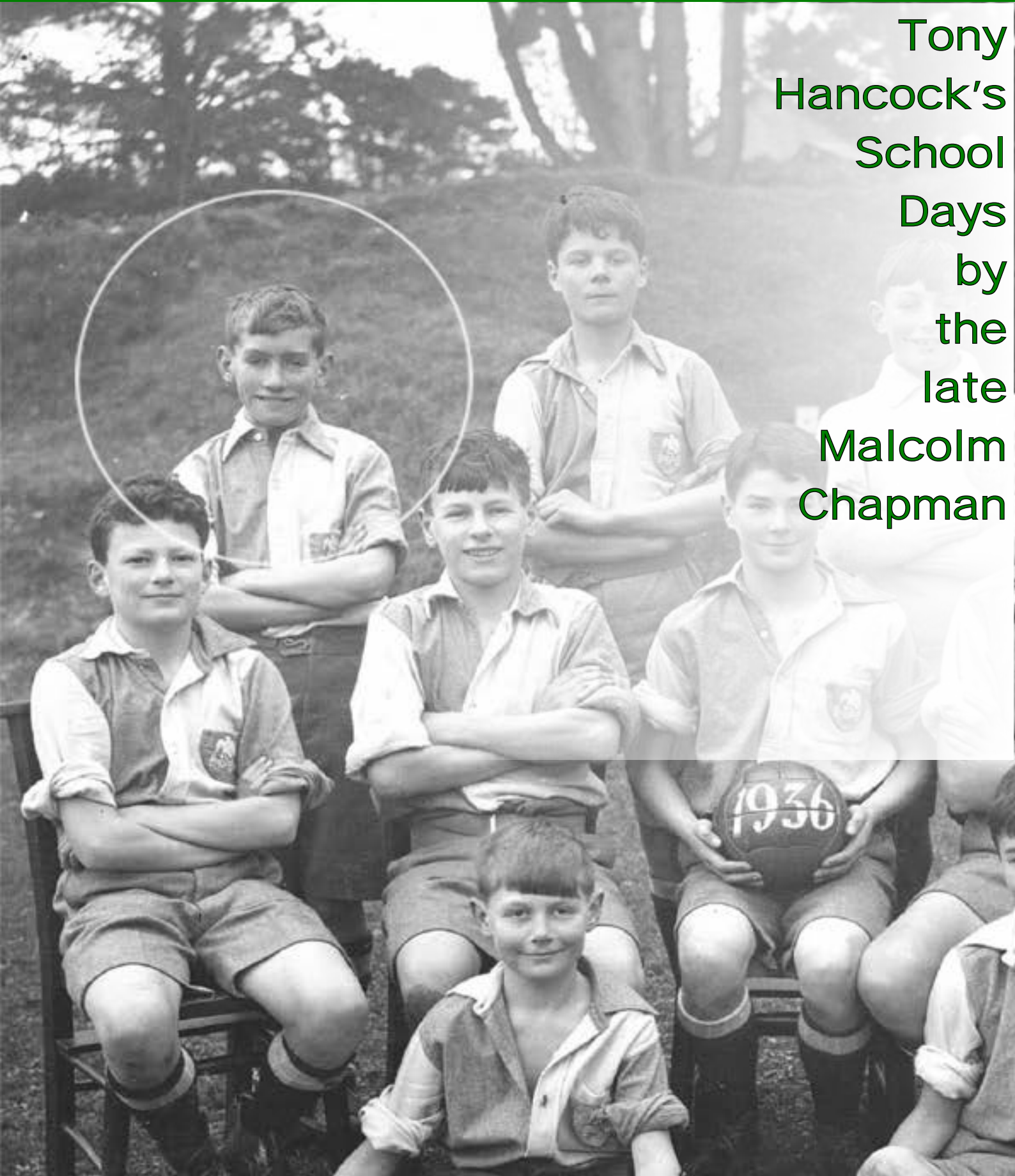


*Tony
Hancock*

Archives Magazine

Malcolm
Chapman
Tribute
ISSUE

Tony
Hancock's
School
Days
by
the
late
Malcolm
Chapman



The Online Magazine of the Tony Hancock Archives

Introduction, by Elaine Schollar

Earlier this year [2012], Julian Mincham, Jeff Hammonds and I put together an appreciation of comedy expert and archivist Malcolm Chapman, accessible via the link below:

http://www.tonyhancockarchives.org.uk/biographies_malcolm_chapman.htm

It was written whilst Malcolm was still alive and battling bravely with his terminal illness. We wanted him to be aware of the high esteem in which so many people held him, for his work in comedy over the years. It was not intended as an obituary and for this reason we did not include some of our most fond and personal memories we have of him. It was a difficult piece to write at the time, but we subsequently discovered that Malcolm was delighted with it.

Sadly, Malcolm succumbed to motor neurone disease on 15 June 2012. We decided to put together a special tribute edition of the THA online magazine for Malcolm, and by way of introduction to this, would like to add a few further reminiscences of an extraordinary man.

Many of you won't have had the good fortune to have met Malcolm, but if you are a Hancock fan, you have every good reason to be grateful to him for the huge amount of (unpaid) work he did in the field of comedy. To quote first of all from the beautiful eulogy Soo Chapman paid her husband at his funeral:

"He was fervent in wanting brilliant comedy to be accessible for the nation, helping, with other devotees, return much to the BBC that had been wiped because they wanted to reuse tapes. DVDs with enclosed scripts have now been produced and 'Hancock's Half Hour' is still alive and well on Radio 4 Extra. Malc was a confident public speaker, unafraid of large crowds. He gave some excellent Hancock talks at Gunnersbury Museum where he took posters and tapes. He knew his subject so well, and has helped authors with accuracy. He was able to field questions easily and was very comfortable doing fairly spontaneous radio interviews. He was also on Channel 4's 'Collectors Lot' twice: once for his board games, the other time for his Hancock collection (available on You tube; about 4 minutes). His meticulous attention to detail meant that I found myself not only driving Malc to various places where Hancock might possibly have lived, worked, gone to school, been ill, been a choirboy, learnt to type etc, but also on the phone last year trying to explain to a slightly grumpy Nicholas Parsons just why he should amend the next edition of his book. (Malc had written to his publishers about an inaccuracy regarding Kenneth Williams)."

"Malc's legacy is not only some dish cleaning awareness, a fine appreciation of allowable Scrabble words, wonderfully happy memories and two lovely children but a fab archive that we hope will be treasured for all to share. Comedy was what he believed in. I quote from Christopher Stephen's book about Galton & Simpson, "The Masters of Sitcom from Hancock to Steptoe" where Hancock in 'The Rebel' is chipping away disconsolately at his monstrous sculpture of Aphrodite, feeling unrecognised as a Great Artiste. Mrs Crevatte, the landlady, is ordering Hancock's eviction having failed to appreciate his genius. Tony says, "Well they haven't seen the last of my work," as Aphrodite crashes through the floor. We hope The Malcolm Chapman Collection will not suffer such a fate but will give pleasure for years to come."

With regard to Malcolm's Hancock and comedy archive, at time of writing, Julian Mincham is working to fulfil one of Malcolm's last wishes, which was that it be housed in a prestigious institution, for the public to see and enjoy. Julian is in negotiation with the Victoria and Albert museum, and we are hopeful that they will be interested in it for their post 1940 comedy section. Updates on any progress will be posted on the THA website.

Of his time knowing Malcolm, Julian recalls:

"I look back with the fondest of memories on the Saturday afternoons at Ealing in the early 1990s when I was part of the team Malcolm put together to record all of the missing radio 'Hancock's Half Hours'. They were joyous occasions and showed Soo [Malcolm's wife] to be a talented radio voice presenting impressions of Hattie Jacques, Andree Melly and Moira Lister. Not long before he died, Malcolm and I discussed these recordings and I remarked that I had never heard them. A few weeks later a package of tapes turned up with all of those shows copied! The fact that he took the time to do this in his last difficult months is truly a tribute to the thoughtfulness and generosity of the man."

Jeff Hammonds, who helped put together the article we reproduce below, recalls:

"I was only a blip in Malcolm's life. Malcolm was an inspiration in my life. There would be no Tony Hancock Archives website without the contribution that Malc made to it. Thank you, Malcolm, for being part of my life.... GOD BLESS."

And finally from me, Elaine Schollar:

"I first met Malcolm at a Hancock event he organised in Ealing back in the 1980s. I later had the privilege of helping organise a number of events with him when we were both part of the THAS. The attention and thought he put into organising these events was an inspiration. He loved sharing his vast knowledge of comedy, and would travel all over the country to put as much of his vast archive on display as was possible at events and conventions. His enthusiasm was positively infectious. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to track down an elusive, rare Hancock piece of memorabilia, or discover some hitherto unknown or forgotten fact."

The article we reproduce below, written by Malcolm in 2007 is a perfect example of his tenacity in researching his subject, covering as it does a lesser known period of Hancock's life. Malcolm's enthusiasm leaps off the page at you.

Malcolm, you'll be sorely missed. Thanks for everything, and rest in peace. In the words of one of your other favourite comedians, 'There'll never be another.'

Donations in memory of Malcolm Chapman can be made to:

<https://www.mndcommunity.org/givinginmemory>

Tony Hancock

(12th May 1924 - 24th June 1968)

Hancock's School Days, 1929 - 1939

By Malcolm Chapman
Layout and additional material - Jeff Hammonds

Sep 1929 to Dec 1929
Jan 1930 to Dec 1935
Jan 1936 to July 1938
Sep 1938 to Dec 1939

Summerbee Primary School, East Way, Charminster,
Saugeen Prep School, 30 Derby Road, East Cliff
Durlston Court, Park Road, Swanage
Bradfield College, Bradfield, Reading

I seem to spend half my life either at car boot sales or surfing the net looking for Hancock memorabilia! But living in Bournemouth has produced a wealth of information about Tony Hancock. I have met all sorts of people who knew Tony, including a chap who worked for W H Smith who used to take Tony's Christmas card orders when Tony lived in Lingfield; and people who saw him in the pub after recording his shows, sitting quietly in the corner. I then came across a person whose parents were in show business and who knew Tony and his parents. Their son, Peter Alliss, is the famous golfer, who also lived in Bournemouth and was the local pro at Ferndown golf course. He has quite a sense of humour, too!

Some time ago I went to a local car boot sale and noticed a 1933 photo of a school cricket team. The school colours seemed familiar to me. They were of Tony's old boarding school, Durlston Court, of Park Road, Swanage. The stallholder confirmed that a friend of his had done a house clearance of a former Durlston Court pupil, Brian Rathbone, who had recently passed away. He had asked his chum to sell some of the items for him.

I mentioned the Hancock connection and he produced another photo, which was of the 1936 Cadet Corps. I couldn't identify Tony, but took a chance and bought it as well. The following week, I went back and he had some more items for me. These included a Prep Schools Rifle Association shooting certificate, first class, 1938, signed by the headmaster, Mr Pat Cox. There were also 6 small Sheffield plate cups won by Brian Rathbone between 1934 and 1938, at the school sports' day, after which he won a scholarship to Bradfield College, going to Bradfield the same time as Tony - September 1938. This was also the year that Tony won his shooting certificate.



SAUGEEN PREP SCHOOL

A few weeks later, my stallholder friend found another photo of Tony. This was a 1938 school photo which showed everyone who worked at the school, including the school dog! My friend also produced a letter Brian had sent to his Dad from the school sanitorium, thanking him for the half crown for his birthday. A touching memento. Finally, he produced a photo of Brian at Bradfield College with the rest of his House. Sadly, this did not include Tony.

Roger Hancock, Tony's brother, kindly identified Tony in the Cadet Corps. I couldn't spot him myself, because they were all wearing officer's uniforms with peaked caps and he looked so small! Roger soon pointed him out though, third row back 6th one in from the right. The later 1938 photo was easy to identify because the school had provided later photos of Tony in other sporting events. He filled out quite well in nearly 3 years at Durlston.

Tony was a very good all round sportsman, excelling at cricket and football. His academic record wasn't bad either. He always said it was his favourite school. Durlston told me that he was interviewed with the then head master, Pat Cox, on BBC South Today TV news in the early 1960s, and talked about his happy days there. Unfortunately as it was a news story, the tape was probably wiped shortly afterwards.

Pat Cox was a real character by all accounts, and well respected. A former pupil at Durlston, just before Tony, was scriptwriter David Croft, who immortalised Mr Cox as Captain Mainwaring in the popular BBC TV show 'Dads Army'. Another former pupil whom Roger Hancock put me in touch with, was John Frankau, who very trustingly loaned me his 1929 watercolour of the school, which features the end of the school occupied by Mr Cox and his family.

I have also found some 1920s postcards of Swanage which featured the school buildings, and which the school gratefully copied. These now appear on their website, along with my most recent discovery. I was surfing the internet a few weeks ago when I found a 1906 photo of Durlston Court School. As it was only 3 years after the school started, I just had to have it! It was before the school was extended and the distinctive turreted additions were made.

When the photo arrived, I was amazed to see that it was posted to someone in Birmingham (Tony's birthplace), of all places! There was no message on the back of the postcard, but my wife deduced that as it was posted from Swanage, it was probably sent by the school to



notify the parents that their son had arrived safely at the school. Looking closer at the picture, I could make out a lady dressed in a dark dress sitting in the main

ground floor window. In the history of the school, there is a 1904 photo with the same lady in it! What was even weirder was that it had been posted the day my Dad had been born, 6th August 1906!

I have sent copies of the photos to Durlston, and they kindly sent me a copy of the school's history, which gets a lot of use from me in my continued research for the UK's greatest comedian. Some of these photos and postcards are now on their website, which I hope brings a lot of pleasure to former pupils. Last year, I presented a Tony Hancock drama prize to the school, which goes to the best drama student, along with a memento as well. In my opinion, it is an excellent school and helps children of all abilities to do well in a pleasant and caring atmosphere.

When Tony's mentor George Fairweather passed away some years ago, we had a wake at the Durlston Court Hotel (now the Quality Hotel), East Cliff, Bournemouth. A lady I met there told me that Tony had been a fellow pupil in September 1929 at Summerbee Infants School (now called Queens Park), East Way, Charminster. This was Tony's first school, and was about a half a mile



Tony with George Fairweather (1910 - 1999)

from the Mayo Laundry in Strouden Road, Charminster, which Tony's parents owned and ran at the time. Apparently he turned up in a smart brown suit, which was most unusual for the time. I don't think that most parents could afford a suit. He only stayed one term. I took some photos of the school several years ago, prior to the school's recent modernisation.

This led me to wonder where Tony went to school after that. We know that he went to Durlston Court School, Swanage, in January 1936, following in the footsteps of his older brother Colin, for whom the Durlston Court Hotel - then owned by Tony's parents - had been re-named. But where did he go from January 1930 'til December 1935?

Despite many enquiries nothing was found until I moved to Bournemouth several years ago. Courtesy of various car boot sales I have attended, I have come across a number of people who have told me that they knew Tony.

It was when I was at my local library in Southbourne, listening to a talk about the history of Bournemouth, that I learnt more. The speaker had been talking about the Boscombe Hippodrome when I mentioned that Tony Hancock had appeared there. This was during the Second World War, as a member of George Fairweather's Black Dominoes. Afterwards, another attendee, Michael Dawney, who was also a Hancock fan, told me that he had recently completed a crossword, one of many he sells, and that Hancock was on the first page! A few weeks later, he came round to my house and saw the Hancock archives and told me about a retired vicar who had told him that Tony was a choir boy in St Swithuns Church, East Cliff, only a few hundred yards away from the Durlston Court Hotel. Eventually he managed to locate the telephone number of Reverend Lane and I phoned him up.

Reverend Lane told me that one of his parishioners had informed him many years ago that Hancock was a fellow choir boy at St Swithuns. Then came the bombshell! The local prep school, Saugeen, supplied all the choirboys to the church. As the school was only about 400 hundred yards away, it was their local church and had been there as long as the church had, i.e. 60 years or more, when Bournemouth only had a few thousand residents.

The next day I went to the church and was shown around. Unfortunately, the church had been sold some years before and had been almost completely renovated inside. However, the stained glass windows were still there, and the name of the choirmaster was also on a plaque on the wall of the

church.

I next went to Derby Road, East Cliff, to see if I could trace the school. The site is currently occupied by the Majestic Hotel, which was built by Rowley and co and their regular electrical contractor, Robert Walker (soon to be Tony's step father) who had both just finished building the new Durlston court hotel for £20,000!

Some additions and alterations had been made, but it was essentially the same. I then went to the Central Reference Library in Bournemouth, and the staff, who were most helpful, located not only a school photo from 1904, but also the last school magazine from 1934 and details about the school and its closure in 1935. The school magazine bemoaned the fact that the pupil numbers were falling and they were a bit fed up with living in what had now become a large residential area, surrounded by 5 miles of houses as they described it! They further mentioned plans to move to a more rural area. The school - location unclear - had its own cricket ground, and taught lots of sports, including rugby, football, boxing, shooting and cricket. Telling the parents of their intentions to move elsewhere was probably not a wise move. Parental confidence can easily be lost. From May 9th 1935, the new location of Saugeen prep school was Furzehill, near Wimborne (now East Dorset Council Offices). The school remained there until the early 1940s. Whether Tony stayed at the school for his last two terms before moving to Durlston Court in January 1936 remains unknown.

The search continues!

At the same time, other things were happening in Tony's life. Sadly, his dad passed away in August 1935. In the Freddie Ross and David Nathan biography 'Hancock' (BBC, London, 1986) it describes Tony walking home from school and seeing the ambulance taking his dad away to hospital (page 18) from which he never returned. The book had already mentioned Tony being forced to wear his school uniform on a family holiday (page 17) to the south of France. It describes the Saugeen uniform to a tee: Eton collar, black jacket, black pinstriped trousers. You can see the photo of the school uniform on the following website..

website:<http://content.swgfl.org.uk/seaside/BmouthDetails/Saugeen.htm>

Another famous pupil at the school, during the 1870s, was the author, John Galsworthy,

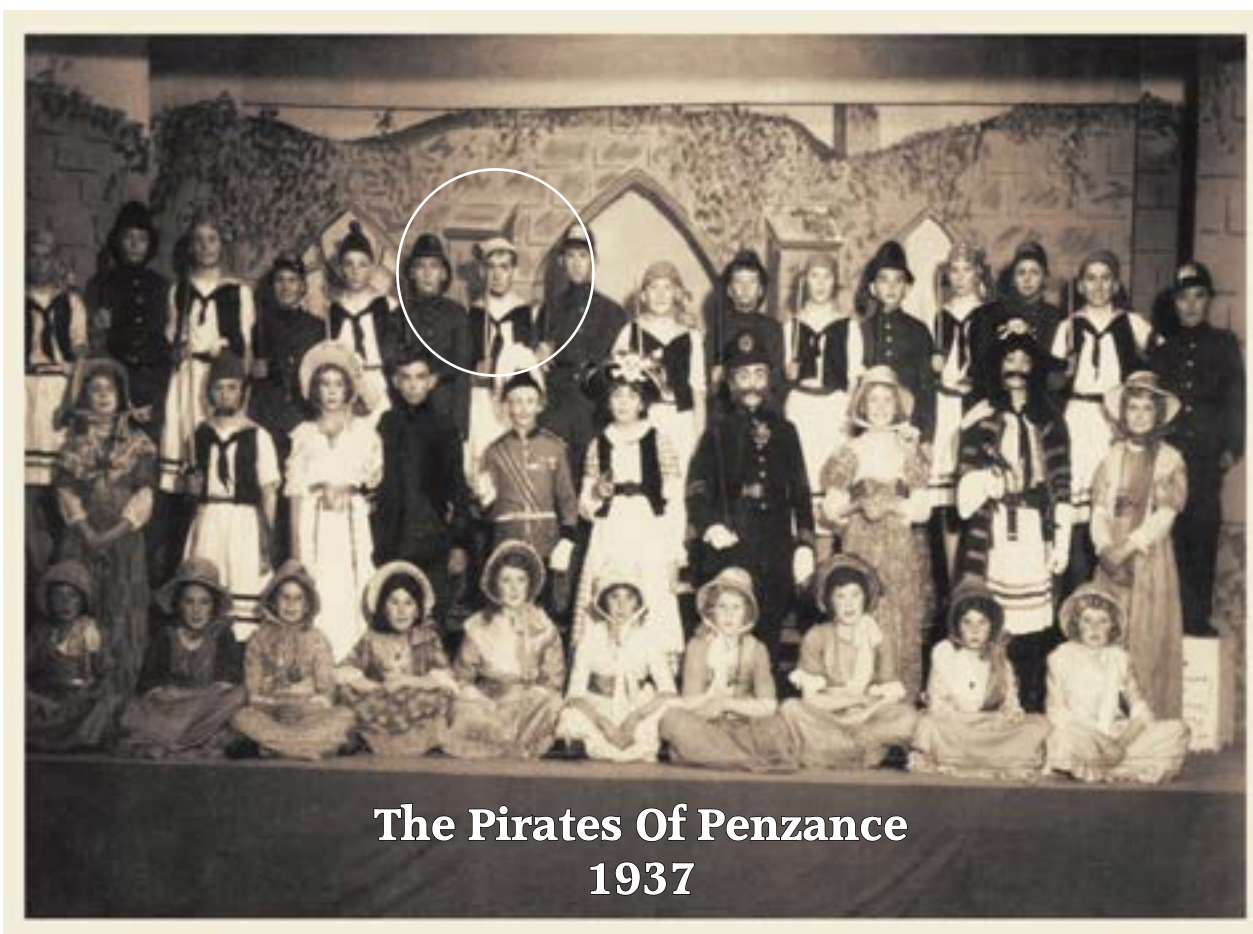
DURLSTON
COURT
SCHOOL



I have had a letter published in a local Bournemouth paper, The Daily Echo, trying to trace further evidence. The local reference library also had an article about the golden jubilee of St Swithuns Church, which mentioned that pictures of previous church choirs were hung in the church vestry. I contacted the Bishop of Winchester's office to see what happened to the photos. They had no information, but put me in touch with the current local church warden, Ellen Berry, who eventually told me after making enquiries that the photos seem to have disappeared. Still, you never know, copies of the photos may turn up, owned by the families of former choristers. I am also trying to find out more information about Saugeen Prep School. Its sudden demise explains why Tony, part way through the academic year, moved to Swanage to join his brother Colin at Durlston Court School. His mother, Lily, had recently remarried, and perhaps it was their intention that Tony join his brother anyway as they were so pleased with Colin's progress there.

Tony Hancock joined Durlston Court at the commencement of the Easter term, 1936. As already mentioned, the headmaster was Mr P H Cox. Durlston was a boys' boarding school situated in Swanage, Dorset. It was founded by Mr G T Atkinson in 1903. When Tony enrolled, there were about 65 boys on role.

During his first term, Tony contracted measles, as did many of the boarders. This hindered his



settling in, as reflected in his end of term report, 12th out of 12 in upper V. However, Tony did catch the eye of the staff in boxing. The school records state: "Hancock won the welterweight final by a narrow margin. He is quick and hits very hard and showed that he can take as well as give punishment."

He was coached by Chief Petty Officer Pitcher VC DCM, a hero of the Q ships during the First World War.

Tony also excelled at cricket. He played in the school's 1st XI, who were undefeated in 1936. He captured 35 wickets, at an average of 6.3. P H Cox commented:

"His bowling has been of great value to us throughout the season. He always bowls a good length with plenty of nip off the pitch and swings in from the leg rather late."

He returned the excellent bowling figures of 7 for 6 against Old Malthouse and received his school colours. Tony also passed his swimming certificate, being placed 5th in the Upper V. But it is in December 1936 that the first record of Tony as an actor can be found. This is when he appeared as a gondolier in the school production of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'The Gondoliers.'

There is no doubt that Tony Hancock was a promising and talented young sportsman. He was selected for the soccer 1st XI playing at either centre forward or outside left. Tony scored 22 goals in 14 matches, including a double hat-trick against Hill Crest. Again he received a school cap for soccer.

The autumn term 1936 was a good one, as Tony was placed 2nd in his form. In 1937, Durlston was hit by a flu epidemic, followed by an outbreak of whooping cough. Tony managed to represent the school at rugby and was awarded his colours. It is recorded in the school annals that he was: "...one of the toughest guys in school." His reputation was being made in the boxing ring. "Hancock is exceptionally strong and quick and whose style is excellent until he tastes blood."

Tony achieved highly in the inter-house competition - The Durlston Shield. Before Easter 1937, he



participated in the melodrama, 'The Rowland Diamond,' playing the character of Joe. He also won the English prize, along with 1st prize in the Easter fancy dress competition. Tony was placed 1st in Lower VI B.

On the cricket field, the summer of 1937 was a glorious one for Tony Hancock. He was appointed vice captain by Mr J Connel, cricket master. Tony took 70 wickets in 13 matches including returns 8 for 12; 7 for 17; 6 for 18; and 5 for 9. His batting improved to an average of 24. Mr Connel described Tony's power as follows: "Hancock has bowled with untiring energy and venom all through the term. A brilliant field and catch at point."

Headmaster Cox wrote of Tony: "Hancock was our outstanding bowler and was absolutely tireless."

Tony represented the school in the 2nd VIII at shooting, receiving his 2nd class marksman certificate. He scored 75% in the highwaycode exam. On the academic front, he was awarded the mathematics prize. At the annual prize giving he was given the bowling prize for cricket.

During the autumn term of 1937, Tony improved in modern languages, securing 76% in French translation. On the soccer field he scored 28 goals, including 3 hat-tricks. 'The Durlstonian', the school magazine, recounts his achievements. Mr Connel wrote:

"he is best shot I have seen in any side this term", whilst headmaster Cox recorded: "A good leader

of the forward line, who distributes the ball with judgement, and his passes to the wings are extraordinarily well timed. A powerful shot with either foot."

Tony was a school monitor responsible for distributing the daily post to the boarders. A Durlston tradition was the annual Gilbert and Sullivan production. Before Christmas 1937 Tony played the part of a reluctant pirate, in 'The Pirates of Penzance.'



Bradfield College



Army House



Bradfield College Cricket Pavillion



Church

BRADFIELD COLLEGE

The spring term of 1938 was not a good one, as Tony caught chicken pox, causing him to miss out on much of the rigger: "We missed AJH who would have undoubtedly made a great difference by his leadership of the forwards, his weight, and general enthusiasm" penned the headmaster, whilst the games master wrote: "Hancock is a very good hooker and always hardworking...He would have been an excellent leader of the forwards." Tony's boxing also went from strength to strength, it being on record that: "HancockAJ was one of the finest fighters the School has ever had."

A 1st class marksmanship certificate was won in the Christmas term, but chicken pox ruled him out of the April 1938 inter prep schools' competition. He was a member of the schools 1st VIII for rifle shooting. In 1938 Tony was also appointed Prefect. He still acted as school Postmaster General.

In his final term at Durlston, Tony achieved remarkable performances on the cricket field. He took 57 wickets at an average of 4.3 apiece. The headmaster wrote: "In Hancock AJ we have one of the best bowlers Durlston has ever had and he should do really well at Bradfield."

In his common entrance examination, Tony scored a highly creditable 76% in algebra. Tony left Durlston on a high note, winning the Victor Ludorum on sports' day. He came first in throwing the cricket ball - 56yds 6ins: he was first in the high jump - 4ft 3/4ins: and second in the long jump, 100

yards sprint and the 60 yards hurdles.

Tony Hancock was a fine example of a Durlstonian. His school career appears to have been successful and full of fun. His sporting prowess was remarkable. One wonders if he could have become a professional cricketer or soccer player. Tony was encouraged to participate in the full range of boarding school activities. Headmaster Cox instilled in his pupils the need to put 'Service before Self'. Tony was given responsibilities of leadership which aided his character building. Whilst a Durlstonian, Tony proved to be a fine example of the school's motto, "ERECTUS NON ELATUS" - which translated, means "Proud but not boastful".

Thanks to the clear memories of his contemporaries and to the impeccable G House archive of the time, a picture has now emerged of a fearsome footballer and a demon bowler as well as of the nascent comic genius.

For a while in 1939, Tony Hancock was fag to Richard Emanuel, who remembers him as: "...a small boy with a permanently worried expression, which became even more so if one spoke to him - however kindly. He was permanently untidy, his clothes never appeared to fit, his tie veered towards the back of his neck and his collar had a life of its own. He invariably had inky hands and not infrequently ink on his face. His hair was generally in keeping with his collar and tie." He was, in short, "...almost a caricature of 'Just William'."

The salient impression Hancock made on Nigel Knight, one year his senior, was of: "...complete and utter silence, uncommunicativeness (markedly towards groups) and a sort of ponderously massive, heavily immobile negativity (seemingly so) that in fact... took on a paradoxical aura of distinctive assertiveness... Yet, equally important was an entirely different feature of his character. On one or more occasions I had the fortune to observe him standing quietly aside in some corner of the hoseroom, giving sincere and devoted advice to a shy or depressed newcomer needing friendly, avuncular, compassionate sympathy and guidance."

W. G. (Bill) Potter recalls "a loner": A.G. (Tony) McLagan recalls "his great sense of humour": whilst Peter Wilson remembers "...a cheerful soul ... full of jokes and the joys of spring". But the most complete testimony is from Michael Turner, probably Hancock's closest G House friend because of their shared enthusiasm for football and cricket. Turner writes of "a ferocious centre-forward with a powerful shot in both feet" and "...a very able medium-pace seam bowler" who would certainly have played for the school had he stayed for another year or so. The records bear this out. In the 1939 inter-house under-16 matches for example, Hancock took eight wickets against both C and H Houses and six apiece against A, D and F Houses. During his first five overs against Army House he did not concede a single run. He finished with figures of 8 for 12. (The remaining two wickets fell to Peter Bodkin, the late President of the OR Society and Bradfield Waifs CC.) In the final match of the competition, against B House, Hancock dismissed for a duck Ben Brocklehurst, who would later found the Cricketer Cup competition.

According to Turner, there were few clues at this time as to Hancock's eventual career, apart from the fact that he was a great admirer of W. C. Fields and James Cagney, and could give a very fair impersonation of both. He was also fascinated by Damon Runyon and the New York Brooklyn accent, remarking after a divinity class taken by the headmaster: "I like dis guy Whitworth wit da neon dome."

Many years later, at Hancock's first London stage show, Turner visited his dressing-room. "His first recollection of Bradfield was 'that bloody bell'."

At about the same time, Turner returned to the school and found their former housemaster, John Mouldsdales, 'rather bewildered' by it all. "I am not used to this sort of thing," said Mouldsdales "I have never had anyone like it in my house before."

Perhaps the final word on the talent which was evident in the schoolboy belongs to Peter Wilson. When Hancock's family could no longer manage the fees and withdrew Tony from the school, he recalls: "We were all very sorry to lose him."

Malcolm Chapman Guardian Obituary

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/nov/01/malcolm-chapman-obituary>