



UPPINGHAM SOJOURN

A period piece by Antony Le Fleming (Fgh 54)

The platform was not difficult to locate
 A swirl of activity, black-clad figures
 A maternal element, bent in concern
 Some men in bowlers, handling brollies.
 A blast on the whistle
 Scramble to climb aboard
 Some repressed farewells;
 Two lurches, a shudder, then forwards.
 The north-bound train gained momentum
 Out into the gathering dusk;
 Snatches of rain on the window-pane
 Wisps of grey-white smoke
 On and into a life unknown –
 A fresh terrain of hope and fears
 The burgeoning of my adolescent years.



Uppingham in those post-war days
 Was like living in another age.
 "Uppingham Hurrah!" we used to sing
 Echoing the words of Edward Thring.
 There were rugby songs, fives songs, too
 And cricket songs to bolster you.
 We had little idea of where we were going
 But concerned with keeping traditions going.

Rocked by the impact of successive wars
 Over seven-hundred OUs gave their lives for
 the cause;
 We were members of a cautious generation;
 The 'swinging sixties' were still to come -
 Technicolour bringing sunshine and fun.
 Meanwhile, we wore black jackets and ties
 Still genuflecting towards Queen Victoria's
 demise.



Self-deprivation made you healthy and strong
With self-denial you couldn't go wrong.
Keeping windows open in the dorm;
Nothing wrong with some healthy rain
Gently falling on your counterpane.
Trousers-pockets were firmly sewn- up
No doors on the loos, nothing to shut.
It was considered to be especially important
To keep a straight back, upright deportment.
This preoccupation in maintaining control
Was instituted during break-times as well
With group exercises out in the open air.

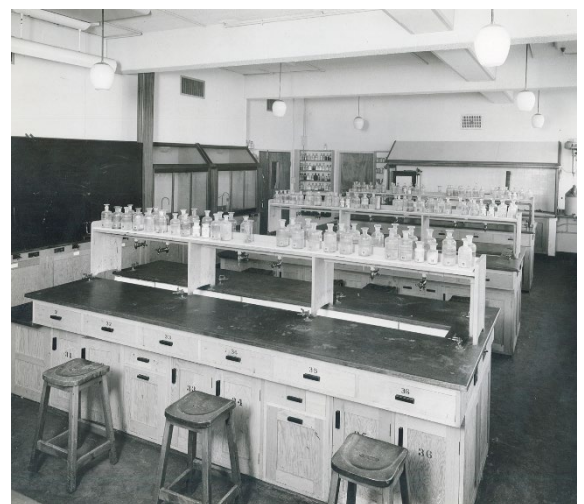


Ritual beatings were a regular feature
Administered either by boys or a teacher
(The worst bit, undue waiting-time
Between sentencing and punishment of the crime.)
One day, I faced almost certain disaster
After throwing a chair at the music master,
But to my enduring incredulity
HM treated the matter with impunity.



In the fifties, various things gave cause for doubt,
The rations were nothing to write home about;
If you were left a bit hungry or underfed
You made up with peanut-butter or chocolate-spread.
Memories of tubes embedded in the liver
Are still apt, at times, to make me quiver.
Baked-apples were, generally beyond the pail
Containing, it was supposed, the cook's toenail.
At least this caused us, back home, to plunder
Normal cuisine with exaggerated wonder.

We were taught in the ways of traditional learners
Dates, and rivers, and Bunsen burners.
Teachers were allowed full freedom of expression,
Not bound to any trendy academic obsession.
That their eccentricities came to the surface
Was much to us pupils' advantage.
Mr Crowe, said to have an ungovernable temper
Once dangled a miscreant out of the window;



Mr Shuffrey, rather more docile, of course
Supposedly turned up to teach on his horse.
Petty-Officer Jones' kingdom was the gym:
Snappy, authoritative and cool
He should have been running the entire school.
Geography, taught in the musty museum-room
Was, on the other hand, a recipe for gloom.
In English, my attention grew to be devout –
I began to comprehend what life is about.
Mr Braddy's productions were also inspirational
David Gooderson, as Richard Second, best of all.

Thanks to Paul David's pioneering mission
Uppingham harboured a strong music tradition.
I was able to reap advantage in many ways
From chamber-music to composing scores for plays.
If the mainstream seemed a bit square to the performer
'Salad Days' was only just round the corner.

We learned, superficially, of birds and bees
But what made the opposite sex thrive
Is something we found out much later in life.
Holiday fumbleings brought some compensation
But lacked a degree of authentication.
Fortunately, I was blessed with violin teacher
Whose extra-curricular sessions were a weekend feature;
After tea, and chocolate-cake, and Brahms
I would be contentedly pinioned in her arms.

In the CCF, on Fridays, we learnt martial arts
Got hooked on maps and the naming of parts.
All went well until, sent on a hike
(Me to earn a lance-corporal stripe)
In Welsh mountain mists we lost our way –
A rescue-party was dispatched without delay.
In summer there was a band-led march-past, when
Local lassies could assess us 'soon-to-be' men.

The headmaster said in his leavers' address
That he was anxious to impress
The need for forbearance and discretion;
In anything unsavoury we might come by,
'Be careful you're not wearing your OU tie'.

On the very last evening of my time at school
We met in the fives-court, where, as a rule
We surreptitiously smoked our last cigarette of the day.
Farleigh stood out in a clear moonlit sky
Like the hulk of a vessel anchored nearby.
It had borne us through waters both precarious and calm,
Periods of exultation and alarm.
We, leavers, speculated on what lay ahead
The ups and downs of the life we had led.

Having come down a path well-travelled
We would now find out how real life unravelled.
I, in my restlessness to move on,
Ready to hit university like an unexploded bomb.



Farleigh House Photo, 1957



Cave, Sargent, Lawrence, Bunting, Kirk, Dickson, Bain, Pease, D.A., Vickery, May, Starling, P.J., Matthews, R.S., Frearson,
 Scott, J.C.R., Dain, Lloyd, Hunt, Wraith, Wilkinson, Wearn, Matthews, M.R., Bray, R.M., Crook, Newton, J.A.G., Cartwrights, Veit, Callingham,
 Starling, J.B., Holmes, Rees, Bufton, Craven, Bowie, Brooke, Le Fleming, Lee, I.R., Scott, R.J.S., de Willemin, R.E., Pease, P.C., Wright
 Miss A. Rut, M.P. Lee, M.B.H. Ashmore, P.M. Haggledine, D.A. Hodgkinson Esq., Mrs Hodgkinson, B.L.E. Johnson, D.M. Bray, R.L. Johnson, Miss J.A. Barnes,
 Suchet, de Willemin, R.H.E. Newton, D.A.G., Lee, M.R.

Anthony Le Fleming (Fgh 54) House photo, 1958

