

## **“A Glimpse into the Past”**

By Leslie K W Price

*Leslie wrote to the School in 1987 enclosing this entertaining glimpse into times at 'Tommy's' at the start of W J Veale's tenure as Headmaster. The article has been lifted from 'The Richian' 1987 edition.*

My family was pleased that I was to go to Sir Thomas Rich's, since it was in the same street as I lived; so it never bothered anyone that the Authority had not asked for me to go to The Crypt. In any case it had the reputation of being more "snobby and snooty" than Sir Thomas Rich's. Vaguely I was aware that the Scholarship girls went to Ribston Hall or Denmark Road and that only Crypt boys and Ribston Hall girls ever met together, leaving Rich's boys and Denmark girls to talk together if ever they wished to .... and that seemed to be very rarely.

During the summer holidays my mother took me to buy my first Sir Thomas Rich's School cap. It was compulsory to wear this cap. It had six alternating segments of pale yellow and pale blue. That hat nearly led to my death soon afterwards, when it came off my head as I leaned over the railings at Clifton Gorge whilst on a school trip to Fry's Chocolate factory and Clifton Zoo and, ill-advisedly, I climbed over to fetch it back, slipped and slid to the very edge, saved by grabbing tufts of strong grass.

The prefect's hat was similar but it had a blue tassel hanging loosely from the crown. There was no uniform, which was a kindness because my family was very poor, as was common in those end-of-the-Depression years. However, a strong satchel was both compulsory and needed.

My form room was at the top of the building that once had been the Wellington Street National School. We youngsters, however, were not deprived of entry into the Upper School building next door, with its laboratories, classrooms and Assembly Hall.

During my first terms, the Assembly Hall was never a welcoming place. Before entering it, we assembled in the school playground in our forms, the whole school standing in twos, silent under the watchful eyes of our form-teachers. When the call came, we went in form-by-form, crocodile style, up the steps to a small area just outside the Hall where

we piled, one on top of the others, our raincoats and our satchels, each of which was threatening to burst open and throw out its load of homework and textbooks.

Already it had disgorged, ready for the coming Assembly, the Bible and Hymn Book which we were required to carry home and back to school. The older and bigger boys went to the back of the Hall and the youngest to the front. Our form teachers stood alongside us as we waited for the Head Master to appear. He had to come from his study in the nearby detached School House and his approach was usually heralded by a watchful prefect who had espied him coming and raced back to ring the warning bell. Instantly we would all fall silent, with heads turned towards his rostrum on the stage. Proudly dressed in his gown and cap, he swept onto stage and from there he conducted the Assembly.

Every boy was required to learn The Lord's Prayer in English, French, Latin and German; and the service was never completed without it being said in English and in at least one other language. I found this a great trial, for I had not learned to speak in the other languages and I never recall ever receiving written scripts to memorise.

Occasionally the system failed and he was faced by a chatty assemblage. The lack of silence and respect for this solemn meeting meant that everyone was despatched back into the playground, each picking up his heavy satchel and coat on the way. Then, as punishment for our talking, we were ordered to run lap after lap around the playground, past the laboratories, the open-to-the-sky toilets, the cycle sheds and the five courts. That satchel and outdoor coat were heavy and I still feel the pain and strain of those occasions.

The Head Master's name was H F Rogers-Tillstone. Tall, long-striding, clever, authoritarian and detached, he worried we newcomers.

We were used to stern and strict teachers but our Junior School teachers had somehow captured our love as well as our respect, even the Headmaster. We found in Sir Thomas Rich's School men teachers and one woman teacher who were like those; but we youngsters were not given time to find our ease with Mr Rogers-Tillstone.

Only months after our arrival we realised that Mr W J Veale was acting as Head in view of Mr Rogers-Tillstone's absence. We never saw the old Head again, for he died soon afterwards.

It was probably the lowest point in the history of the Sir Thomas Rich's School. Most of we youngsters were surprised that Mr Veale had become Head, since he appeared to be so young, so lacking in seniority and seemingly nothing like as clever or as haughty as Mr Rogers-Tillstone. Yet, that was the turning point in the School's history.

Without any apparent show, Mr Veale, assisted by the LEA, changed that school from an anachronism into "the next century" and made it a place wherein humanity, endeavour and success illuminated its progress upwards, and happiness reigned.

Early signs of change came with school uniform, less pedantic assemblies, cloakrooms and the leaving of satchels in classrooms. The Hall was refurbished as a gymnasium, with wall-bars, ropes, mats, benches, bucks and horses, leading to the joyful destruction of the archaic desks, stored on the ground floor of the National School building, that alone had served as our gymnastic apparatus. It also meant PE kit for the first time; but no changing rooms or showers.

It is with great affection that I remember many of those teachers, not just as names but as PERSONS, about whom I feel I could write volumes. Mr Veale (Maths and Head), of course. Mr Hancos (Latin), Mr Hands (French), Mr Nicholas (English), Mr Williams (Chemistry), Mr Freeman (Physics, and probably my greatest teacher: a tiny man but a giant), Mr Sinkinson (PE), Miss Thompson (Art), Mr Davies (Music), Mr Saunders (Woodwork).

They worked us hard. Every night there was homework that took at least one and half hours, usually much, much longer; and done by candlelight or gaslight on the family's table, on and around which gathered my parents and younger brothers. It was always, repeat always marked. Each month the marks were added up in every subject and a chart of form positions appeared on the form's notice-board. Three times a year a School Report was sent out to each pupil's parents. I still have every one of mine, the first of them now fifty years old.

Indeed, I still have some of the prizes that were handed to me in the glorious Annual Speech Days, usually held in St Michael's Church, the tower of which still stands at the Cross.

We were out of school on Wednesday afternoons, playing compulsory football or cricket on Sutgrove Grounds. That meant a two and a half miles' cycling trip in all winds and weather - and I was prone to nasty colds.

To make up our schooling time, we were required to attend school on Saturday mornings until 12 o'clock.

Once a year we had our strenuous Junior and Senior cross-country races at Matson or Chosen Hill. It was compulsory for everyone and pride in finishing was mixed with agony for many like me who were just sprinters.

It is with great affection that I recall many of my class mates, especially Derek Long, the genius who wrote one of the school's History textbooks when he was thirteen and whom Prime Minister Churchill sent to University America (doing something with Wilson Cloud Chambers) rather than have him being ill-used at the front. And Manning, Hughes and West, my constant competitors for 2nd place in our form. Then Easton and Faulkner, who were to die over the Ruhr in a crashing aircraft in the Second World War, and Pearce, alongside whom I sat so often at the double desk.

We were in our 4th Year when Prime Minister Chamberlain came back from Munich, waving his piece of paper; and we all prepared for the war we felt was being thrust upon us. The School wasted not a moment in forming its own Air Training Corps Squadron. The boys flocked to join it and soon we were learning to march across the playground and to identify friendly and enemy aircraft from charts in the classrooms. We trained to be navigators and wireless operators, flew in gliders and Anson training aircraft, donned ATC blue uniforms and marched in parades to the Cathedral. I treasure photographs and ATC certificates of those days.

The older boys like me became members of the School's Home Guard detachment too, wearing our brown uniforms but swapping our brown caps for blue ones on the occasions we went off to such as Robinswood Hill or Chosen Hill to throw practice

grenades, fire .303 Lee-Enfield rifles, handle anti-tank guns, use Aldis signalling lamps and sleep out rough on all-day night field-exercises. We also did street fire-watch and city messenger service duties.

In those few short years we became a fine school, every bit as good, I am sure, as The Crypt: but, of course, public esteem is very conservative and I have no doubt that the public continued to regard The Crypt as Gloucester's No.1 Boy's Grammar School. Perhaps that is why it was given its new building at Tuffley on the Southern Ringway years and years before the Sir Thomas Rich's got its on the Northern Ringway, a circumstance which consolidated the public's estimation of the two schools, one in fine new buildings and the other in turn-of-the-century buildings.

One wonders how many boys have been enrolled as Sir Thomas Rich's School Boys? One wonders how many went on to carve out for themselves fine careers? One wonders how many went on to become teachers and to pass on to countless numbers of children the excellent standards set before them by their Sir Thomas Rich's teachers?

*Leslie William Kenneth Price  
was educated at Rich's from September 1935 to February 1941.*