

The Truth, but Not the Whole Truth. Memories of Roundhay School, 1950-1957.

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The Roundhay School of which I became a pupil in September 1950 contained getting on for one thousand boys, nine or ten times larger than the three-classroomed Gledhow School which I had just left. As a first-former (aged 11+) my form-room was in The Mansion (a.k.a. Gledhow Hill). I imagine first-formers were taught in The Mansion in order to lessen the culture-shock of arriving at so large a school, and perhaps to avoid being bullied and/or corrupted by older boys. My form master/maths teacher seemed to be a very venerable gentleman - I find it difficult to believe that I am now about a decade older than he then was. He had a unique, and somewhat unwise, sense of humour, his set, and oft repeated jokes ('Watch the board while I run through it', 'If you don't stop looking out of that window, I'll shut it', 'Every time I open my mouth some fool speaks'), all tending to make him seem stupid in the eyes of us boys, as we did not realise that these remarks were tongue-in-cheek.

I did not get off to a good start. Arriving four days later than my fellows, because of illness, and being somewhat confused by the multiplicity of teachers, I was persuaded by a fellow pupil to address this maths teacher by his nickname. I had not realised that he and the form master were one and the same person, though I did notice a strong resemblance between them. Other first-form memories include the music teacher, a brilliant musician but less streetwise than his charges, who set the same exam for different first forms on different days, with the obvious consequence, and the woodwork teacher who could not tolerate my perfectionist attitude to planing a piece of wood. I could never be quite sure it was straight, so I went on until there was little left, much to his annoyance.

The second, third, fourth and fifth forms were all taught in the main school, one disadvantage of which was that they were nearer to the headmaster, who believed in physical exercise, at least to the extent of wandering the corridors during lesson time. The doors of the classrooms had glass windows, so that periodically a deathly hush

would descend on a class when they became aware of the man's tremendous presence (in both senses of both words). The story goes of the class who were reading Macbeth aloud and had got to Act I Scene 2, which opens with Duncan saying 'What bloody man is that?', when the class became aware of a face at the fortunately relatively sound-proof window.

The second form meant a second foreign language. I chose the soft option, Spanish, and had an agreeable four years with a teacher who realised that his pupils needed to know English before mastering a foreign language and so spent a good deal of the time explaining the intricacies of English grammar. Perhaps he also realised it did not take four years to learn GCE Spanish! He is also an interesting example of how a respected teacher can influence his pupils. He once condemned the wearing of scarves as unhealthy and I have never worn one since, except once for a very stiff neck.

Unless a pupil had fallen irremediably behind, life at Roundhay became progressively more pleasant and easier as one progressed through the school and "dropped" subjects at which one was less adept. One subject that was never dropped was games, at which my own record was less than brilliant. I did get an approving mention in the school magazine for doing the scoring (in the book, not on the pitch) for several house cricket matches, but my general attitude to rugby was largely governed by a public-spirited concern not to add to the workload of St James' over-stretched A&E Department. I should, however, mention that I did score two tries in the seven years I was at Roundhay, both on the pitch bounded by Old Park Road and the ginnel through to Thorn Lane (those responsible for blue plaques please note).

Then, of course, there was cross-country running, to which I was subjected when the ground was unsuitable for rugby. Routes varied a bit, but often involved crossing the Soldier's Field to the "donkey-field entrance" to Roundhay Park (to the right of Hill 60), running (or walking in my case) to the gorge, then through to the Ring Road, up the Ring Road as far as the path across the golf course to Waterloo Lake, and so back to school. Dedicated runners went on to Shadwell from the Ring Road and returned to it where the path crossed the golf course.

If one reached the sixth form and A-levels, the classes in the first of the two years were held in The Mansion, which gave greater freedom

to responsible older boys. The class I was in was fortunate in having a good view of the path from the main school, not to mention an English teacher who was often late. We had many enjoyable games of shove ha'penny on his large desk before he came into view, giving us ample time to stop before he arrived. It was back to the main school for the second-year sixth.

A number of the teachers at Roundhay had taught at the Central High School before Roundhay was built, and had in fact taught my father. I reminded one of them of this when meeting him in the 1960s, and he replied, somewhat gloomily, 'I am waiting for someone to tell me that I taught their grandfather'. One of this number was a highly effective and respected maths teacher who, when a boy arrived for a lesson lacking, say, his set-square, would intone parsonically 'Let me remind you of the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to St Matthew, and of the five wise virgins, who remembered to bring their set-squares to their maths lesson, and of the five foolish virgins, who forgot to bring their set-squares to their maths lesson'.

Joking apart, I have much to thank Roundhay School for, as have most pupils of that type of secondary grammar school who managed to get into and keep in the higher forms (this was a bit touch and go with me at one point). Those in the lower forms might have a different tale to tell. I have avoided naming names, though some will be apparent to my contemporaries. I must, however, recommend, for those interested in a serious history, 'Roundhay School: the first half century', by G. Hinchliffe, one of the best, indeed arguably the best, of the teachers of that time