

This is a highly personalised, perhaps scandalous, maybe slightly libellous Plymothian's view of education in this area.

I was a pupil of St. George's Primary, then Devonport High and Plympton Grammar School, none of which had a great influence on me apart from the basic rudiments of the three 'R's and the formation of a lifelong liking for smoking cigarettes.

I suppose that almost forty years on, the one teacher that stands out in my mind was a certain Horace Gordon, Physics Master at Plympton Grammar School. I believe Horace had not had a failure in School Certificate Physics for years but his lessons were fun. He had a ready fund of blunt-edged sarcasm and irony which was probably instrumental in persuading a high proportion of our year to become scientific high-fliers. Why Horace Gordon, not Ella Horell, H.A.T. Simmons, H.W. Hayle, George Harris or Reggie Hickman, I ask myself. I suppose it was his sense of humour in delivery and explanations within the laboratory. I certainly felt throughout my thirty years, that if my sense of failure failed then I would have to quit teaching and take up politics.

My twelve months' National Service and my two years at St. Luke's, Exeter, were probably the most formative period of my life. Less because of the curriculum and quality of instruction, much of which was diabolical, but more because of the people involved, from C.S.M. Varley at No. 1 P.R.D. Westmoors, to Joe Stripe, the Head of English at St. Luke's.

Joe was a performer, particularly good with poetry or Shakespeare and it was J. Stripe who led me into a life-long enjoyment and appreciation of poetry in general and T.S. Eliot's poems and Macbeth in particular. He also encouraged me into an appreciation of gin and vermouth as an aperitif.

Personality is an important tool in teaching within the classroom but it is interesting to look at the personalities involved in local education (we should note that the strongest personality in National Politics was once probably the worst Minister of Education we have had, with the possible exception of Florence Horsborough).

Personalities outside the classroom fall into two main categories, politicians and administrators. Almost certainly the person who exerted the biggest influence on the local education scene before reorganisation was Lesley Paul, a privately educated newsagent who was Chairman of Plymouth L.E.A. for practically all the years the Conservatives were in power.

A traditionalist to the nth degree, who by his pro-grammar school and pro-eleven plus fervour and political astuteness kept the borough of Plymouth close to the bottom of the table for L.E.A. spending on education, and more important, close to the bottom for educational advance.

Mr. Paul's co-partner for many years was Andrew Scotland, the Director of Education. Dr. Scotland was well known for his abridged version of the modern classics which were well in evidence in the City schools, but he was not. Trefor Williams, the last Director of Education in the City, was very much an appointee of Mr. Paul. Trefor was an able administrator who was also rarely seen in the schools.

Before the appointment of Mr. T. Williams, Plymouth made one of those mistakes which even the worst authorities sometimes make - a first class appointment. John Chadderton became Director of Education. 'Suddenly it was Spring,' we actually saw the Director in our schools more than once a decade and changes were in the air. Unfortunately, J.C. found the political climate in the City untenable and left after less than two years. Incidentally, another of those interesting mistakes was Dr. Theo Matoff, at the School of Architecture. I am sure there were many politicians who breathed a sigh of relief when he departed for Leicester!

The other two characters of influence on the local education scene are Jos Owen and Ted Pinney. The former, an administrator with a national reputation and the latter, a politician/farmer who always struck me as 'slightly to the right of Attila the Hun', until I was told by a prominent politician that 'Ted is so far left he is almost a Socialist.' It just shows how far wrong a mere teacher can be about his own leaders.

The local education scene has been dominated by the conservatives for so long that one forgets there are other organisations that 'made strait the path' to quick promotion, such as Mutley Conservative Club and some of the Masonic Lodges. It would be interesting to take a head count of the 'apron weavers' in politics, education, the judiciary and the police locally. A Gallup survey of the local scene would be more interesting than a pre-election poll.

It is fascinating to look back on thirty years of teaching, especially from the viewpoint of an employer with a staff of fourteen young people in one of the most competitive manufacturing businesses, print. When I list the qualities I need for my staff I come up with enthusiasm, care, consideration, flexibility, willingness to

learn, initiative, politeness (not servility), etc. etc. I never discover until later how many G.C.E.s or C.S.E.s they have.

This is rather shattering when we consider how much time is spent in Secondary schools preparing for examinations. In Plymouth in particular, it even blighted the curriculum of many of our Primary schools. We should not, however, be too sanguine about the demands of industry. For a real piece of out-moded traditionalism, look at the maths papers set for the hopeful entrants to Her Majesty's Dockyard or the Plymouth and South Devon Cooperative Society.

Unfortunately, teachers are great swingers of pendulums and new ideas are often grasped with more enthusiasm than expertise. A prize example of this was the so called NEW MATHEMATICS. The ideas following one of the less scurrilous sayings of Confucius:

'I hear and I forget,
I see and I remember,
I do and I understand.'

and the application of this tenet to primary mathematics led to many excellent ideas but also to many problems such as a lack of numeracy. It has taken the recent efforts of one of the giants of primary education, Arthur Owen, H.M.I., to instil commonsense into the teaching of mathematics in schools. Arthur Owen, alas not now based in Plymouth, has been one of the few bright spots in the local education scene. He is a most approachable member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate and a real crowd-puller for after school teachers' meetings.

The last three years in the profession I spent as Warden of Plymouth Teacher's Centre. The Centre serves in excess of 2,500 teachers and yet as a major provider of in-service training for teachers it struggles on a budget of #7,000 for the purchase of both hardware and software. In-service training is a hairy nettle that has not been grasped by County. I feel it should be a requirement that all teachers attend a minimum number of refresher courses every few years. In Plymouth there are many teachers who attend courses less frequently than once in ten years.

Many Plymouth teachers looked forward to Local Authority reorganisation as the old Devon County track record in enlightened education was so much better than Plymouth's L.E.A.s. Alas, reorganisation has changed a liberal Conservative, somewhat benevolent authority into a hard-line business and professional Conservative dominated authority, largely interested in the manipulation of political power. Now, even school managers are political appointees. Re-organisation has, in my opinion, served the City badly in most areas. It always appears to me as a substantial provider of rates for the County that the City is the poor relation of that other small City 42 miles up the road.

Conclusions are difficult in a short piece such as this, but the summary must contain hope. Hope that teachers are beginning to come to grips with the real world. Hope, too, that employers are looking for the right talents in their young employees - I can do long division and work out square roots (I think), but why should I expect my staff to do without a calculator? Hope also springs eternal that politicians will see the merit of Comprehensive schools like Plymstock, Coombe Dean, Eggbuckland and press for the same facilities for all children. We have four members of staff from one of these schools and they are all first class.

Hope perhaps springs from the fact that now all schools have a micro computer; I hope they are setting problems as well as merely solving them. Hope springs from the fact that the curriculum is so wide that the teacher is no longer the fount of all expertise. I accepted long ago that many of my ten year olds knew more than I did about some subjects and that certainly many of them were brighter than me.

My personal hope is that we can get all our young people to question the rightness of authority. Not just in a rebellious, paint-spraying manner, but constructively and critically with a determination to improve the local and national scene. Oh dear, I sound like a politician and these of all people are the ones we must teach our children to question and harass and vote in or out of office.