

Small Beginnings

The newsletter of the former pupils of the old Barling School is aimed at all ex-pupils, staff and friends of the school

Reunion News

The next reunion is on Saturday October 11th 2008 at the old Barling School from 6.30 to 9.30 pm. All ex-pupils, staff and friends are welcome.

A group of ex-pupils, friends and partners occasionally meet for lunch. The next lunch is on Saturday October 25th at the Rose Inn, from 12.15 pm until 3.15 pm

Special Interest Articles:

- Reunion News.
- Articles on the lives of Keith Mumford and Ray Motts
- Barling Youth Centre Drama Group

Keith Mumford 1938 – 2008

Keith was born on 29 August 1938 in Alexandra Road, Great Wakering - the eldest child of Edward 'Gaffer' Mumford and his wife Ellen 'Nellie' (nee Enguell). They lived briefly above Claydon's Stores in Little Wakering, then moved to Harris Row, Barling where I was born in 1941. Dad worked on the land, and was in the Home Guard. He had two sisters and three brothers, and Mum had two sisters and one brother. Our little sister Dawn was born during the great snow blizzard of 1947.

There were six cottages in Harris Row - our grandparents, John and Hannah Mumford were at No 1 - they ran a small shop from their home. At No 2 there was Grandad's sister Kate and her husband Walter Carey. We lived at No 5, and at No 6 were the Bradburys - Fred and Mabel, and their daughters, Margaret,

Yvonne and Olive. We were very much part of the village community - taking part in May Day celebrations, local fetes, attending the local Methodist Chapel where we all went to Sunday School; Keith's favourite chorus was 'Wide, wide as the ocean...' and he pumped the organ for services manually until electricity took over. Keith and I shared birthday parties - being born three years and six days apart. I recall clearly on my 8th birthday when Keith, and Olive (from next door), decided to dig a tunnel from No 5 to No 6 under the garden hedge. All went well until I fell down the hole Keith was digging and that was the end of that adventure! I have a scar to this day, but it always reminds me of our very happy childhood in a cottage with no electricity or mains water, and a two seater earth closet at the bottom of the garden! There was

water from a well, and rainwater was boiled in the outhouse for clothes washing and to fill the tin bath we used in front of the warm cooking range in the kitchen.

Dad owned various boats over the years - dinghies, fishing smacks, a landing craft and a small Thames barge (the Cygnet). These were moored in Barling Creek where we all, with our friends, spent countless hours getting up to our knees (necks?!) in mud on the saltings, swimming, rowing, walking round the sea walls, and sitting having picnics watching the tide coming in and going out. As a family we spent many Summer holidays living on the barge, motoring along the East Coast, stopping off at Colchester to pick up Great Uncle Joe (an ex barge captain) who would come on board and take charge of the Cygnet for the day. Keith loved going out fishing with his Dad (and as years went by, with his mates) and he also went on

Keith Mumford cont.

cockle shell collecting trips to a shell bank off Foulness Island. The shells had to be shovelled into barrows, loaded into the landing craft or barge, and brought back to Barling Creek for crushing, to be sold as shell grit (Dad's business at the time).

In 1950 we moved to 1 Tweed Cottages, Kimberley Road, Little Wakering. Keith sat his 11 plus and passed a subsequent interview and was allocated a place at what is now Fitzwimarc School, Rayleigh. It was a long journey – having to change buses in Southend – and Keith along with several of his cousins and other youngsters from Barling – usually arrived at school after assembly was over.

On leaving school Keith was apprenticed for approximately seven years at the AWRE (Atomic Weapons and Research Establishment) on Foulness Island. He was in the Technical Drawing Office and continued studies at Evening classes. In later years he worked for French mostly but had a short period with

Scott Hale. The Royals in Southend was one of his projects. He always loved driving and at one time owned a motor bike with a car seat where the side car should have been. He also owned a small pick up truck. He enjoyed shooting around the farm and local countryside with Dad. He loved ballroom dancing – going regularly to the Victor Sylvester Dance Studio at the Odeon, Southend.

Keith married Christine White and left the Barling area in 1966, they had two children - Brett born in 1968 and Jan, born 1970.

Much of Keith's leisure time following his marriage was spent as a member of the Sealed Knot in which all the family got involved particularly during the re-enactment battles staged at events up and down the country. Keith was very proud of Christine's dressmaking skills making Sealed Knot gear, his jackets etc.

Keith's senior officer in this organisation read the Eulogy at his funeral and had these words to say

about the time he spent as her Commanding Officer for nearly twenty years. "Keith was the peacemaker whose quiet but firm leadership steered the company. He had a strong sense of duty and always took the time to think things through.

His ability to bring out the best in people working together made Keith an obvious candidate for the Master Gunner to all England post. He accepted this appointment with great pride at the end of 2006, as it is the highest accolade for the humble gunner.

We all have our own memories of Keith. He would be smiling now and wondering what all the fuss is about.

He was a fine man with good values. None of us here today are in any danger of ever forgetting him".

Pearl Perryman (nee Mumford)
Keith's sister

Memories of those who shaped our young lives – Mrs Hannah Watson

Mrs Watson took care of some of our out-of-school activities at her home in Kimberley Road. She taught music, in my case, a fruitless task, and before long we both gave up.

However, I enjoyed her country dancing classes. She patiently trained us for the May day celebrations, going over and over the plaiting of the ribbons around the maypole saying "over and under" to the timing of her ground-thumping stick. However much we tried, it went wrong more often than right. On good days the pole was erected between the seawall and Jummie Groves's ditch, then round and round we would go, determined to get it

right this time only to come face to face with someone who forced you to go under when you knew you should go over. Of course it had to be undone and started again.

Such patience Mrs Watson had with us, bless her. At times she appeared quite foreboding but if you fell over or hurt yourself you'd get a nice soft, warm hug and kind words of encouragement.

Come May day we would perform at the village fete on the lawns of Little Wakering Hall and the May queen was crowned at the Parochial Hall. The queen, her maids of honour and the retiring queen were dressed in an

assortment of recycled bridal wear or ball gowns from Mrs Watson's bottomless box.

She was at times a formidable lady - tall, blond and elegant. She used her walking stick when her hip played up and later in life, this was often.

I hold her in my mind with warm affection, as I am sure many others do

Sheelagh Chapman (nee Chapman)

Ray Motts 1938-2008

It was with great sadness this year that our Ray died. Many of his friends have asked me to write a few words regarding Ray's hobbies. I will start with playing the drums. He taught himself by practising on anything he could reach and our mealtimes were often interrupted by the banging of his knife and fork on the salt and pepper pots which, as you can imagine, drove mum and dad mad!

Eventually he became a drummer with the Dickie Burgess Band also known as the Skyliners. Then through the years he played at weddings and parties in small trios mostly on Saturday evenings.

Snooker became a passion for him and he played in a league at the Green Baize club in Eastwood. His other hobby, going back to music, was the

big band sounds such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Tommy Dorsey, and of course the great singers of the day like Sinatra, Tony Bennet etc.

We often had arguments regarding music as I used to buy every new record of Cliff Richard and Ray bought Sinatra. However, he always let me win the argument – there was no comparison really, when you think about it now, but it was fun all the same.

Ray also loved films and in his younger days used to visit the cinema every week. Film-making fascinated him. He also loved watching football, mostly the big name footballers and clubs.

Our holidays were hilarious at times as we shared the same sense of

humour.

Being a wood machinist, Ray was able to make several things like bird tables etc and he enjoyed working with anything associated with wood. He made a garden seat for when he retired so that there would be a nice area in the garden for relaxing in, but sadly he never enjoyed his retirement once cancer started to spread.

I hope that this small list of Ray's hobbies will be interesting reading for his friends from the school reunions and anyone that remembers him from years ago when living in Woking.

We will miss him so much but he will never be forgotten

Val Ridley (nee Motts)
Ray's sister

Barling Youth Centre Drama Group

One evening during the late nineteen-forties our usual activities (table tennis and snooker) at the Barling Youth Centre came to a halt with Mr Learmond making an announcement. He introduced us to Mr Geoff Butler at our meeting place in the old school.

Their joint appearance represented a stark contrast – Mr Learmond was large and formidable (having been caned by him at school – I deserved it – I was well able to determine the strength in his arms). Mr Butler was small in stature and quietly spoken.

We were told that the new arrival was going to form a drama group with the intention of producing a play.

I think the girls present were generally supportive but the boys showed complete indifference and wished only to continue with their table tennis and snooker.

However we completely underestimated the persuasive abilities of our new tutor. Slowly, if somewhat reluctantly, the following individuals were recruited by the end of the evening: David Salmon, Bernard Duffy, Brian Claydon, Peter Carey, Nobby Emerson, John Duffy, Laurie Street, Geoff Wright & Arthur Chittock. Alas, I am unable to recall the first boy to cross the line – he deserved a medal.

The girls, who were more self assured, confident and adventurous, were: Jean Wigg, Pearl Reynolds, Jean Watson, Barbara Wigg, Jean Wright, Yvonne Bradbury, Lily Duffy &

Sheelagh Chapman. They all deserved a medal.

The following week the play was chosen – “Peril at End House” by Agatha Christie – and casting commenced. Geoff Butler's wife and Mr Learmond had walk-on parts. That evening the seed was sown and we had no idea how it would grow and flourish.

Rehearsals were held every week for well over a year before we were ready to present our performance to a paying audience. On reflection, I am unable to recall a single individual who dropped out – truly remarkable.

The evening duly arrived for the dress rehearsal and photo-shoot for the Southend Standard but our efforts that night were terrible. From being reasonably confident we

Barling Youth Centre Drama Group cont.

became disillusioned and nerves began to show. The big night eventually arrived and the old Parochial Hall was full to capacity with mums, dads, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. I really have no recollection of the actual performance, being totally committed to the play. One thing I can remember was the applause at the end. It seemed to go on and on.

Thanks to the care, attention and sheer professionalism of Geoff Butler the seed had grown and produced the very first flower.

During the period, individuals from the drama group performed at the South East Essex Youth Area Music and Drama Festival. Coach outings were organised to see the stage shows "Annie Get Your Gun" and "Oklahoma" at the old Odeon cinema in Southend. A float was also entered in the Southend carnival.

Our second production was the

wartime play "Flare Path" by Terrance Ratigan. Geoff Butler was unable to direct and our new producer was Gloria Giles.

Cast: David Little, Janet Collicutt, Nobby Emberson, Derek Groves, Jean Wigg, Geoff Wright, Jean Wright, Barry Harper, Barbara Wigg, Arthur Chittock.

I seem to remember we performed on two separate nights to meet demand. Incidentally the scenery for the play was built by the recently formed carpentry class run by John Cerson.

On a lighter theme our new director introduced evenings based on a music hall format during which she also participated.

Our third production was "Happiest Days of Your Life", a school comedy by John Dighton.

Cast: Bernard Duffy, Peter Griffiths, Barry Harper, Geoff Wright, Olive Bradbury, Nobby Emberson, Jean Wright, Yvonne Bradbury, John Duffy, Lily Duffy & Arthur Chittock.

At this juncture my own participation was curtailed when I received a letter marked O.H.M.S. containing a one-way rail ticket to R.A.F. Padgate to carry out my two year's National Service.

On demob, I remember participating in "Ghost Train" a comedy/thriller by Arnold Ridley (famed for playing Godfrey in "Dad's Army").

Cast: Derek Groves, John Duffy, Sam Freeman, Colin Smith??, Jean Wigg, Betty Cranfield, Judith Edwards, Derek Groves' fiancée & Arthur Chittock.

My own enjoyable time with the drama group came to an end in the mid 1950s when I moved abroad for three years. I shall always remember the producer/directors who developed the group and, of course, Mr Learmond who set the whole thing up. As with many enterprises in the village at the time, he devoted a considerable amount of his own time for the benefit of others.

Arthur Chittock

Barling Magna School 1937

Barling Magna 1937: an outpost of Empire, as it seemed to a girl from the town of Aberdare in the Welsh valleys. I had trained as a teacher at Barry Training College in Glamorgan and for me, the first rung on the ladder of my new career was teaching in Barling Magna.

Digs were arranged with the Ladbrokes by the head teacher, Mr Shepherd, and I arrived at "Dunrovin" to start at Barling Magna School in charge of the whole infant department.

It was a complete change after

two years of constant company as a student to find myself knowing no-one. I was made welcome in Dunrovin by Mrs Ladbroke and soon found companionship with Eva Riley with whom I kept in contact until she died in the late 90s. When it became too much for Mrs Ladbroke to continue to look after me I moved to stay with Mrs Prior in Little Waking. Mrs Prior's husband was away in the army and so she was on her own with her little boy Mike who proceeded to call me "Teach". The Snow family was also kind and made me welcome at the Post

Office. Reg Snow and I enjoyed many happy times together. I remember him with affection and also with great respect for his distinguished war record as a bomber pilot. I made good friends within the community, some of whom I kept in contact with right through life. I am glad to mention Malcolm and Edith Mumford who visited us many times when I returned to Aberdare.

My class consisted of children from five to seven years and I think there were about 30 of them. The classroom was a bit dark and dingy. Heating was provided by one stove fired by coal. I tried to brighten the room up with

Barling Magna School 1937 cont

stories and friezes, and the children responded to this with interest. I took a traditional Welsh costume and when I visited the school recently, I was reminded that I should look for a dark haired child to wear it in order to look authentically Welsh. I was told that I am also remembered for my curly hair and the fact that I used to sit at the piano and sing.

I took part in all the activities that went on. On one occasion when we were preparing for the Christmas production we went to a hall in Little Wakering for the morning. When we emerged at lunchtime there was a dense fog. This was my first experience of such a fog and we had to walk back along the road shrouded in this dark, damp blanket. Fortunately the roads were quieter then.

When the war came, life changed

completely. Evacuees arrived and they seemed much tougher than the village children! They were also far from home. Air raid shelters were built on the school field. They were only one brick thick which seemed to give far less protection than our solid stone school. I remember one occasion when some of the boys disappeared from the shelters, with many shouting after them to come back. They were in hot pursuit of a German pilot whom they were convinced they had seen jumping from an aircraft that had been shot down. I don't think they found anyone!

One of the sad things was when a child called Pearl died of a brain tumour. I remember that she was a talented artist and her death was one of the things that one never forgets.

In 1942 I applied for a job in Wales. I was successful and then my

connection with Barling School ceased. Eventually I found myself teaching back in my home town, Aberdare. One evening in 2006 over dinner, it was suddenly revealed that the school in which I had taught all those years ago was the very one that Ros Somerville had been describing as an example of one of those "tucked-away village schools" that she was fortunate to visit in the course of her work as a local authority schools' advisor. She could hardly believe me and kept asking "Are you sure?". As a result of this a visit was arranged and I was delighted to be made so welcome. I thought I would be history and no-one would remember me, but far from it!

Sadie Jones (nee Morgan)

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Paul Abercrombie initiated "Small Beginnings"

Further "Memories of those who shaped our young lives" would be welcome. Mr Learmond and Miss Riley come to mind as prime subjects for articles.