

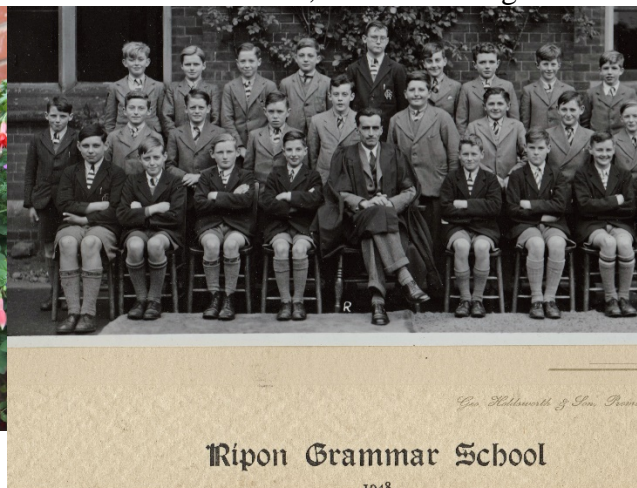
John Henry Richmond. RGS 1947 – 51

*Recollections of an Old Boy*

John in 2017



John: middle row, 4<sup>th</sup> from the right



I grew up on a small farm between Kirkby Malzeard and Dallowgill, the youngest of four, and attended the Ripon Grammar School for boys from 1947 – 51. The day of the scholarship exam is etched in my memory: February '47 was the start of the 'Big Winter' and I walked 2.5 miles to Kirkby Malzeard to catch a bus designated to transport children from village schools for the dreaded examination. The bus never made it, so numerous village children had another opportunity a month later to sit the exam. Happily, I passed and spent the next five years enjoying a new life of education from the village school, generally fitting in with the varying classes, proving to be above average in most subjects.

Teachers who gave me inspiration were Mr Thomas, who taught English (my form teacher in the class photograph), French teacher Mr Kempster and chemistry teacher, John 'Masher' Brown. He was admired and respected by all pupils but was also a very good shot with a piece of chalk if he thought you weren't paying attention. My brother, David, 5 years my senior, had gained his school certificate in 1946 and became a trainee dispenser at Boots the chemist. A popular pupil at the Grammar School for various reasons – including sport and also for smoking behind the bike sheds and the cricket pavilions – his acquaintances befriended me in my early days at RGS, sometimes saving me from the many rituals, such as 'duckings' that was an accepted initiation for new boys. However, owing to my father's ill health, I left RGS at the early age of 15 to assist on the family farm.

After all, farming was bred in me and our small farm had been selected by the Milk Marketing Board, as an example for tuberculin tested milk production. By

this time, the tractor had taken the place of horsepower, a further attraction for a teenager away from school. I could see that small farms were already in decline and I decided that management of larger farms was for me and after applying for a few such positions, I secured a management post for a highly intensive dairy farm near Harrogate. My boss (somewhat of a recluse, though only in his mid thirties) resided in the large farm house, added to the mystery when, after a couple of weeks, he handed the reins over to me to run the whole outfit: that of production of farm-bottled milk. Little did I know that he was part of the Bletchley Park team who had, during the war, cracked the codes of German intelligence and he still remained at this point in time, under the Official Secrets Act?

Early in 1958, I met Barbara – we married during the first month of my new job, spending 5 years living in a small cottage on the farm. However, in 1963, we bought the Nordale Guest House in Ripon and now with 2 small children, we were back in touch with the city. My involvement in Ripon culminated in being elected to the city council in 1967, mayor in 1975/76 and becoming one of 2 county councillors in 1977. The battle over RGS was at this stage at its height. Comprehensive education was on the cards for all Grammar Schools in North Yorkshire – York and Tadcaster had lost 4 grammar schools between them and so the prospect of the same thing happening to Ripon was imminent.

At my very first full county council meeting in 1977, the decision that comprehensive education would be administered was about to be taken. My previous experience of council procedure was that I had only one opportunity to persuade the ninety strong council to change their minds and a motion of ‘reference back to committee’ would be my only chance. Perhaps I was as much surprised as anyone that I won the day – persuading a group of very new councillors from York that their decision for “comprehensivisation” had not been as good an idea as they thought two years previous and that to allow one of the finest grammar schools in the county to suffer the same fate would rest on their consciences for the rest of their lives. My strategy to defer the council’s decision paid off so that by the time Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979, declaring that all existing Grammar Schools be allowed to retain their status, I had won the time necessary to save Ripon Grammar from “comprehensivisation”.

Whilst mayor in 1975, I also became the city’s hornblower over the Christmas period, and much later, shared the duties with two others before George Pickles became the official hornblower. Also the same year, I became captain at Ripon City Golf Club and during my captaincy, visited Ripon, California to establish a link with our city. We set up a biennial golf tournament between the two countries, which still runs today, over four decades later.

Having sold the Guest House at the age of 52, I gained another interest – filming family documentaries and civic historic occasions as well as formal Royal visits and Brian Stanley’s last Speech day as Headmaster.

I have also been heavily involved with Alhallowgate Church and was a Methodist Lay Preacher there for over 40 years. I spent 30 years in Ripon Rotary and was awarded the Paul Harris Fellowship in 2004. The same year, I was lucky enough to be made a Freeman of the city of Ripon.

More recently, I have joined Ripon’s U3A (University of the Third Age) and have enjoyed the singing and writing groups particularly – the latter has inspired me to write my memoirs which I am wading through as I write!

John outside Nordale Guest House

