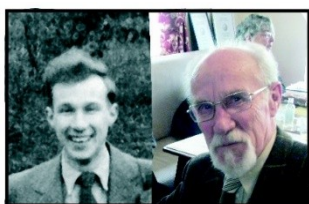


Ted Brabban – Life After Tanfield



I suppose that I have barely left Tanfield!

I enrolled into the 'First Year' in 1944. As my days as a pupil were ending I already knew that what I wanted in life was to become a teacher of woodwork. I knew that I had some skill and enjoyed using it, and I wanted to share my enthusiasm and the pleasure that it brought to others as they developed. To this end my final examination at Tanfield, encouraged by Bob Harrison, was to be a City and Guilds Craft Teacher's Certificate. So I left school in July 1951 ready to go!

By September '51 I was in the Royal Air Force. I volunteered for aircrew. There followed various physical examinations and interviews, and then I was accepted and sent for preliminary square bashing and officer training. After 12 hours flying Tiger Moths it was decided that my previous experience of pedalling a bike hadn't prepared me to be a pilot, so I was selected for navigator training. That was a highlight! In January '52 we were flown, in a BOAC Stratocruiser out to London, Ontario, in Canada. From there we were transported by train for about 24 hours to Winnipeg. At RCAF Winnipeg we joined a NATO training programme with French, Dutch and Canadian lads to learn to find our way around the skies.

Returning to GB with our 'wings' we spent 3 months getting used to the different UK systems, flying in ex WW2 Wellington bombers. As National Service was only 2 years, by the time we were fully trained it was almost time to go home! My last 3 months of service were as an adjutant to an RAF Volunteer Reserve unit.

I went to St John's College, York to teacher train, specialising in heavy craft, followed by a year at Shoreditch College where we were encouraged to sample crafts other than metal or woodworking. That was just up my street!

I began my teaching career at Shield Row School which in those days was an all-boys school. I taught woodwork alongside Norman Conkleton – we 'split' classes. After 3 1/2 years a post at Tanfield came up when Bob Harrison, my mentor, became a County Advisor. I applied and was appointed Head of a Department of one! I was back to where I'd started!

Those were the good days. Boys did woodwork, girls did D.Sc. I therefore taught all the boys in the school in their junior years and knew them all. I also taught a handful of senior boys to A Level, those with aspirations to teach the subject. I was barely a decade older than they were, and consequently had good relationships with them. Two of them came back to teach alongside me in later years, Alan Mills (who went on to Head a department in a 6th Form College) and Ian Goldsborough (who went on to Head a department at the Royal Grammar School).

By the time that I retired from teaching in 1988, everything had changed and the joy had gone out of my life. The subject had changed and the token time that was given to it was not enough for pupils to complete the simplest of projects. It had always been a pleasure when a past pupil would tell me that his mother "Still had and used the 'whatever'" he had made in his schooldays. That would never happen again! I just felt that pupils were missing an enjoyable and useful strand of their education.

When I retired I was like a dog with two tails. I immersed myself in creating and doing (as well as holidays!). I had time to enjoy the skill that I had.

When Fred Westwater inspired the Tanfield Association he approached me to join. I was at the time still disillusioned at the way things had gone and declined. Time passed and the wounds healed and when he asked me again I agreed to help. The wheel had gone full circle and I was again associated with Tanfield whose gates I had first entered in 1944. I have edited the Newsletter for over 40 editions, and am currently the President. However Father Time is against me, and it can't be long before I too become a figment of Tanfield history.

Ted Brabban.

Sadly, Ted's last remark about time being against him was prophetic. However, I think that he will be remembered with affection and respect for many years to come. He was a great man.

Elizabeth Hawkins