

From "The Sunday Times Magazine" of 10 July, 1963 - very kindly sent to us by Amanda Swift, whose father was Editor of the STM from 1965 to 1972 and a friend of Jim Hyde.

Amanda writes: "I'm pretty sure my dad knew Jim through the Vocational Advisory Service they both worked for in the Middle East in 1946/47."

Amanda is an author of children's books:

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Mr. Mrs. G. H. Bailey

**George H. Bailey was the much-loved
Headmaster of Woolverstone Hall
School from 1960 to 1974.**

THE PUBLIC PUBLIC SCHOOL...

REPORT BY GODFREY SMITH/PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTOPHER ANGELOGLOU

"WOULD YOU LIKE your car cleaned, sir?" asked a tall, courteous boy in a grey flannel suit.

"Yes, what a good idea, thank you very much."

"That will be half a crown, sir."

I'd just arrived at Woolverstone Hall, the L.C.C.'s boarding school six miles from Ipswich and was much impressed. I doubt if an Etonian would have had the gumption to make the offer, and if he had the charges would have been at least 10s. The money, by the way, was going to the school car club; they make about 30s. a week from cleaning mas-

ters' cars, own a £10 Morris 8 and are hoping to buy another car soon. At half a crown, the polish they put on my car was a bargain.

One of the most agonising sights this life can afford is an English middle-class intellectual deciding where to send his son to school. Only England could offer you the preposterous spectacle of radical parents fighting to get their children into schools they are working hard to overthrow. And it is perhaps worth noting that Mr Harold Wilson himself sent both his sons to a public school—admittedly as day boys.

Woolverstone Hall might be the eventual answer to his problems and ours.

Much to the disgust of masters and boys, Woolverstone has often been called the poor man's Eton. In fact, the L.C.C. started it after the war first as a nautical school; then reorganised and enlarged it as a secondary grammar school partly to meet the needs of boys whose parents were serving overseas in such organisations as BAOR, the Colonial Office, or the United Nations. It has also from the beginning taken a proportion of boys who needed boarding education be-

cause of home circumstances, but it has never been primarily for them. It is just a very good State grammar school where the boys happen to live in.

Its situation is gorgeous: a Georgian stately home, once owned by the Berners family, standing in 60 acres of grounds with views over the estuary of the river Orwell; not surprisingly the school is already distinguished for its sailing and came eighth out of 40 in the Public Schools Championships this year. The original building contains the Headmaster's house, classrooms and the administrative centre, and dotted in the grounds are the modern blocks which make up the school Houses, Assembly Hall, labs, workshops and more classrooms. You would take it for a trad public school, but there are significant differences.

Parents pay according to means. Tuition is free for everybody, but the parent pays a maximum of £240 a year for a son's board if he earns £1650 a year or over, nothing if he earns £450

a year or less and a sliding scale of fees between those two salaries. The 360 boys are drawn from the whole L.C.C. area, from the Ministry of Education's special pool of boys with parents overseas and from other parts of Britain too. About 90 applied for 60 places this year, which is disappointing when you consider that a good slice of these had some special reason for applying, such as overseas posting; the fact is that any parent in London whose son is suitable for an academic course can ask for his son to go there and not very many yet do.

YET by any criterion it is a very good school. This summer 20 sixth-formers have won university places for 1963 and two for 1964. Of these, seven are going to Oxford and Cambridge, two with Exhibitions. In 'O' level results last / *continued on page 21* year the fifth-formers averaged 6.8 passes. In sport, too, the school is out-

standing. Its first XV has been defeated only three times in school fixtures since Woolverstone began.

It is a genuinely classless school; most of the boys speak with a neutral, David Frost accent, and it does not matter a jot who your father is. Those boys from army families have fathers ranging all the way from privates to brass hats and it is noticeably the officers' sons who take the more radical line in politics. Race appears not to matter either; this year's Rugby captain is a Pakistani.

The boys have an insouciant charm. They are well-mannered, but not at all subservient; indeed they display a healthy cynicism about the world they will soon inherit.

"I'm going to be a quantity surveyor," one fifth-former told me over tea, "because I am told there is a lot of loot in it." He added, with a straight face, that they had used Fairy Liquid to clean my car, "because it is so gentle with our hands."

"They're so pure," one master remarked. "They get white shirts instead of grey at 15 and every boy has a toothbrush to scrub his drip-dry with." A census undertaken by *Number*, the school's duplicated equivalent of *Private Eye*, revealed that, among 43 sixth-formers, 13 used Old Spice after-shave lotion, eight used Yardleys, while Max Factor, Mark Vardi, Aqua Velva, Corvette, Tang, Imperial Leather and Cedarwood each had three users. Thirty-nine shampooed their hair ("pretty impressive, actually," said one member of the staff). Twenty used L.C.C. soap and four Camay ("some people need that little extra loveliness," remarks *Number*). Fifteen boys have electric razors.

I should have thought that such traditional horrors of public school life bullying and beating are virtually absent. There is no fagging. I couldn't help noticing when talking to a group one evening that when some smaller boys arrived to join in, a sixth-former threw them a cushion to sit

on. I don't know, but I doubt if it would have happened at Rugby or Marlborough.

BOYS go to Woolverstone at 11, two years before normal public school age, and, of course, some are terribly homesick for a few days. But this is understood and nobody makes fun of it; indeed everyone goes out of their way to help. On the first Sunday of term, when homesickness is most likely to set in, all 60 new boys play a magnificent Woolverstone game called Stonehenge Rugger—30 a side with three balls, a point

scored every time a ball is grounded over the goal line, a senior to boot the ball upfield after each point is scored, and the whole school cheering them on. That sends them to bed far too tired to worry about home. Occasionally boys have run away, but not lately; in the early years when only junior boys were there they seem to have been somewhat overshadowed by the nautical school which occupied Woolverstone Hall be-

fore and briefly overlapped. But now they are a complete school with an Old Boys' Society, a school magazine, and a very high level of accomplishment in music and drama. They have put on Menotti's opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and Brecht's *Mother Courage* with music specially composed by a master. And they have taken part in the nearby Aldeburgh Festival.

Not all the boys approve of the way Woolverstone is going; one group of very radical sixth-formers feel they are aping an orthodox public school. A recent census revealed that in the lower sixth there were 15 Socialists, 13 Liberals, 4 Conservatives and one Communist. The rebels suspect the elocution classes they are given in the sixth form and are taking the Hoggart line that their working-class culture is being ironed out of them. They think the Headmaster, Mr G. H. Bailey, is a very kind and considerate man, but they believe the school was started as a Socialist experiment (the L.C.C. deny this) and is becoming a hot-house

of the Establishment. A group of fifth-formers told me this was balderdash; they thoroughly enjoyed the school and were proud of being there. On a show of hands, they seemed much more conservative politically.

"They talk about everything under the sun," said one housemaster; "Yoga, Thalidomide babies, capital punishment. They never stop."

"Bless their hearts," says Mr Bailey, who played Rugby for Cambridge. He canes very occasionally but doesn't believe it is the right answer for serious offences. There is a certain amount of illicit smoking. A deputation of athletic sixth-formers came to discuss with the Head how to stop it. His wife brought in coffee. "It would help us a great deal, Mrs Bailey," said one sixth-former, putting his head on one side, "if you would set an example by stopping smoking." She did—for a year anyway.

"We believe here that girls are a good thing," said one of the housemasters. "There are dances three

times a year, the Young Farmers' Club has meetings and organises sausage sizzles with girls at Ipswich High School." He added realistically: "Most boys are prepared to feed a rabbit if they are going to meet girls in consequence." Girl friends who ring up from London are not supposed to be put through, but one gathers that House matrons sometimes relent. There are seven jazz groups and, with the help of a visiting Canadian school, they once gave a three-hour jazz concert.

Pocket money ranges from 3s. to 5s. a week and each parent can, if he wishes, provide 7s. 6d. for his son's birthday party; that provides a cake with a name on it, jellies, and enough food for eight guests. (Very poor boys would have this paid for and it has been known for the Council to fit a boy out with his clothes in cases of special need.)

It costs the L.C.C. 30s. a week to feed one boy at Woolverstone and the true price of keeping him there (including a £76 capital repayment charge) is

£497 a year. As much as Eton cry the reactionaries, but then, after all, why not? A boy doesn't eat any less because his parents are working class and graduate teachers cost much the same all the world over.

WHAT I liked about Woolverstone was that it seemed to breed the ruggedness and independence of public school life without moulding the boys into po-faced conformers. It is true that occasionally a boy there is incurably homesick for the fish and chip shops and coffee bars of his native metropolis. (On the other hand, some boys fall in love with the countryside and have gone into agriculture as a career.) It is true, too, that when the boys go home they are cut off from their old friends.

But they vehemently deny that they grow away from their parents and certainly the coaches that bring mothers and fathers to Woolverstone are some of the chummiest and least class-ridden assemblies England can offer. The parents have raised some £3000

towards the cost of an open-air swimming-pool.

Should we build more schools like Woolverstone? And if we do, will we create a new kind of class barrier between boarders and day boys? Or should we start boarding schools, as Surrey has at Ottershaw, which take grammar, secondary modern and prep school boys at 13? Or should the Government simply pay the fees for more and more of our children to go to existing public schools? The L.C.C. already pays for 500 a year, but that is hardly a significant proportion from the 176,000 secondary children it is responsible for.

"Sir," said one boy politely, "did the L.C.C. ask you to come down here and write this article?" I don't think he believed me when I said they hadn't, but it is just this tough, questioning spirit which Woolverstone engenders, and which I think we should encourage.



Boys eat three cooked meals a day, sometimes at first complain they can't eat so much. Supper (above) is at 5.30 p.m. A typical menu: chipolata, spaghetti and tomatoes, bread and butter, jam and tea. Then at 9 p.m. they have, say, an apple and a chelsea bun. It costs 30s. to feed one boy for one week



A junior boy waits for supper to be cleared so that he can start on his prep. The youngest boys have striped ties. Higher up the school they wear plain ones; prefects have a wolf's head on theirs



Five members of the school Car Club with the Morris 8 they bought for £10. They make 30s a week cleaning cars and are now busy straightening out a written-off M.G. for a master. Soon they hope to buy another car. Behind them is Woolverstone Hall, built in 1776 for the Berners family.