

MOULSHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL CHELMSFORD

Past Pupils' Newsletter

SPRING 2021



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## Greetings once again to all our readers

What strange times we have all been living in, with the Covid pandemic lasting much longer than most of us imagined, and daily life so very different, with the face masks, staying indoors, restrictions on meeting up, travelling, and even the way we shop for our daily food! But perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel now, with the level of infections thankfully diminishing.

Apologies that this Spring issue of the Past Pupils' Newsletter is later than usual, but here we are at last. No paper copies again this time either, I'm afraid, but we will send this issue by email to all those for whom we have email addresses, and we will of course add this issue to the past pupils' page of the school website, where all previous editions can also be accessed.

This Newsletter may be rather shorter than usual, but we nevertheless have some very interesting articles, which we hope you will enjoy. One is by a new contact, John Boyle, 1957-62, a past pupil who only learnt of the existence of the newsletter while googling for information on Bundles, a 1950s and 60's Chelmsford tramp (who was mentioned in one of our issues). John spent many hours engrossed in reading past issues of the Newsletter. Many thanks to John for getting in touch and sharing his Moulsham memories.

We also have articles this time from Kes Gray and Kevin Bowen, also at Moulsham in the late 1960s. As these three articles relate to the 1960s, we have also included some pictures from that decade. In addition, we have another article from our good friend and former Head of Moulsham Junior School from 1995-2006, Les Kemp, in his series on Junior School playtime activities. This time the subject is that perennial autumn term game of Conkers. And of course, a report on current school activities from the Headteacher, Mrs Marie Staley - our thanks to both Marie and her and her secretary Jacqui Tyler, who has been our very helpful contact at the school over many years.

When the Covid pandemic began, early last year, we had to cancel the 2020 annual past pupils' open day at the school, and with some restrictions still in place, we have now had to cancel the current year's reunion too. So sadly, no reunion in 2021 either, and we have already put a notice to this effect on the relevant page of the past pupils' website. But we really do hope to meet up again next year, in the late Spring of 2022, and will be consulting the school in the near future. We will send an email you all as soon as we have a definite date. After two years without being able to meet up with other past pupils' it will be lovely for as many of us as possible to come to next year's reunion.

Do please keep sending us your news, photos and articles for the next issue. We look forward very much to hearing from you. For the time being, please continue to send them to me, Mrs Kathleen Boot at 1A Vicarage Road, Chelmsford CM2 9PG, or by email to [kathleenvboot@gmail.com](mailto:kathleenvboot@gmail.com) (**please note my recent change of email address**). We are currently asking for a volunteer to take over from me as editor (details on next page) and hope you will also consider whether you could help in this way.

With all good wishes, and looking forward to seeing you at the 2022 reunion if you are able to come.

Kathleen

*Kathleen Boot (Nash),  
Moulsham Junior Girls' School 1951-55  
Newsletter editor since 1999*

## Can you help?

We are looking urgently for a volunteer to take over as Editor of the Newsletter, as Kathleen has now served in this role since 1999 and feels it is time for a change. The work involves collecting and assembling materials sent in by past pupils, and using source documents such as log books and old school magazines. All of these Kathleen can hand over to you, along with her large collection of relevant photographs, from 1938 to the present day, many of which were sent in by readers or found in old documents. For information about current school events and interests, you would keep in touch with the Headteacher and her helpful administrative staff at Moulsham Juniors.

You would then need to be able to use your computer to put together the text of a magazine which can be emailed to all the past pupils who have asked us to keep them on our mailing list. A printed version of the same text, in normal times reproduced by the school office, is currently added for distribution to local past pupils, by post or pushing through letterboxes.

Do please consider if you could be interested in taking over the role of Editor, and do feel free to consult Kathleen if there are any aspects on which you need further clarification or advice. We look forward to hearing from you.

## From the Headteacher Mrs Marie Staley



When I wrote my article for the last Newsletter in the Autumn Term last year, little did I know we would be facing a second lockdown after Christmas.

School had returned to a 'new normal' after we returned in September. Things were different of course: one-way systems were in operation, the times of the school day were staggered to reduce the numbers on site, visitors to the site were requested to wear masks and litres of hand sanitizer, antibacterial spray and soap were used!

Our school community was, for the most part, fit and well and Covid free until December when our first case was diagnosed. We still managed to enjoy many of the traditions of the Christmas season, albeit in an adapted format. Christmas lunch was enjoyed by all and the Christmas carol services were available through our school, website.

Shortly before the start of the Spring term, the Government announced school closures and a second lockdown. Remote education was once again provided for the vast majority of our children but school remained open for our most vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

Our staff worked tirelessly to ensure children engaged in the learning offered and remained safe and happy.

We returned to being fully open to all children on 8<sup>th</sup> March following an extensive risk assessment and continued with a cautious approach.

One of our achievements in spite of Covid and one which has caused great excitement has been the creation of our sensory garden located close to South Wing Hall. This area is now a beautiful oasis of calm and will be a huge asset to the school for many years to come



Mrs Moores, aided by an able team of willing volunteers, had a great time planting in the sunshine! We were so grateful to FOMS for providing significant funding for the planting. All pupils have accessed the garden which is being enthusiastically enjoyed by our youngest students and the most mature.

Sadly, due to current regulations, the Past Pupils' Reunion has once again been postponed this year but we look forward to welcoming you all back next year, by which time our garden should be looking beautiful and ready for everyone to enjoy.

## Recollections from John Boyle, 1957-62

We were delighted to hear recently from a new reader of the Newsletter, John Boyle, who attended Moulsham Junior Boys' School from 1957 to 1962, and writes as follows:

'One evening last week, I was searching the web for information about Bundles, the Chelmsford tramp, and the Moulsham Past Pupils page came up in the results!

I was at the school from 1957 to 1962, so when I found your newsletters I was up until the wee small hours reading them all! It has brought back so many good memories. What an extraordinary achievement to have started this and to have kept it going for so many years.

My own recollections of those years are pretty fragmentary, but as I read through the newsletters it was wonderful to be reminded of the teachers, friends and happy times I enjoyed at the school.

My first year teacher was 'Daddy' Gardiner. I've never forgotten a story he told about a boy who thought the words in parts of the Lord's Prayer were not "Our father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name" but "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallo Beehive Lane!"

My next class teacher was Poppy Donovan. I was in her class for two years because at some point during my first or second year it was discovered that I had joined the school a year earlier than I should have done. When the mistake was found, it was decided that I should stay in the second year for another year, so Mrs Donovan was my teacher for two years. In the second of these years, she gave me the important job of going over to the staff room just before morning break each day to put the kettle on! I remember her fondly and it was great to find a few photos of her in previous newsletters, especially the photo of her with several friends I remember with the Scottish dancing group.

In later years, my parents became friends with Poppy and her husband (I think through their involvement with Baddow tennis club). When I was in the sixth form at the Technical High School, my parents moved temporarily to the USA. They arranged for me to stay in Chelmsford to complete my A levels, and they left my Mum's car with Poppy for her use and I had the use of it at weekends.

I think my teacher for the third year was Mr Hodgson. I certainly remember enjoying his craft lessons. For some reason my memories of the third year are a bit hazy, but that might be because I had my tonsils out that year and I was off school for a very long time after the operation.

Mr Picken I remember very well and with great affection. Looking back, I think he was an outstandingly good teacher. I have always thought of him as being entirely responsible for my passing the eleven plus! Of course I remember Mr Sturgeon and his son Dave (who I will always think of as David). It was great to read his and Barry Reed's various entries in the Newsletter.

It was interesting to read people's memories of Mrs French and her special interest in plants on display on the verandah outside her classroom. One day she caught me commenting quite innocently to a friend that one of them looked like a weed. She gave me 100 lines: "A weed is a plant growing where it is not wanted". I have since passed this important wisdom to my children and occasionally to other people!

I now live in Sussex and we no longer have any close connection with Chelmsford, but now that my wife and I are both retired, an excuse for a post-pandemic trip to Chelmsford would be very welcome, so do let me know if/when there is another open day.'

**Gerry Etherington (Butterworth)**, who was at the school from 1960-64, and now keeps the mailing list for the Past Pupils' Newsletter up to date, enjoyed reading these recollections from John Boyle and comments as follows:

'Lovely to read this letter from John Boyle. I too remember 'Bundles', and there were quite a few interesting characters in those days. We had an elderly Romany Gypsy lady who turned up from time to time and Mum always invited her in for a cup of tea. I think her family 'settled' in the Boreham area and she was so proud of them. Were we more tolerant then?

Old 'Daddy' Gardiner played the church organ at Widford Church. He was getting on a bit by then and rather deaf, so Canon Pike had to shout up to the belfry when he wanted Mr Gardiner to start/stop playing. It certainly made church services interesting, and the congregation hid behind their hymn books trying to stop laughing! Both these elderly gentlemen were very much loved in the local community.'

### **A photo from 1963: Caretaker Mr Little's retirement party**



A photo of Moulsham staff in 1963, at caretaker Mr Little's retirement party in 1963. Pupils from the 1950s and '60s may recognise teachers including Mrs Donovan, Mr Picken and Headteacher Mr Tom Sturgeon.

## **Kevin Bowen, 1965-69 at Moulsham Junior School**

I attended all the Moulsham schools, starting at the Infants School in 1963 and then attending Moulsham Junior School from 1965 until 1969 which I think was the last year before the boys and girls schools combined to form a comprehensive school. My younger sister, Kay followed me through the three schools 4 years later so I think she would have started at the Junior School in 1969, having been born in October 1961.

Neil Smilie and Peter Orford were two of my closest friends at the Junior School. I used to sit next to Neil in many of the classes and I remember his dad Ron ran a shop in Moulsham Street at the time. He also managed Springfield Boys football team that Neil and I played in.

Other boys whose names I can still remember include Gary Buck, David Constable, Les Tong, Simon Childs, Richard Powell, David Kay, Adrian Dawson and Roger Sugden. These were all in my year group, as was Geoff Hoare who wrote an article in the Autumn 2014 edition of the newsletter. I have always felt that there has been very limited representation of the late 60's era at the Junior School and Geoff's article prompted me to write one of my own which appeared in the Spring 2015 edition.

Sadly, I have seen little, if anything, in the newsletters from late 60's pupils. Hopefully this will encourage a few more of our old school friends to come forward.

I live in Sussex and we no longer have any close connections with Chelmsford, but now that my wife and I are both retired, an excuse for a post-pandemic trip to Chelmsford would be very welcome if/when another open day is planned.

## **A photo from 1966/67: Football cup and league winners**



## **Kes Gray, 1968-72, celebrates his sixtieth birthday**

Whilst 2020 will I'm sure be remembered in the main for Coronavirus face masks, social distancing and empty supermarket shelves, but for many of the class of '72 it was also the year of the big SIX OH. It was my sixtieth birthday on the 8th September 2020, and I'm guessing I was one of the first from my school year to reach that particular landmark. I've been a children's author for twenty years now, the platform for every story I write is my childhood, and many of the most enjoyable moments of my childhood were spent at Moulsham Junior School. So I'm writing this letter to extend warm 60th birthday wishes to everyone in my year who headed off to Big School in 1972. Most of the children I can recall are classmates from Mrs Taylor's Class 4.1, some are pupils from Mr Picken's Class 4.2, others are familiar faces from the playground at breaktime. Apologies if your name has escaped me, the mists of time get foggier with every year. Please just think of my list as the beginning of your list and award yourself a house point for every name that you can add!

Happy 60th returns (belatedly or in advance) to:

David (Changy) Chambers, David (Lortle) Moore, Clive Weaver, Derek Beeson, Mark Alexander, Trevor Cooper, David Petch, David Peplow, Richard Roper, Jeremy Thackeray, Michael King, Nathan Bearman, Richard Stockley, Shane Champion, Graham Moore, David Smith, Christopher Smith, Gary Barker. Tony Nicholas, Malcolm Knight, Paul (Menal) Toms, Christopher (Tibby) Dowsett, Michael Henderson, Robert Dulwich, Christopher Stock, Paul Beard, Kevin Dunbar, Catherine (Pinky) Pinder, Suzanne Webber, Claire Sweeny, Caroline Massam, Erica Mitchell, Louise Daniels, Diana (Granny) Granville, Jean Staplehurst and Theresa Marshall.

Three cheers also for:

Fruit salads, Blackjacks, daddy longlegs, football in the playground, rounders on the field, conkers, kiss chase, country dancing, Onward Christian Soldiers, cycling proficiency, bubble gum cards, tea cards, the rain gauge on the centre lawn, Mr Sturgeon, Noddy the caretaker, strawberry custard, chocolate custard, prefect badges, teacher's desk pencil sharpener, blotting paper, Quink, Mumbo Jumbo Sapient, the incinerator, sports day, squirty soap, school milk, blocked toilets, football bibs, plimsoles and tuck!



### **A photo from 1962**

Moulsham Junior Boys' School choir queuing up to sing at teacher Miss Martin's wedding at Widford Church in 1962.

## **Conkers, by former Moulsham headmaster Les Kemp, 1995-2006**

I was born in 1946 at Hillingdon, West London and moved to Hornsey in North London when I was two. My mother's health was not good and the doctor thought that she would benefit from sea air, so we moved to Clacton when I was four. My mother was the disciplinarian in our family and would administer a smack on the back of the leg just as the nuns had done to her in the orphanage where she spent most of her childhood.

When I myself was at primary school, September was a painful month. This was because September was our time for playing conkers, and I was in the unfortunate habit of using my shoe laces to string the conkers on. The string we had at home was no good for this - it always frayed, and no matter how much you licked it, you couldn't make a point that would pass through the hole you had made in the conker with a meat skewer. Shoe laces were ideal for the purpose. This naturally infuriated my mother, and if I shuffled into the house after school minus a shoe-lace: 'Smack!'

However, I loved collecting conkers, not only to get the most but also the biggest specimens. Conker fights both at playtimes and on the way home, made school and facing my mum's wrath worthwhile.

More recently, since my retirement as Headteacher of Moulsham Junior School in 2006, I have used the subject of conkers as part of a Keep on Reading project, encouraging parents to read to their Year 3 and 4 children.

Sadly, due to the Covid pandemic, this project had to be halted, and I replaced it with a scheme providing story books for teachers to read to their class, with book badges for all the children. The box containing the book and badges also has a zip wallet which is part of a project called 'Do You Know?', which aims to promote the children's general knowledge. The second of these topics is conkers.

My first 'Do you know?' topic is about pennies minted during the reign of *George V*, principally because I had purchased 236 such pennies on eBay. The pennies were distributed to schools and always included one coin minted during the First World War. There was also an information card which included the facts we had to learn at school about money, facts that always appeared on the back cover of exercise books. There was also information about the price of a stamp, and the cost of a bag of chips when I was eleven (I only had them once a year when walking the four miles home from the cinema on Christmas Eve), the penny brass lock on a toilet door, and the cost of a telephone call from a red telephone box in 1936 when you had to press button A.

As mentioned above, the second theme of the 'Do you know?' wallets was Conkers, and facts from the two information cards sent out to schools are reproduced below. The problem I hadn't foreseen concerned the four threaded conkers ready for a conker fight, a cheeser conker and conkers with eye stickers on that I sent to schools. These were in a self-sealing plastic bag and sadly, when this was opened at the school, most of the conkers were covered in a white mould! Of course, I should have dried them out before putting them in the bag. Oh dear!

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Editor's note: We would welcome any memories our readers may have of collecting conkers or having conker fights, and will include these in a future edition of the newsletter.

Facts about conkers, from the two information cards mentioned above

Conkers are the seeds of the Horse Chestnut tree. These trees can live for up to 300 years.



Many Horse Chestnut trees are now dying from a pest or disease. There might be no conkers in 15 years. Have you noticed there are fewer large conkers?

The casing of a conker is very prickly.

Conkers can be mildly poisonous to many animals such as dogs and horses causing sickness if eaten. Deer and wild boar can safely eat them. People shouldn't eat conkers.

Some people believe that if you put conkers on your window sill that they will keep spiders away. This is unproven.

In 1917, during the First World War, a chemical used in making ammunition was in short supply and it was found that you could extract it from conkers.



The Government asked children to collect conkers and take them to the nearest railway station from where they were sent to two factories. You got 7s 6d (now worth £52.36) for a cwt (50.8kg) of conkers.

This is approximately 3,400 conkers. So many conkers were collected that they rotted in the stores. Also they got less of the chemical than they expected. It wasn't a great success but conkers were also collected in the Second World War.

Roald Dahl was a big conker fan. He tells us in his book 'Roald Dahl, My Year' that a great conker....."is one that has been stored in a dry place for at least a year. This matures it rock hard and therefore formidable."



You might think this is cheating, as you might if the conker is soaked in vinegar or baked for a short time in a hot oven.



A conker with a flat side is called a cheeser. It is caused by two or more conkers in the same pod.

On finding your first conker of the season you should say -

"Oddly, oddly, oddly, my first conker." Doing this is supposed to bring you good fortune and when playing conkers, your strings won't tangle.

The first recorded game of conkers was on the Isle of Wight.



Obituaries – David Simmons, 1933-2019

Many thanks to David's sister Hilary Heath (nee Simmons) for the following obituary and photograph. She writes:

My brother David Simmons died on 5 July 2019 in Gibsons, Vancouver. David had lived in Canada for 62 years, but never forgot his early life in Chelmsford.

Like a lot of his peers, he first attended Friars infant school before attending Moulsham Junior Boys School. This was during the second world war, and readers may remember an article that David submitted for the Autumn 2013 Newsletter, about life at school during that time. He was an interesting and interested person who loved to talk and laugh with people from every level of society. David lived life to the full and he is sadly missed by his family both in Canada and here in the UK.

When David was 13yrs old he moved from Moulsham Senior School to the Chelmsford Technical High School. On leaving school he went to work for the Motor Union Insurance Company which was situated over Wenley House. This employment was interrupted in 1952 by an 18 months stint in Oxfordshire where he completed his National Service training.

In 1957 David emigrated to Toronto, Ontario, where he eventually became the successful owner of Claire Wallace Travel enabling him to make frequent visits back to the UK and his family in Chelmsford.



I have just taken possession of a bundle of papers, photographs and other memorabilia belonging to David, and among them found an old photograph taken in 1944 of David's final class in Moulsham Junior Boys School. It has been signed on the reverse by the school benefactor Mr Turner. David is on the second row second from the right.

Editor's note: we would be pleased to hear from anyone who recognises himself and/or classmates on the photograph

Copies of this and earlier issues of the newsletter are on the past pupils' page of the school website:
www.moulsham-jun.essex.sch.uk

Data Protection Legislation

Please note that for the purpose of compiling the Past Pupils' mailing list, and for no other purpose whatsoever, your name and address is being held as a computer record. If for any reason you object to this, would you please inform us immediately in writing. Unless we hear from you, your consent is assumed.

The views expressed by individual contributors in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Head Teacher, School Governors or Editors.