

A favourite teacher remembered

"I felt I had lost something valuable when I heard from David France that the Old Centralians had been disbanded and the Newsletter finished," writes **John Bailey**. "When I started at High Storrs and toiled up the hills from homely Sharrow to forbidding Bents Green in 1949, many of my new teachers had been born in Victorian England, some still looked warily at us scholarship boys, memories of the Central School were fresh and the prefects already looked Brideshead.

News of the Old Centralians, collected by Bryn Baker, was an important part of the School Magazine; it was easy to feel part of a bit of Sheffield history, a sense consolidated as news of OCs continued to arrive over the ensuing 65 years.

"It is good to think that a slot on the school's website, Alumni News, has been reserved and although contemporary social networking has put paid to the old ways, it is still possible, if we old 'uns make use of it, to communicate with our contemporaries and learn about the current life of the school to our mutual benefit. Indeed, my mind was immediately flooded with memories, and, for once, all good ones.

"Surely my Sixth Form teachers were equal if not better than my Oxford tutors: Messrs Hamilton, Billington, Tickner, Hoffman and Coulson comprised a wonderful team and Peter Coulson changed the course of my life. He took seriously the quality of his students' writing, attending to weaknesses, suggesting improvements, praising strengths; he illuminated texts and demonstrated how to write critically about them; how to structure essays, how to seek the right word, how to use commentaries.

"I see now the long stride into the classroom and remember the vari-speed lesson: discussion, challenge and reflection and, in a high-speed conclusion, the gold dust of notes on the board - bullet points, we'd call them now. So there was something for everybody. I can recall to this day observations on essays and personal encouragement outside lessons – books to read, choices to make: the world became wider and learning with him a joy.

"Many years later, when interviewing head teachers, I noticed that one candidate had been at the City of London School. I knew that after High Storrs, Peter had taught at Dover College and then, for nearly a quarter of a century had been Head of English at CLS. In the preliminary chat, I asked the candidate if he knew Peter; of course he did, we were of the same opinion of Peter's qualities. The interviewing Head on the panel spoke up; her son, still at the school, was always talking about him; for a few minutes, we rejoiced. On his retirement, CLS named a studio after him in recognition of his contribution to the lives of his pupils and the school.

"Pupils from the first 7 years of Peter's career will be delighted to know that he is still writing, still challenging the loose remark, still wishing you well. I tell him that although the grandees from the City of London School garlanded him at the conclusion of his career, we spotted him first."

John Bailey (1949 – 56)