christ Church.

He thought it was a hoax and telephoned the college to check. It was confirmed and Max was photographed hoisted on the shoulders of his classmates and interviewed by the *Newcastle Evening News* because he was the first boy to have won a scholarship to Christ Church, Oxford from the RGS.

Max's working life centred around finance in industry and later on, personal finance and investment. He had a strong work ethic and enjoyed dealing with people, not retiring until the age of 79.

Max had many hobbies, mostly cerebral. He enjoyed keeping up with new scientific theories, studied classical music bar by bar, especially Beethoven, Bruckner and Sibelius and in poetry he greatly admired Eliot, Yeats and Dylan Thomas. He also loved folk music, traditional jazz, early Bob Dylan but most of all he loved spending time with family and friends. When he retired at the age of 80, his goal was to complete a full cycle of daily Talmud study, which takes seven and a half years.

Max achieved his aim, and we very proudly held a family celebration marking his achievement and commitment in March 2022.

Max will be remembered for his kindness, integrity, intellect, dedication to the task in hand, his gentleness, his offbeat humour and for his smile.

Zsusanna Messing

OBITUARIES

WILLIAM ALLAN SCOTT (44-52)

BORN 1 JANUARY 1933,
DIED 1 APRIL 2023, AGED 90



Allan Scott gained entry into the RGS in 1945, and in those early days he might often arrive for morning prayers having walked to Jesmond over the Tyne from home in Low Fell, in order to save the tram car fare, presumably to be subsequently spent on the luxuries of the time, i.e. comics and malted milk tablets.

Since Allan was in the second set of Year I in the senior school and I having crept in by the back door in Penrith was in the third set, we never formed a relationship until united in the Sixth Form studying History and English Literature under those first-rate masters 'Sammy' Middlebrook and Morris 'Streamline' Robinson.

Then, as chance would have it, I was invited by Allan and John Sims to join them on a summer hiking trip to Scotland. We met at the Armstrong Monument in Barras Bridge early one morning and set off to hitch our lifts north to rendezvous in Perth. Once there, we scrounged a particularly long and uncomfortable lift on the hard back boards of a fish lorry to distant Ullapool. From there, we set out tramping and hostelling for weeks down the west coast, forming friendships and bonding in that basic wayfaring existence. The only friction I can recall between us was that at some point it was discovered that Allan had a tiny jar of Marmite secretly hidden away and would never share it, no matter what.

I never let him forget it.

Once back at school, Allan shone at rugby and cricket, getting his colours at both sports and still remains the highest ever run scorer in a season at the RGS.

His kicking, defence, and astute play as a full back on the rugby field was first rate, as was his batting and fielding on the cricket pitch as the best cover point and sometime wicket keeper. Whilst batting, woe betide anyone attempting to take the initiative for a dodgy run if it was Allan's call!

It was always difficult to get the better of Allan due to his determination, but I recall an instance at a summer harvest camp at Burnham Beeches where the Lower Sixth-Former serving lunch and armed with a heavy ladle took exception to Allan's attempt to redress the portion of fish allotted to him. The exchange resulted in Allan going to hospital with a severed tendon in his hand and missing his opportunity to play cricket for the Durham County Schools XI.

After school Allan went to Oxford University and read History at Hertford College. Having successfully gained his degree and excelling again at rugby and cricket, he left to begin his National Service in the Intelligence Corp as an interrogator. Of what or whom I am totally unaware. I do know however that he distinguished himself at one time by being put on a charge for 'insubordination' to a senior officer. No surprise there, since he never suffered fools gladly.

In this University and Service period we kept in contact and when we were able to meet it was usually in the Long Bar of *Get Carter* fame in Newcastle.

Having completed his duty to Queen and Country he married his long-term sweetheart, Sylvia Coulson, and began working as a manager at the massive Consett Iron Company. He and Sylvia settled in Shotley Bridge and later in Consett, where they brought up their particularly bright and personable five children. Tragically, Sylvia died at a fairly young age from a brain haemorrhage which was devastating to Allan and I never ever met him once since her death when he did not mention her, and he always carried her photograph.

Distance and family commitments eventually kept us apart for some time but

in his later years Allan's eldest daughter came to live close by to me and when visiting her, he would invariably call at my door and even before he had time to enter, I would be bombarded with the inevitable questions: 'Thompson did I ever tell you?' 'Did you know?' and 'Can you remember?'.

I shall always fondly retain that last sight of him closing my gate and leaving with a smile, reciting his favourite quotation of Mr Toad's opinion on the 'Clever men at Oxford'.

He never let me forget it.

George Thompson (43 – 52)

STEVE LAWSON (53-64)

DIED 28 AUGUST 2023, AGED 78*

WERNER MAIER (44-47)

DIED 23 MARCH 2024, AGED 93*

ALAN MITCHELL (STAFF 63-95)

DIED 23 OCTOBER 2023, AGED 85*

NEIL MORRISON (69-75)

DIED 15 NOVEMBER 2023, AGED 65*

MIKE W ROBINSON (68-79)

DIED 16 DECEMBER 2023, AGED 63*

PAUL HARDING RUTHERFORD (48-56)

DIED 13 OCTOBER 2023, AGED 85

DR FEDERICK RYAL (36-43)

DIED 12 APRIL 2023, AGED 97

JOHN SEDGEWICK (39-46)

DIED 2022, AGED 94

BERYL SILVERSTONE (STAFF 86-01)

DIED 22 AUGUST 2023 AGED 81*

SIMON SQUIRES (STAFF 72-07)

DIED 11 DECEMBER 2023, AGED 79*

* indicates that a full obituary will feature in the following edition of the magazine

ALAN MAURICE LARGE (52-62)

BORN 3 APRIL 1944, DIED 9 JANUARY 2023, AGED 78



Maurice Large was born in 1944 in High Heaton, the younger son of Lambert and Greta. He entered RGS Junior School in 1952, four years behind his older brother Roy, and progressed to the Senior School three years later.

While at primary school he joined the Cub Scouts and performed in at least one of the Gang Shows, a theatrical experience that may have given him the confidence to take part in the IVth form play, directed by Bill Thornton, as Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*. He studied the violin with Irene Stephenson, one of the school's music staff, becoming sufficiently proficient to join the First Orchestra, which had a good reputation for the high standard of its performances. One of the first boys to play badminton when it became an official school sport, Maurice continued to play until the restrictions imposed by Covid brought his participation to an end.

After leaving school he taught History for a year at a private school in Morpeth before studying Law at the then Guildford Law College. He was articled to Bitterman and Wood but later joined the firm of Mitchell Dodds, specialising in litigation.

In 1968 Maurice married Joan Hardman, a teacher, whom he had met at a conference at the Unitarian Church of the Divine Unity in Newcastle. They were married in Bury, Joan's home town, and had two sons, Andrew and Malcolm. For 50 years Maurice was on the management committee of the church, serving as both secretary and chairman. In addition to church and other activities Maurice was for 35 years a trustee and sometime chairman of the Northern Brainwave Appeal, a charity devoted to providing

vital equipment to support the staff and patients of the RVI Neurosciences Centre.

In 1995 he was appointed a District Judge on the North Eastern Circuit, covering an area from Berwick to Hull, though most of his time was spent at the court in North Shields. He was described by one of his colleagues as a 'kind, encouraging and patient guide, always courteous and fair, and resolute when necessary'. It was perhaps this latter quality that earned him the soubriquet 'Sheriff of the North'.

Roy Large (48-58)

ALAN MICHAEL HAWDON

(71-81)

BORN 12 MARCH 1963,
DIED DECEMBER 2022, AGED 59



Michael, originally known as Alan, first attended King's School.

When interviewed for a junior school place at Royal Grammar School, Newcastle, the Head said, 'I see you are called Alan Michael; which name do you like to use?'. Michael replied, 'Alan at the moment, but **when** I come here, I will be called Michael'. And so it was.

Michael thrived at Junior and Senior School: friendships, sport, handing in work in the nick of time. He caused his parents great panics, surfing the day before important exams rather than working, but pulling off good grades. There were also a few 'scrapes' that any friends reading this will recall with amusement.

Michael represented the school in many sports. Highlights include: breaking

the UI3 record for 200m at the All-England School Championships; being part of the gymnastics team who won the 1978 Public Schools Competition (he won individual floor); and being awarded full colours for gymnastics and half colours for squash. Sailing, surfing, squash, skiing and skateboarding were also passions outside of school.

Michael's father (ex RN) was delighted when Michael elected to apply for a Royal Navy sponsorship for university and was successful. He went to Dartmouth after leaving school and immediately after that sailed for The Falklands, the war having started. Unbeknownst to his family, something on the ship blew up and they had to stop at an island in the North Atlantic for repairs, which is where he stayed, playing cricket until flown home to start university at Nottingham, where he studied Mechanical Engineering. That said, he was very much affected by the deaths and injuries of those he had come to know.

University and the Navy were successful times for Michael, with ongoing sporting achievements (including representing the Navy for rugby), new and lifelong friends, and adventures abroad both with the Navy and of his own planning.

After leaving the Navy, Michael travelled extensively and commenced working in consultancy for PWC in New Zealand and Singapore before returning to London, where he became partner. Again, throughout this period friendships, sport and travel were key features.

On his travels he met Beth, his future wife, and a fellow lover of the sea. They have two daughters Rebecca and Lucinda, who have inherited their parents' good nature, sense of humour, intellect, love of travel and sporting ability. Rebecca represented GB in youth gymnastics. Beth describes their life with Michael as one big adventure that they all loved embracing.

Michael died with Beth by his side in December 2022, having become unwell in the prior months. He died knowing that his family would be well supported by close friends, and that Beth, Rebecca and Lucinda knew just how proud of them he was.

Michael also leaves his sister Jane (CNHS 1968-1978) and his niece and nephews.

Jane Hawdon

OBITUARIES

GEORGE NEWTON HOGG (57-64)

BORN 13 JANUARY 1946, DIED 9 NOVEMBER 2022, AGED 76



George Newton Hogg was liked, admired and envied by just about all his contemporaries. He was a consummate athlete, a convivial companion, a loyal friend, and a true (and always modest) gentleman.

It is tempting to describe him as a natural leader, except that he never thought of himself as a leader, and rarely behaved as one, although he was indisputably the magnet around which numerous groups naturally gravitated.

Many saw him as the Golden Boy of his year. He was a school prefect, he acted in school plays, but was primarily known for his sporting prowess. He was an undisputed star, a natural athlete who was in the school teams for rugby, tennis, athletics, swimming and cricket, often captaining the sides. He ran in the All England U16 440 yards race and came fourth. He operated at the highest levels and there were offers from many clubs to further his sports career with them. He didn't see his future there, although he was happy to take part in as much as he could, when he could.

However, it all came at a price – many of his contemporaries remember him throwing up on Sports Day because of nerves. And in later years, walking would be painful because of damage to his knees from all his sporting activities. He had been a superb wing three-quarter but stopped playing rugby at university. He did, however, coach youngsters in several sports for years afterwards and continued

playing football until long after he should have stopped. He remained a firm Newcastle United supporter for the rest of his life.

George was never one to be defined easily. He could happily mingle with the rugby crowd and yet be a sensitive and insightful critic of literature and poetry. He had a most sociable nature and at parties and dances it seemed everyone wanted him to be their friend. He was also very good-looking, with many girls vying for his attention.

He read English at Newcastle University and his first teaching job was back at the RGS, experiencing life in the staff common room with those who only three years earlier had been his tutors. He was to spend the rest of his working life in the profession, notably 35 years at Fylde near Blackpool, where he became deputy head of the Arnold School. He later moved south to Guildford High School where he taught English for 15 years and produced the annual school play. He did so even after retiring, until Covid brought it to a premature end.

But he was far more than that. At his funeral near his home at Beaconsfield, former teaching colleague Fiona Mackay delivered a glowing tribute, describing him as 'The school's hero' and 'The English Department's uncle'.

"He was universally loved by teachers and pupils alike," said Fiona, "and had a passion for English and drama that inspired everyone." She recalled that when he had returned part-time, the Head told the school assembly: "The living legend that is Mr Hogg is walking our corridors once more." And there was a roar of approval from the pupils.

George was married twice, having a son Nicholas with his first wife of 12 years, Sue and two stepchildren Joanna and Jonny with Diana, to whom he was married for 33 years. He also had five grandchildren.

In recent years he was in contact with several old RGS friends and was a keen

attender of the annual Old Novos reunion dinners in London and Newcastle, as pleased to see us as we were him and reminding us of his warm voice, ready laugh and keen sense of humour.

He began to be aware of a heart problem two years ago and with Covid delaying an operation, he finally had open heart surgery on his aortic valve in late September. Although initially in some discomfort, he went home after a week and appeared to be recovering well. But he died quite suddenly three weeks later, on November 9.

George Hogg had a natural spontaneous charm which encompassed all he came across. He was a big spirit who played a huge part in many of our lives and will be missed by all who knew him.

By **Ian Gardhouse** (53 - 64)
& **Tony Boullemier** (57 - 64)

The authors not only shared seven years at the RGS with George Hogg. They also started in the same class at Craggside Infants School circa 1951, and were friends for more than 70 years.

GUY RODNEY PETTY (56-60)
DIED 16 FEBRUARY 2023, AGED 79

MALCOM TOWNEND (49-57)
DIED JUNE 2022 AGED 83

J ROGER WATKINS (45-53)
DIED 7 JUNE 2023, AGED 88*

ALEX WILSON (76-81)
DIED 6 FEBRUARY 2024, AGED 60*

* indicates that a full obituary will feature in the following edition of the magazine

'JOHN' BRIAN ALCRAFT (44-52)

BORN 16 AUGUST 1933, DIED 15 OCTOBER 2022, AGED 89



John Brian was born and grew up on Beatty Avenue, Jesmond, Newcastle close to the Town Moor. He called himself Brian because his father was also called John. Brian's father worked as a railway accounting clerk and his mother as a telephonist with the Post Office. He attended the nearby state primary school, West Jesmond and won a scholarship to attend RGS where he excelled in Modern Languages and English Literature. It was also here that he met lifelong friends Malcolm Fail (44-52) and Harvey Smith (44-52). While at RGS Brian was a prefect, received the Ronald Fallows Memorial Prize, played chess at county level for the school and acted in school plays, including *The Lady's Not For Burning*.

At school Brian played rugby and was a passionate footballer, being a lifelong supporter of Newcastle United. He was offered a place at King's College, Cambridge to read Modern Languages (French & German) and went up to Cambridge in 1952 with his friends Malcolm and Harvey.

Brian's parents, and his brother David (56-66), were enormously proud of him going to King's. Neither of his parents had been to university – both left school at 14. After graduating in 1955 Brian went on to do two years' National Service. Starting in the Royal Artillery he was then recruited by the Intelligence Corps to learn Russian (gaining a Russian A-Level in nine months), after which he was sent to Berlin to translate Russian radio broadcasts.

Early in 1958, Brian met Willian at a talk in Newcastle. She was working in the city at the time whilst Brian was engaged in a one-year teacher training course there. Shortly afterwards, they both moved to

London and were married on 1 November 1958 in St Martin in the Fields, London. They bought their first house together in Mitcham, South London near their friends Harvey and Pat Smith. Brian took a job with the London Master Builders' Association before moving on to the Central Electricity Generating Board in central London. In 1963 Brian and Willian moved to Ipswich, where Brian had obtained a managerial role with Eastern Electricity. He worked in various management roles with Eastern Electricity until retirement. He kept himself in shape by walking into central Ipswich each day and catching the work bus to his office in Wherstead on the other side of town.

In his spare time Brian liked to play bridge with friends from work. In the late 1970s he also found time to join the governors of Westbourne Comprehensive School, where his sons Nick and Rob went to school.

Throughout his life he was an avid reader and in his prime he read a book a day. During retirement he amassed a large collection of books and also pursued his interests in wine and music.

Sadly, in 1993, Willian was diagnosed with cancer. Shortly after, in 1995, Brian retired to look after Willian until she died in 1998. During retirement Brian volunteered at the Citizens Advice Bureau in Ipswich, training advisors and producing training material.

Brian had a good, full and happy life. He was a very decent, honest, hardworking, family man, who made the most of the opportunities he had, enjoyed his life to the end and encouraged his sons to do the same. He died in Ipswich Hospital on 15 October 2022 after a very short illness. Prior to this he had looked after himself at home. Brian didn't like hospitals and hadn't stayed more than a day in a hospital before.

Brian is survived by his sons, Nick and Rob, his daughters in law Anna and Buzz and his four grandchildren Ibbey, Nell, William and Nancy.

Nick Alcraft

ALAN CHARLTON WOLF

(44-49)

BORN 24 FEBRUARY 1931,
DIED 31 JANUARY 2023, AGED 91



Alan was born in Monkseaton and spent the whole of his life in the area apart from a brief spell in Haydon Bridge during the war. He started at RGS in 1944 where he developed a love for Latin and Mathematics. He was articled for Chartered Accountancy in 1950, spent two years at RAF Acklington doing National Service (1955-1957) and qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1958. He married Ruth in 1962, moved to Whitley Bay and had two children, Deborah and Martin.

Alan was a keen photographer and golfer. He was a member of Mensa and loved riddles, quizzes, wordplay, chess and *The Times* crossword which he completed every day. He enjoyed holidays in Guernsey, Austria and Switzerland but he was perhaps at his happiest exploring the Northumberland countryside or the Yorkshire Dales with family. He was a life-long supporter of Newcastle United and, as a season ticket holder, witnessed all their FA Cup wins of the early 50s.

He worked for several companies over the years and retired in 1996, at around the same time his first grandchild was born. He had two granddaughters and more recently, two great grandchildren and made many visits to Ely, Cambridgeshire, to see them. He and Ruth celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary last year. Having led a very active life, he later suffered from a spinal disorder making it difficult for him to walk and after a series of falls, he ended up in hospital where he contracted pneumonia and passed away shortly afterwards.

He was extremely patient and kind with a great sense of humour and was loved dearly. We miss him every day.

Debbie Brown

ONA DIARY DATES

Below are just a small selection of our forthcoming events, if you are interested in hearing any more information, or would like our support with a year group reunion, please email development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk.



RGS GOLF DAY

Monday 10 June 2024, 9am-3pm
Close House Golf Club, Northumberland,
NE15 0HT

Experience the beauty and challenge of the 18-hole Lee Westwood Filly course offering breathtaking views of the River Tyne Valley in Northumberland.



RGS GARDEN PARTY

Saturday 29 June 2024, 6pm-Midnight
The Biscuit Factory, 16 Stoddart Street,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1AN

Join us for our renowned joyful evening of celebration, which this year takes place at The Biscuit Factory. This is a fabulous, relaxed end of year celebration for RGS parents and Old Novos.



98TH NEWCASTLE ONA DINNER

Friday 4 October 2024, 6.15pm-11pm
RGS, Eskdale Terrace, NE2 4DX

Join us for a fabulous opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new acquaintances from the Old Novo Community.

We have an extended weekend of reunion activities for the Classes of 2014, 2004, 1994, 1984, 1974, 1964 and 1954

SAVE THE DATE

LONDON ONA DINNER

Thursday 13 March 2025

Please save the date for the first of our Quincentenary year celebrations!

ONA SHOP



We have a range of wonderful RGS merchandise on our website, please visit www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/rgs-family/merchandise to order. Below are the new items, recently added to our range:

PERSONAL DETAILS AND DATA PROTECTION



The school has a very special relationship with its former students.

In order to keep in touch we would like your contact details and consent. Please do complete your details at www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/rgs-family/on. Alternatively to unsubscribe or change your preferences please contact us at development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk or on 0191 212 8909.



£30

Water Bottle
Limited edition RGS branded black Chilli's water bottle.

Mug Full of History

A quirky and beautiful china mug featuring the words dear to Old Novocastrians. Handmade in England, from the Susan Rose pottery in Northamptonshire.



£20



£23

RGS Logo Silk Tie

A new design 100% pure silk, slip stitched and fully lined tie in school colours and featuring the RGS logo.