

Memories of New College 1950\ 1954

I gathered that Sub-Warden Ruth Harris, after the Gaude of 2011, was interested in how, if it did, the war influenced the lives of the over-eighties before and during our time in New College. I was nearly ten when war broke out. I remember living in London in the Blitz of 1940 (both parents in medicine, so could not move and they were against evacuation). My sister and I slept in Notting Hill Gate tube station at the height of the bombing. To a ten-year-old it all seemed rather fun and I do not remember being frightened. But in 1945, when I had more sense, I found the

Creed's advice concerning FHS in Animal Physiology was remarkable. He told me that if I read all I could in the latest journals of physiology and biochemistry and could quote from them and the best textbooks, the examiners would be able to assess my industry and memory, but not my intelligence. That might get a second, but you need to show originality and a bit more to get a first. 'Know the basics', he said 'and challenge accepted dogma with your own criticisms and suggestions'. About three weeks before schools he barred me from the College library and the Radcliffe Science Library.

Earlier in the year both he and Dr. Carter (tutor in biochemistry at the Queen's College) were keen to see that I achieved a hockey blue, reminding me that there was no need to work after lunch. Both suggested that a blue would be of as great or greater value to me later than a first class degree. In my later career as a junior doctor I found they were right. A Vincent's club tie was a huge asset at interviews.

I have not said anything about day-to-day life in New College. I was entranced by the singing of the choir in chapel under Dr. Andrewes and attended evensong most evenings. That gave just enough time for a glass of sherry with the Pre-prandial Club before Hall. The Pre-P flourished in my day—does it exist now? I remember that we appointed George Younger (later a minister in the Thatcher government) as Hon Sec as he seemed to be too quiet and unassuming to fill the role of President!

Because of post-war numbers, we could not dine in hall for one year of the three. When allowed to dine in college we all did so, and I remember a group of us who were always together on the same table (bottom left). The group comprised three reading Greats, one English, one History, one Modern Languages and two Medicine/Physiology. Sconcing was still an occasional event—the sins being talking of religion, talking shop, mentioning women by name and talking about pictures in Hall. My memory is that the undergraduate accuser had to send a note in Latin to whomever was presiding at High table giving detail of the sin. The accused could then defend himself also in Latin or submit to the sconce. The silver sconce pot took a formidable volume 66 0to

My scout . . . was he Mark Lyne? . . . had all those 180+ steps to climb when bringing the jug of hot water and bowl each morning for shaving when I had rooms at the top of the Robinson tower. Astonishing to think that to seek a bath one had all those stairs to cope with and the trip to the Long Room for any other water, hot or cold! If that was so different from today, what of the difference between the early 1950s and the 1930s? My uncle Oliver Woods (New Coll. 1933 and on the same staircase as Herbert Nicholas) once visited me and could not believe that we lunched in Hall rather than in our rooms with parties supported by shopping and service at the table by one's scout on the day. Was that true, I wonder? Oliver had the splendid job of dining in Oxbridge colleges with senior tutors to seek the best to recruit for and had lived for a number of years in the privileged rooms in the Albany.

Because of my original lack of science I spent four very happy years at New College, but was then impatient to get to the real world of sick people at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School in London. Very few of us stayed at the Radcliffe Infirmary in those days. We all went to London to return to Oxford only to sit final examinations. That too had its bizarre side—the dressing in sub-fuse with gown and hood even when examining patients on the wards of the old RI.

A meandering account—I wonder how it compares with others. Memories after so long are a little rusty.

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