

STIRRING THINGS UP!

In the mid 70s, before the days of political correctness, there was still a Men's Junior Common Room (MJCR) at Wye. It was widely known that Harry Darling, the Principal did not approve, but once a term we had a MJCR night. There were four elected posts, the President of MJCR, the College Ram – responsible for the sex life of the students, the Official Tortoise Keeper to look after the College mascot and finally, the most prized position of the Arch S*** Stirrer, who's mandate was to disrupt College life without hurting anyone.

Before our time there were wonderful stories about the Stirrer pulling off high-profile stunts, like making the College believe Winston Churchill was coming on a visit and when the Principal – Dunstan Skilbeck – went to meet the train the President of MJCR alighted with a goat in tow. There was also the story of a van going to Kent University with students in overalls and ladders and painting out the windows in one of the blocks with whitewash. It was also told that they diverted the Monte Carlo Rally through Wye and rebuilt the College tractor inside the quad.

John Magnay (74-77) was a victim in his 1st term, when his room was rebuilt in the corridor to the new lecture theatre while he was away for the weekend; and in the 2nd term he lost the wheels off his car, FPK 30C, for a week only to find them decorating the Old Library, tastefully balanced on the public gallery.

John Lory (74-77) was Stirrer of some class. In his first year he proposed blowing up the loo in 'C' block at a time to catch Malcolm Hughes (74-77) on his weekly enthronement. The plan was to shoot him off the loo with a fountain of water. Fortunately, wiser counsels urged caution and a trial run. Sadly, for 'C' Block, but fortunately for Malcolm, the trial detonation shattered the loo. The explanation that the damage had been done as a result of flushing dry ice down the pan was accepted, but the end result was still a 'pink chit' from Cliff Martindale. Those lucky enough not to receive a pink chit should know that these were, in essence, bills from the College. Part of the Stirrer's role was to help – very unofficially – help these find their way to the appropriate responsible person. Whilst in these days of 'all rights and no responsibilities' the reaction might be one of 'prove it', it was part of the Wye culture that one paid one's dues in this area.

Undaunted by the poor results in the lavatory, John struck again by exploding a tin of talcum powder under Malcolm's bed during an alleged moment of intimacy with a visitor to his room – something of a 'great balls of fire' performance. Rumour was that it put Malcolm off his stroke, but gave the rest of us weeks of chuckles.

But, John's master performance was his timely appearance deep in the woods near Wye on a cold, dark night in the winter just as a party of students had finished 'borrowing' a Christmas tree. Waiting until the said item was secured to the transport, John stepped from his cover and yelled something like 'What the hell do you think you are doing?' Wilder versions of this tale include talk of a shotgun being discharged into the air at the same time. The vehicle containing the tree left at speed without all of its intended occupants. A certain member of the party – let's call him Pat – was subsequently found groveling on the ground trying to hide, whilst others had simply disappeared into the undergrowth. When John had revealed himself as friend rather than foe, and the consequent commotion had died down, all that was left floating over the still night air was the sound of one individual – let's call him Malcolm – crashing through the undergrowth in the distance as he legged it cross-country back to Wye at a considerable rate of knots.

We both had the pleasure of being at College at a time of some classic stirs. In our second year, Nick Chance (73-76) hit the big time with a stir involving painting the post boxes at Coldharbour and the post office in Wye blue and painting a zebra crossing, complete with flashing beacons on the road outside the College. It could not have been a better day to do it – Ted Heath turned up at the College for a surprise visit and we hit the local paper with the headline 'Village turns Blue for Tory visit'. There was a big ruckus within the College that day with allegations from the Post Office that interfering with the infrastructure of HM Post was a capital offence. The only penance was to repaint them the following night, although we remember that many years after Wye post boxes were not quite 'Post Office' red, with flecks of blue paint on the brickwork.

Colin Speller (74-78) found himself lumbered with the job of Stirrer at the start of February 1977. Advancing years and the natural tendency to dim the memory of embarrassing events means that he struggles to recall all his efforts. The main college quad was planted overnight with new varieties of fruit trees (basically, cuttings from apple trees pressed into the turf), each one labeled with a latin-esque name that was incorporated the name of a key college character. A sheet giving descriptions of each variety was made available, each one setting out characteristics of the tree that were similar to those of the individual after which it was named. But, Colin's masterpiece was the VD warning letter, a prank undertaken with the knowledge – if not actual collusion – of Matron Jean Andrews. A letter was distributed around the college (see pdf copy posted on the site) warning male students of the possibility that they had contracted something nasty from the toilet seats in various parts of the college and inviting them to attend Matron's clinic for a check-up. We are grateful to Lawrence Mills (76-79) who found a copy of the letter in his archives. He reported seeing from

his vantage point in 'C' block several students turning up at Matron's office for their inspections.

Colin McCabe (74-77) took over in the summer term of his last year at Wye, while living in 136 Bridge Street with Malcolm Hughes (74-77), Pat Goode (74-78) and JM. On the night of Andrew 'Rastus' Jeffery (74-77) and John's 21st Cider v Beer birthday party at Chilham Village Hall, he closed the Olantigh road by dressing up his car as a police van and using road works signs. Then he diverted all the traffic at 1am into Wye up a narrow track over the Downs only to chop trees across the road. The ensuing chaos saw drunken students trying to back up ten cars over half a mile of dirt track with no torches or light – brilliant!

Around Easter '77, early in the McCabe reign, we remember that Withersdane toilets suffered from a bout of mackerel in the loo cisterns, left over from an exceptional fishing trip.

The 'Roses' stir was probably the best, dreamt up in May '77 by the 136-gang, led by Colin Mc. This involved posting a letter (see pdf copy) to all of the houses in Wye one night in the lead-up to a significant village event. The memory does not recall whether it was a 'best kept village' inspection or a horticultural show, but there was a lot of 'fettling' of roses going on and a lot of tension in the air about their condition and appearance. To make it seem credible the team also spiked a few gardens by covering their roses with plastic bags and cling-film, so that if anyone had any doubts they would see their neighbour's garden already protected. The crowning glory was sending a note the College maintenance department suggesting that they should be prepared to hand out free plastic bags to the village residents. By 11am that morning there were queues outside the College to collect their bags. The 1pm regional news reported the incident and the local paper had the headline 'Green-fingered Hoaxer hits Wye!'

The last few weeks of John's time at Wye in the summer of '77, straight after exams, included a flurry stunts. A group of 2nd years took chickens from the Poultry Department and floated them out of the windows above the College photograph. Unfortunately, they were battery chickens and had not learnt to fly. Most members of staff were horrified as they hit the deck, but Tony Biggs (staff 70-80), said 'they should have asked me for some free-range Rhode Island Reds – they would have flown!' If you look at the 1977 photo (see Photo Gallery) you will see various banners hanging from windows in the background as part of this stir. Unfortunately, it ruined John's efforts to appear in the picture three times. He claims he got it right during the first take, but the intervention of the chickens led to a re-take and he is only a blur in the middle of the final picture.

The 136 team's finale was the "GOODBYE HARRY", sprayed on the downs with Gramoxone in letters 24yds high and 8yds wide. It took a week to show, but

blazed out of the hillside on Commemoration Day, just in time for Princess Anne's visit. The letters stayed for over a year, turning brown for the summer, then turning fresh green for the winter to be followed by a flurry of flowering annual plants the next summer. Even Harry Darling admired our handiwork, congratulating the anonymous perpetrators at the going down dinner.

Other stirs float vaguely in the memory. Whose car was lifted over the low wall into the grassed area just down the road from the College? Whose was found parked on four beer crates in the Union car park? And who was responsible for the appearance of molehills on the manicured college lawns? Some wag decided it would be a laugh to lift frozen molehills on frosty nights and transplant them in the quad, one at a time, each a night or two apart. Global warming and mild winters would rule this one out now, but it worked a treat then. The College Maintenance Department was in a state of panic until some bore of a Soil Scientist pointed out that the soil type in the molehills was different to that in the quad.

So, were these stirs a part of the rich tapestry of college life? Of the sort of male-dominated irresponsibility we would now frown on as adults? Recalling them here certainly brings smiles to our faces and we hope you have enjoyed them too. If you have details of any others, please let us know.

John Magnay (74-77) and Colin Speller (74-78)
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