

# TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

Chris Lowe and friends

Number 18

## The Mightier Pen

*Fifty years ago, almost to the day, I decided to leave my post as Head of English at the Wyggeston Boys School, Leicester. It was a hard decision and taken with some reluctance because I was enjoying the challenge of teaching very bright boys lesson after lesson. But it was time. Leicester Education Authority had decided to 'go comprehensive' by creating 11-16 high schools with a number of Sixth Form Colleges. Wyggie was to become one of these high-powered academic colleges. There was no guarantee that I would get a job in the new institution, but after much deliberation I knew that I did not actually want to teach in one either. I enjoyed both sixth form and main school 11-16 teaching and wanted to continue in an all-through school.*

*And so in April 1970 I started taking the Times Educational Supplement (TES) again and scanning the back pages – where literally hundreds of teaching jobs were advertised.*

*I will tell the story of my search and discovery in the next Tales. In this one I want to pay tribute to those teenage scribblers, who through the ages have kept school magazines going – and paved the way for the explosion of brilliant 'student' comedy in the latter half of the twentieth century – That Was The Week That Was, I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue, Beyond The Fringe, The Young Ones, The Goodies, Monty Python, Life of Brian and a host of others.*

*Some contributors to school magazines loved to try their hand at comic narrative, when they were not pouring out poems of idyllic encounters, undying devotion and love spurned. As an English teacher it fell to my lot to oversee the publication of the magazine in each of the schools I taught in – and to exercise the occasional power of what has come to be referred to as 'redaction' but which is in fact, 'censorship'.*

*I have kept a number of the magazines. I am glad I have now, but there have been times when I resisted a temptation, and exhortation from Mary, to bin them.! Here is a routinely clever and witty contribution to his school magazine by a 16 year-old – who went on to become a professor of drama and a dramatist himself. He is a receiver of these Tales – but whether he recognises his adolescent wit or not, he will no doubt tell me!*

## The History Paper

*Discuss the life and importance (if any) of at least three of (i) Napoleon (ii) Nelson (iii) Wellington*

**Napoleon** was a short man who always stood slightly bow-legged, hence his nickname 'Boneapart'. His favourite strategic position was with his arm inside his jacket. This was to prevent a breaching of his flags - or in the presence of Lady Hamilton - a flagging of his breeches. Napoleon is often described as 'a little corpulent'.

He was said to be a child of Destiny – probably by the Conte d'Estigny, the famous charlatan.

Napoleon's wife married him, it is said, for purely social reasons as she wanted to become a lady, and she was bitterly disappointed when he explained that he was not 'a knight, Josephine'.

Napoleon's most famous campaign was his march on Moscow in 1812 - with a full orchestra. (He is reported to have turned back, but not too far back, because a Russian pianist was making overtures towards him). He went into retreat at Borodino but found he got a chilly reception.

Napoleon was very clever for he once said, 'Elba saw I ere I was able' which was then changed to 'Able was I ere I saw Elba' after a 'reversal in battle'.

The very **Admirable Lord Nelson** was a sea Lord. (NB He is not to be confused with his half-brother, Half Nelson). He is famous for putting his eyeglass to his blind spy and uttering the immoral comment 'I see no telescope.'

It is he who sent the famous message 'England expects every man to do his duty' which goes some way to explaining England's population explosion in the following year. Consequently it was hastily abbreviated to 'England expects'. The expression 'Lie back and think of England' is often incorrectly attributed to him.

Despite having only one arm, Nelson always managed to keep the upper hand.

Although primarily known as a sea pier, Lord Nelson also wrote regularly for the London Gazette. His writings are known throughout the world as 'Nelson's Column'.

Nelson died very romantically at Trafalgar, but he wished it to be known that Hardy and he were 'just good friends'.

The **Duke of Wellington**, formerly an Irish shop-lifter, became famous as the inventor of the renowned Bute. He was also way ahead of his times in designing a wartime bomber.

His uniform was always dashing, so that he often had a job to catch up with it. Being good at inventing legends he also invented the Waterloo Close-call (or WC as it is now called).

At Waterloo he fought against overwhelming odds, as the Thin Red Line was a rank outsider. The tide of battle was turned when an English soldier, spying the Prussian reinforcements, shouted 'A Prussian! A Prussian!' whereupon the French soldiers all fell down.

He retired to take over numerous pubs.

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