

FROM THE STUDY WINDOW

The preacher at our Beginning of the Year Service held in the Cathedral on Thursday, 9th September 1982 was the venerable Frank Johnston, Chaplain-in-Chief to Her Majesty's Land Forces. In view of the conflict which had taken place in the Falkland Islands earlier in that year, his presence seemed particularly appropriate—though of course at the time of inviting him I had no idea of what the future was to bring.

We welcomed to the staff of the Chemistry Department Mr. J. N. Atherton, a graduate of Cambridge, an Old Boy of Bolton School and for many years Head of the Textile Department at the Blackburn College of Technology, together with Mr. C. P. J. Evans (Churchill College, Cambridge), who came to us from St. Dunston's College at Catford in South-East London. Three new lady members of staff also joined us, one of whom was Mrs. E. A. Evans, though no relation to the foregoing. Mrs. Evans, now teaching in the Junior School, trained some years ago at the City of Bath College of Education before the needs of her family caused her temporary retirement; Mrs. C. E. Butler, a modern linguist (Bedford College, London), came to us from Witton Park School, Blackburn; and Mrs. L. J. C. Fisher (St. Hugh's College, Oxford) joined our Physics Department, having previously taught at Shrewsbury, where she also taught swimming.

The term was quickly under way, with its usual round of visitors to school and visits out of school to theatres, exhibitions and places of further education. An innovation, and one receiving enthusiastic parental support, was the holding of the Junior School Speech Day on the last Friday afternoon before half-term.

Much excitement raged over the refusal of the Lancashire County Council to allow any of its pupils to come into our Sixth Form for our five Assisted Places, and it is to the credit of our Governors that money was found to bring in such pupils under the Bursary Scheme. The Rank Trustees also deserve our gratitude for their continued and most generous support of several pupils in the school, particularly at sixth form level, who would not otherwise be able to attend.

At an Old Blackburnian Section Dinner held in Christ's College, Cambridge on November 19th, Professor Henry Loyn, Vice-Principal of Westfield College in the University of London, was the excellent speaker. Professor Loyn also exercised his Welsh wizardry in his delightful Speech Day address in King George's Hall on December 7th.

Snow made the following February a particularly unpleasant month: one which will stand out in my memory for the remarkable railway journey undertaken by the Provost of Blackburn and myself. After attending the General Synod, we were to travel to the University of Durham for the inaugural dinner of the Old Blackburnians' Association, at which the Provost was to speak. What was intended as a high-speed journey actually occupied much of the afternoon and early evening; and when we emerged from the train at Durham to be confronted with amazing scenes of snow and ice, I doubted that we should ever make it to the Tristram Room at St. John's College, particularly when the Provost disappeared from sight in a most un-provostlike position as he glissaded down a steep embankment to the road below. Fortunately he sustained no damage apart from a slight loss of dignity. We

were made most welcome and passed a very pleasant evening. More and more of our students are going to Durham, and I very much hope that this enjoyable connection will be maintained.

Later I attended a farewell lunch at Lloyds Bank, Manchester for their Regional Manager, Mr. Eric West, whom we were soon to welcome onto the Governing Body of the School, Mr. West being himself a distinguished Old Blackburnian.

Ash Wednesday fell on February 16th: on this appropriate day, Mr. Stanley Waring, formerly with the Lancashire County Council, took over his new letter-opener and his many-ledgered office as he assumed the role of Bursar in succession to Mr. Hunter. In the evening, the Governors gave at my home a supper party for Mr. and Mrs. Hunter to wish them every happiness in their retirement. Not the least part of a delightful occasion was the presentation to Mr. Hunter of a cake suitably coloured in green and white, and inscribed with various cricketing symbols. The Common Room had already given him a season ticket for the Nottinghamshire County Cricket ground at Trent Bridge, conveniently near to his new home at Southwell to which Mrs. Hunter and himself were later to retire.

Towards the end of term, the Dramatic Society produced three comedies: "Ernie's Incredible Illucinations", "Dear Departed" and "The Stunt", with a number of highly successful individual performances; and the term closed with a superb rendition of Bach's "St. John Passion" in the Cathedral.

The bad weather at the beginning of the Summer Term gave no hint of what was to come. It was a damp, dismal day on which I drove to an Independent Schools Information Service at Penrhos College in Colwyn Bay, the sea mist being almost continuous; and the Elizabethan Association's Spring Dance, highly successful though it was in respect of its excellent cuisine and the quality of the music provided, could hardly be said to have taken place on a blazing May evening. Buffeted by high winds and driving rain on my way to Silcoates School, where the first Northern Conference of the Association of Registered Old Pupils of schools such as ours was held, I pondered, with little hope, on the possibility of a fine summer. Half-term brought no change: thunder and lightning accompanied some pupils and myself to Cambridge, and, on the Open Day at the University of Edinburgh, another party trudged round the cheerless environs in pouring rain.

Not until June was there a sign of change. I spent the first two days in Brussels as a guest of the British Atlantic Committee on a visit to the Headquarters of NATO, SHAPE and the EEC, returning to a very warm and much pleasanter Blackburn. The improvement might have been a flash in the pan, but no: it was more than that. Halfway through June, when I was preaching in the Chapel of Bishop Stortford College, the Headmaster, anticipating an outbreak of fainting (from the heat, not the sermon), gave the order to remove blazers.

In the Town Hall on June 28th, there was held the public enquiry into our plan to build on the site between Ormerod House and the Holden Laboratories. To our chagrin, the application was refused: a decision strongly inimical to the future of the school.

Our new Bursar supervised the renovation of, and alterations to the school buildings. This took place in tremendous heat, which persisted until the end of August. We returned to school to find the upper rooms of Hartley House converted to smaller study rooms, and the library—sadly truncated—moved down to the premises once occupied by the Church of Christ, Scientist; these premises, recently acquired by the school, have been re-named "Adelaide House", obviously appropriate to a building situated on Adelaide Terrace.

Under the auspices of the "Experiment for International Living", Thwaites, our local brewers, generously sponsored a summer trip from Blackburn to Morocco for a group of young people led by Mrs. Hardcastle, whose account of the adventure I found both fascinating and amazing.

The Rt. Rev. Peter Nott, Bishop of Taunton and Archbishop's Adviser to H.M.C. Schools, gave a lively and thought-provoking sermon at the Cathedral Service marking the beginning of the new school year on September 8th, 1983.

At this time, the Governors were considering anew the future use of the existing school buildings as well as the provision of a sports complex which would include a swimming pool—the latter being a much-discussed topic for some time past. We hope that the plans now approved may soon come to fruition.

We welcomed at the beginning of term Mr. D. A. Cooper, former Organ Scholar of Lincoln College, Oxford and subsequently Sub-organist at Wells Cathedral; he has come to Blackburn as the newly-appointed Cathedral Organist, and has taken a part-time teaching post in the school.



The Headmaster in command of a Ferret Scout Car during the visit of the Royal Tank Regiment

Dr. M. A. Cantrell having left the Biology department, to our regret, in order to return to Africa, Mr. W. D. Jennison (London University) came to replace him after serving for over ten years at the Royal Grammar School, Lancaster as biology master and C.C.F. officer. There were two appointments to the English department: Mr. P. R. Kent, who undertakes his first teaching post following his studies at the Universities of Sheffield and Liverpool; and Mr. R. Stowell, a former Scholar of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, and an Old Boy of Burnley Grammar School. Mr. Stowell has had considerable experience of teaching overseas, and now joins us following a spell at his old school. The two vacancies arose largely from the impending departure of one man—Mr. W. H. Proctor, who was to retire at the end of term, exactly forty years since this distinguished Old Boy started to teach here.

We were happy to have as guests at the beginning of October the Headmaster and some of the governors of St. Bede's School in Manchester; they were intending to introduce co-education at St. Bede's, and were interested to see how it was working here.

During the week before half-term, the Christian Union organised a mission; it was led by the Rev. Eric Townson, to whom we offer our gratitude.

At the Junior School Speech Day on October 21st, Mr. David Waddington, Q.C. and M.P. for Clitheroe, presented the prizes.

November's particularly arduous task was the drawing up of a short list from over a hundred applications for Mr. Bury's post, from which he retires in October 1984.

Towards the end of term, I attended as a representative the enthronement in York Minster of the new Archbishop of York—an unforgettable experience.

Speech Day was on December 15th, when the prizes were presented by the Master of St. John's College, Cambridge—Professor Harry Hinsley, O.B.E., M.A., F.B.A. The unusual, even novel exuberance of the Professor's speech dispelled any notion that distinguished academics, the writers of long and learned books, necessarily lack wit, humour, panache and joie de vivre.

The Old Blackburnians' Annual Dinner took place without the hindrance of bad weather, and we were further cheered on our return to school by the news of the award of twenty-two places at Oxford and Cambridge.

It having been recently announced that Blackburn was to lose all its sixth forms except those at St. Wilfrid's and Darwen Vale, the gift of £1000 from the Bradford and Bingley Building Society to enable sixth formers to move here from other schools was very welcome. We also record with gratitude a most generous gift of £25,000 from the Wolfson Trust which will certainly help to stimulate interest in the provision of new buildings for the school.

Fresh challenge, fresh direction, but still the same school: the school which, since my last report, has so benefited from the combined efforts of parents, Old Boys, and the academic and ancillary staff as to produce excellent results in so many walks of school life. I thank them all.

P. F. Johnston