

10. Gordonstoun School

I spent almost five years of my life at Gordonstoun. This chapter describes the school as it was then, and says nothing about subsequent changes.

The school was founded in 1933 by Kurt Hahn, a German Jew, second cousin to my father.

As a young man, Kurt Hahn was an athlete who once held the world record for the standing high jump for two days. He had strong links with Britain. Just before the First World War he spent a year as an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford. Although he never returned, he remained on the college books, and was sometimes referred to as 'Our oldest and most distinguished undergraduate'. During the First World War cousin Kurt was an administrator in the German government. Looking around him, and thinking of his own education, he became disillusioned at the single-minded pursuit of academic studies to the neglect of all other qualities. He determined to found a school, based on the pattern of a British public school, which would offer an education with a much wider base. Hahn was convinced that a healthy body, a feeling of compassion, and a devotion to public service were just as important as brilliance in academic subjects.

The result was the school at Salem, which was launched in 1923.

By 1933, it became obvious that the Nazi creed negated everything that Salem stood for. Hahn began to make public speeches denouncing Nazism. At one of these meetings he was warned, just in time, that the secret police were in the building and about to arrest him. Mr. Norman Pares, one of his colleagues, smuggled him through a back door and out of Germany in the boot of his car.

Kurt was in some ways a naive man, but he was brilliant at raising money for his educational schemes. He quickly collected enough to buy the estate at Gordonstoun, near Elgin in Morayshire. The school he founded there was based on his existing school at Salem, that is - two removes from the standard English public school. This was enough to make it markedly different from other schools in Britain.

Gordonstoun House

The boys wore a uniform that consisted of shorts, and a jersey worn over an open-necked shirt. No ties, blazers or boater hats! We had a blue set for the morning and a grey set for the evening.

There was no fagging (the common system by which younger boys are the servants of older ones), and virtually no bullying. It is widely believed that single-sex boarding schools are hotbeds of lust and erotic attachments of one kind or

another, but during the four and a half years I spent at the school I never witnessed anything of the kind.

The rest of this chapter describes Gordonstoun as it was in 1950. Since then there have been many changes (including the admission of girls), but then this is a personal memoir.

Near Gordonstoun House itself are two other large buildings: The Round Square and Cumming House.

The Round Square was once a stable block. Two stories high, and made of granite, it is built on a circular plan with an inner courtyard. The curvature is readily visible even inside the building; the side walls of every room are curved, and no two end walls are parallel,

Cumming House is modern (ca. 1936) and is built of wood and concrete, somewhat like a huge and austere chalet.

Cumming House

The three main buildings are complemented by other, smaller structures such as the Sanatorium, a dovecote, and dozens of black Nissen huts built by the army during the war. The whole complex of buildings is set in a large tree-filled park. To the North there is a lawn easily big enough for a game of cricket. Southwards lies another set of lawns separated by paths, and beyond that, in easy view of Gordonstoun House, there is a long artificial lake. An observer with good eyes might just see a rope stretched across the far end of the lake.

The school is approached by two drives, East and West, both about a mile long. The surface of these drives was reportedly damaged by the army, for it has appalling bumps, potholes and huge areas of mud.

The three houses near the geographical centre are called the home houses, and they each accommodate about 50 boys. The school also has several remote houses, including:

- Duffus: About a mile away: 50 boys
- Hopeman Lodge: About four miles away by Hopeman village: about 40 boys
- Laverock Bank: In Lossiemouth, about four miles distant: 35 boys
- Dunkinty: The other side of Elgin about eight miles away. 40 boys.

All classes are held in the main school, and boys who live in the remote houses must commute by school bus or bicycle. Although in winter there are only six hours of daylight the whole school is near enough to the sea to ensure that really cold weather is rare.

The daily timetable for all the boys in the school is this:

- 6.55 Get up, go for the morning run, have a wash and cold shower, get dressed, make bed
- 7.20 Housework: sweep out dormitory, clean bathroom, etc.
- 7.45 Inspection of shoes and lockers
- 7.50 Breakfast
- 8.50 Assembly in Gordonstoun House: prayers, bible reading hymn, announcements
- 9.10 Lessons: First period
- 10.00 Second period
- 10.50 Break
- 11.10 Third period
- 12.00 Fourth period
- 1.00 Lunch
- 1.50 Rest (20 minutes lying down listening to music)
- 2.15 Afternoon activity: Sport, Practical work or Services
- 3.45 Second wash and cold shower
- 4.00 Tea
- 4.15 First afternoon period
- 5.05 Second afternoon period
- 6.30 Supper
- 7.00 Free time (for homework, music practice, etc)
- 9.00 Junior bed-time
- 9.15 Senior bed-time
- 9.30 Five minutes silence
- 9.35 Lights out.

On Saturdays we are allowed to get up a little later, and have no morning run. Instead of formal lessons we pursue projects, which we can choose for ourselves: they range from engineering and building radios through Art and Drama, to musical composition. Sundays are even more luxurious; we may lie in bed until 8.30, and apart from a Church service we can do what we like.

The school is run by the colourbearers, which includes most masters and many (although not all) the older boys. In formal terms I must describe this group as a self-selecting oligarchy. On the whole the group governs well; boy colourbearers are not permitted to hand out severer punishments. In any case, as J. Gaythorne-Hardy explains in his book *The Public School*, revolt against the oligarchy is both impossible (they're bigger than us) and undesirable since every junior boy hopes one day to become a colourbearer.

Beneath the colourbearers there is a complex hierarchy of ranks. Every new boy starts at the bottom of the pile, and is not even allowed to wear the grey version of the school uniform. Towards the end of his first term, if he has not disgraced

himself, he is awarded the Uniform and is no longer immediately distinguishable from the rest of us.

The next step is the award of the Junior Training Plan. Each boy has a number of specific personal tasks to do each day: cleaning his teeth, having two cold showers, doing five press-ups and 60 skips. He also has a duty such as tidying a particular room. New boys, and boys who had just been awarded their uniforms, are asked every night if they have fulfilled these obligations; but the training plan is a chart, kept by the boy himself, in which the items are recorded day by day. Everybody with a training plan is trusted to keep this chart and fill it in honestly. Inspections are rare.

At the age of about 15 you might be promoted to a Senior Training Plan, which has a few more obligations and corresponding privileges, such as being allowed to study without supervision.

The next stage is the award of a white stripe to be sewn on to the uniform. This gives you a minute amount of authority over other boys; something like a highly-diluted lance-corporal.

The colourbearers use the white stripers as source material for their own group. If you are in favour, you will be elected to be a colourbearer candidate, (CBC) and after some time the election is confirmed and you reach the full status of colourbearer.

The most senior of the (boy) colourbearers are designated helpers. There is generally one to each house. The highest point of authority is the Guardian (the title is borrowed from Plato's Republic) who is effectively the Head Boy. Helpers have their own rooms, and the Guardian has a suite in Gordonstoun House.

The school has a complex system of punishments. For ordinary offences, such as being cheeky to a master, you may be awarded a number 1, a number 2 or a number 3 depending on the severity of the crime. Each of these punishments has to be served by getting up very early and walking a set distance, before the other boys get up. A number 3 takes about one and a half hours, and walking it off is a matter of trust.

For more serious offences the school has a gamut of penalties. Often boys are made to walk to Elgin and back, some 15 miles. During these walks it is forbidden to speak to anyone, except in dire necessity, and then as briefly as possible.

A standard punishment for any serious crime is to be demoted to the status of new boy.

The ultimate sanction is expulsion. The commonest causes are drinking and smoking, followed by unrepentant dishonesty. First offenders are usually demoted and warned.

One of Kurt Hahn's ideals was Service to the Community. Every boy chooses to belong to one of the four services: The Army Cadet Force, the Sea Cadets, The Watchers, who operate a coast-guard and rescue service in the Moray Firth, and the Fire Service, who run the local fire brigade. Like other volunteer fire stations, this is part of the Regional Fire Service, and is often called out from the headquarters in Aberdeen to handle fires in the vicinity.

Another aim which finds expression in the school is that of excellence in physical activity. You can learn seamanship, sailing cutters on the Moray Firth. Mountain expeditions are strongly encouraged.

Games are compulsory, and one period every morning is spent on athletics: running, jumping, throwing and tackling an obstacle course. The final obstacle is the rope across the lake. You lie on your tummy, one leg hanging down for balance, and pull yourself across with your arms. If you fall in, the penalty is a dose of castor oil!

Fortunately the level of performance you reach in these activities is not crucial, as long as you're seen to be trying

The school caters for pupils of varying academic ability, and some of them go on to Universities.

The school sometimes exchanges pupils with its parallel foundation at Salem. The boys from Salem tend to be older than us, because some of them have been forced to put on military uniforms at the age of 12 and defend Berlin against the Allies in 1945, and have missed out several years of schooling.

One such boy was a talented putt-shot thrower, and was entered for the Scottish School Championships, which he won easily. When they asked him to confirm that he was under eighteen, he replied,

“No, I am tsventsy sree.”

At this point, you know rather more about Gordonstoun than I did when I arrived at Laverock Bank in January 1950. What was it like? Read on!

11. Laverock Bank

My first House was Laverock Bank. It was located in Lossiemouth, some four miles east of Gordonstoun. The house was surrounded by hotels; indeed it was once a hotel itself, and has now reverted to its original status.

When I arrived, Laverock Bank had just been opened as an experimental house for the induction of new boys. There was a salting of experienced boys collected from other houses, but the overall proportion of new boys was much higher than normal. The plan was to move us to other houses as soon as we had got used to the Gordonstoun system. The housemaster was Major Downton, nick-named the Hebe.

In Laverock Bank we were gradually and quite gently introduced to the rules of life at Gordonstoun. As the days passed I came to realise, with some surprise, that things might not be quite as dreadful as we had been led to believe at Aberlour House. The food was incomparably better, and we were not forced to eat things we didn't like. The teaching was effective, there were no restrictions on buying things outside, no censorship of letters, no embarrassing female supervision, in short, we were treated like adolescents, not as small children.

The training plan was required of us straight away. The first evening I was asked by the boy in charge of the dormitory whether I had fulfilled my list of obligations: cleaned my teeth, etc. When it came to 60 skips I had to confess that I had not mastered the art of skipping.

Never mind, he said. Just step over the rope sixty times.

I did this daily, and in three days I managed the sixty skips without a break!

Although we lived in Lossiemouth, most of the day was spent in Gordonstoun. The school bus which fetched us was not big enough to take everyone, so we cycled twice a week by rota. The route crossed Lossiemouth Naval aerodrome, and about a mile of it lay directly along the perimeter track. There were no fences or other security measures, but a man with a flag would stop us to let taxi-ing aircraft past.

In my first term I chose to take Physics and Chemistry. The Physics teacher was a Russian, Dr. Barlen. He spoke English with a thick Russian accent which took everyone about six weeks to understand and then we began to learn Physics! He was a superb teacher. He was known to be so fierce, and to give such frightful punishments, that behaviour in his class was perfect.

I had the same Physics teacher all my time at the school.

At Laverock Bank, most of the new boys were not from Wester Elchies but from other schools. There was Brian Ellis, who could make a joke about anything.

'What would you do if you kicked the bucket? You'd turn a little pail.'

There was Gordon Arnott, who specialised in torturing other new boys with pliers.

There was Frizell, a fat rich boy, who, as we discovered to our surprise, couldn't actually write at the age of fourteen. He was not at all stupid; but in his previous school he had paid another boy to do his writing for him. Night after night, Frizell was to be seen with a pen clutched in his fist, tracing large shaky letters.

On Saturdays and Sundays we would walk round the town and look at the fishing boats in the harbour. As spring approached and the tourist season started, we began to frequent the putting green (three pence a round) and ride our bikes over the grass bunkers on the golf course until we were chased away.

At Lossiemouth there is a superb sandy beach, terminating in Covesea Lighthouse (as shown on packets of Players cigarettes, and pronounced cow-sea).

I tried swimming once or twice, but the water is icy, even in summer. I remember family groups on the beach, blue with cold, pretending that they were enjoying themselves.

My mathematical ability had somehow survived the stultifying experience of Mr. Brereton's methods at Aberlour, and with Major Downton's teaching I was making rapid progress. In the summer of 1950 it was decided I would take the Scholarship exam for Gordonstoun (at 13 I was still eligible to do so).

As the examination came nearer I studied moderately hard. (I didn't experience really hard work until I went to University.) The day before the exam I was cutting myself a slice of bread in the kitchen when the knife slipped and I managed to cut half-way through my left thumb. There was lots of blood, and it was decided that the wound needed hospital treatment. Major Downton took me to Elgin in his Austin Seven. As he drove he breathed on the windscreen and gave me a final revision session, drawing diagrams on the screen with his finger.

When we got to the hospital, I watched with interest as my thumb was jabbed with a local anaesthetic and sewn up. I sat the entire scholarship exam with my left hand in a sling it was just as well that it was the left hand, and not the right!

After two terms we were deemed to be sufficiently inducted into the ways of Gordonstoun, and we were distributed among the other houses. I was sent to Dunkinty, a move which delighted me because my best friend, Tony Finlay, was already there.

12. Dunkinty

Dunkinty was run by another ex-military gentleman, Colonel Bannerman. We were so far away from the main school that we felt vaguely privileged. Elgin was within easy walking distance, the house was warm and comfortable, and the community was small enough for everyone to know everyone else. There was a large garden. A whisky distillery stood nearby, and our garden backed on to its cooling pond.

Much of our spare time was spent on or near the pond. We had a jerry-built aluminium boat which leaked so severely that it would only stay afloat for a few minutes unless we bailed continuously. I spent a lot of my pocket-money on pot-menders, but without noticeable effect on the pond-worthiness of our boat.

The pond had a small island, joined to the shore by two wires, one above the other. It was quite easy to cross, holding on to the upper wire. One day the lower wire gave under my weight and I found myself up to the waist in mud and up to my neck in water above that.

At that time I was just becoming interested in radio, and I built a series of crystal sets. Elgin is a poor place to learn about radio, because the signal from the nearby Burghead transmitter swamps everything else. You could receive the Home Service loud and clear just by connecting a crystal and a pair of earphones to the bedsprings, but receiving any other station was impossible. Coils, condensers, directional aerials, nothing made any difference.

On Sundays we used to go to an evening service in Elgin. One day the visiting preacher delivered a powerful sermon about the importance of giving money to the Church. He was quite explicit. Looking straight at me he intoned,

“If ye don’t sacrifice generously, an gie a yer bawbees tae the Kirrrk, ye are damned to Hell forever!”

A few minutes later the plate was passed round, and I discovered I had left all my money back at Dunkinty.

Looking at a group photograph taken later that year, I can still remember the names of all the boys, but some stick specially in my mind. Baker, a large boy who was often teased about his resemblance to a gorilla, was already a competent driver and desperately keen to get some practice. One night he and a couple of others crossed the fuses in Col. Bannerman’s car and went out for a joyride. To their horror the car ran out of petrol about five miles away. They tramped back, collected about a dozen other boys, took them out to where the car was stranded and pushed it all the way back. Apparently they all got to bed just before we were woken for the morning run.

Another boy I remember was Isbister, an Orcadian. He was about 18, easy-going and well-disposed to everyone. He was obviously attached to Edna, the young cook, who in her turn was not entirely indifferent to his attentions.

When Isbister left Gordonstoun he joined the Merchant Navy as an apprentice officer. A few months later we heard that he had died of a ruptured appendix, two hours before his ship could reach a port with proper hospital facilities.

All through the year I was gradually discovering who really ran the school. Kurt Hahn was still the nominal Headmaster, but he was often away, and I never had the chance to speak to him until I myself had left the school. The Deputy Headmaster was Mr. Henry Brereton, the elder brother of the biologist at Aberlour House. He was nicknamed The Bear. A third figure was Dr. Erich Meissner, who could be seen striding about followed by his poodle Ponto. He had some vital but undefined function that I never understood.

No boy can go through Gordonstoun without spending a great deal of time on physical activity. I was unusually bad at every form of sport. On my first day playing rugby I made a painful discovery: if you touch the ball you are likely to be assaulted. From then on I was careful to keep away from the dangerous object. This required some subtlety. If you run away from the ball when everyone else is running towards it the master in charge is liable to stop you and impose some form of punishment. If you run parallel to the ball's course and some 20 yards away, you can always say that you are placing yourself for a pass (whatever that means). You are quite safe - none of the serious players knows you are there, or would dream of throwing you the ball even if he did know.

Every morning we had a period of athletics. The various houses were in competition with one another, and we were supposed to score points by reaching certain minimum standards, related to age. For example, at age 14 you were supposed to throw a discus 55 feet and run 100 yards in 13 seconds, I reached very few of these standards although I tried hard enough. My worst event was the high-jump, where I never managed more than one foot nine inches. (Later in life I could clear three feet without any trouble.)

Soon after moving to Dunkinty I joined the school choir as a treble. But my voice was breaking and after two weeks I was sacked. The way my voice changed was unexpected. It didn't just slide down in range, but I developed another, lower voice as well as the one I had been used to. For a few months I could choose either voice at will, and I had a range of over five octaves. I used to sing alternate verses of hymns in treble and bass. Eventually the upper voice atrophied, but some of it remains as falsetto.

When the voice had settled down I rejoined the choir as a bass. I enjoyed choral singing and have been doing it every since.

The choir was conducted by Mr. Godfrey Burchardt (a.k.a.Plug). His main academic task was the teaching of Latin and Greek, but he was a superb all-round musician: a good pianist and a competent performer on both French horn and double-bass.

The chief music teacher was Frau Susie Lachmann, a German lady of great charm and wit, except during violin lessons, when she seemed to turn into a witch. When I went to the Music Room for the last period before lunch on Thursdays, she had already dealt with three pupils producing agonising sounds from their instruments, and she would be in a foul temper. As I struggled hold the violin correctly she would beat my hand with her bow and shout.

I was no better than the rest. Music was not allowed for in the timetable, and we had to practice at times when other boys were free to relax. If we had a heavy load of homework, it was impossible to find any time for practice at all. I realised, even then, that the lessons must be as agonising for her as they were for me.

Outside the music-room, Frau Lachmann was excellent company. She once took a group of us for a picnic, and after we had eaten she produced the four parts of a Haydn wind quartet. We sang through it, with me taking the bassoon part.

Her most impressive achievement took place during an amateur concert in Elgin. They were playing Bach's third Brandenburg Concerto, which is scored for three violins, three violas and three cellos. Frau Lachmann had the middle viola part. During one passage most of the other players lost their place and gave up, but Frau Lachmann kept the piece going by playing all the important parts on her viola at the same time. Gradually the other players found their places and came in, so that they all ended together.

When I had been in Dunkinty for a year, it was decided to close the house down for economic reasons. Both Tony Finlay and I were transferred to Cumming House under the housemastership of Mr. Burchardt.

13. Cumming House

Life at Cumming House should have been more relaxed, because we no longer had the daily commute into Gordonstoun. But I don't remember it to be so. I had my own desk and table-lamp to study for O levels, but there were plenty of other distractions - expeditions to the mountains, mornings spent sailing in the Moray Firth, singing and playing in the School Orchestra.

The success of our expeditions depended entirely on the weather. They would always start by putting on heavy rucksacks loaded with tents and food, and cycling thirty or forty miles to places such as Tomintoul or Dallas. There we would pitch camp in a field near a stream (having asked the farmer), light a fire

and brew up tea or soup. Farmers tended to welcome us generously, and to make us presents of milk and eggs.

If the weather was fine we would spend the next couple of days walking in the hills before returning to Gordonstoun, weary, dirty, but thoroughly pleased with the weekend.

If it rained, we would pass the whole weekend sitting in our tent, playing Monopoly and eating cold beans out of a tin.

At that time the School was careless in its appointments. I was allocated to a young new Maths teacher called Dr. Ford. He taught us all about logs and indices, and made an excellent job of it. One day he remarked to me that he was on the Governing Body of the City and Guilds Institute, which regulates technical qualifications. As I had recently taken the Radio Amateurs exam, I had all the documents. I looked up the Governing body, and there was indeed a member called Ford, but the initials were incorrect.

A few weeks later Dr. Ford disappeared. It turned out that he was completely unqualified, and just had a great desire to be a teacher. I hope that he eventually managed to reach this goal legitimately, for he had all the right talents.

One morning Mr. Burchardt and his young wife Mary invited me to breakfast in their private flat. It was a welcome change from eating with all the other boys!

I eventually gained eight O levels, including Russian, for which I did not have to study at all. There was only one other boy who managed as many that year: James Weatherall, who is now a Knight and a retired Admiral.

At the end of the year, Mr. Burchardt moved to Duffus House, taking most of his boys with him.

You may have formed the impression that we never had any holidays. In fact holidays came regularly, and I used to count the days, and then the hours, before the blessed moment when I would board the train and start the long journey back to London.

When I was at home my mother used to spoil me abominably. I would get breakfast in bed, and quite often not get up till mid-day. For Christmas I would get a pillow-case full of presents. I would spend the days building radio sets, or hanging about Lyle Street (near Leicester Square) which was then full of shops selling electronic components at prices I could afford.

My asthma was now completely under control, and only came on if I came in contact with cats. Nevertheless my parents felt that I should continue treatment, so several years running, in the long summer holiday, my mother and I went to Mont Dore in France.

Mont Dore is a spa in the Auvergne in the centre of France. It nestles in a valley at some 1200 metres of altitude, and boasts several mineral springs, all of which are supposed to be good for asthma.

We stayed in a hotel. Every morning I would get up early and go to the Etablissement, and take the cure. This consisted of spending about two hours in a series of steam rooms at different temperatures. I would always take a paper-back to read, and they would always get soggy with the steam but they passed the time! I specially enjoyed the adventures of the Saint (detective stories by Leslie Charteris).

After the steam room, it was a couple of hours in bed, and then back to the Etablissement to gargle with mineral water, drink it or squirt stinging gas up my nose.

In the afternoons my mother and I would generally take a funiculaire up the hill to a café and skating rink, where I learned to roller-skate and she drank coffee and read the paper. Sometimes, specially in the later years, we would go for walks, clambering over steep rocky paths. Thinking back, I am amazed at the agility my mother showed in her wooden sandals.

I'm sure that Mont Dore did many people a lot of good; but this was probably due to the altitude, the clean air, and the holiday from the stresses of daily life. I don't think the waters had anything to do with it.

14. Duffus House

My last two years at School were spent in Duffus House. I was now a senior boy and started my preparation for University. I chose to follow the Science route and dropped all subjects except Maths, Physics and Chemistry.

My Physics teacher was still Dr. Barlen. He gave me an excellent grounding for the Engineering course I was to pursue at Oxford.

Chemistry was taught by Mr. Sime, whom I remember chiefly in the title role of Hamlet. In Chemistry, he preferred rote learning to theory, so he never explained why we have NaCl and CaCl_2 , and not, say, Na_3Cl or CaCl_7 .

As I explained earlier, we all had to do two afternoons of practical work on the estate. Mr. Sime used my services, one afternoon each week, to mix up reagents for the chemistry laboratory. I would dilute down concentrated acids and alkalis, titrate them to a specific strength, and top up the reagent bottles.

This continued until a serious accident occurred at another school. A girl doing the same job as me dropped a bottle of vitriol and burnt her legs very badly.

When news of this event reached Gordonstoun I was switched to other jobs in the lab.

My Maths teacher was Mr. Ruscoe. He was the best teacher I have ever encountered - patient, encouraging, and happy to go at my own pace. He taught me so well that I still remember and use the material he covered.

When I first came to the school I chose to join the Fire Service. After years of training, I was now made a Fireman, and became part of the team that was called out to local conflagrations.

We kept a fire engine in a Nissen hut, together with our uniforms and helmets. The appliance was equipped with ladders, two pumps, lots of hoses, a selection of branches (nozzles to the layman) and a mass of other gear such as ropes and jacks to open out iron railings and release children's heads.

When we were called out (which happened two or three times a term) a siren sounded. We would immediately drop whatever we were doing, run to the Fire Station and be on our way to the blaze. This would take some three minutes, an excellent figure for a station staffed by retained firemen.

The fires I attended mainly involved hayricks or burning moorland. Once a hayrick catches fire there is no point in putting it out, since the animals find the hay uneatable. Our job was to protect other hayricks in the vicinity, which we did with huge quantities of water.

Our training involved various techniques, such as the Fireman's Lift for rescuing people, and methods of removing animals from burning buildings. To rescue a cow you put your thumbs in its nostrils and walk backward; the cow follows you. I never had to use these methods in practice.

A couple of times a term we used to have a Services Parade. The boys in all the services, Army Cadet Force, Sea Cadets, Watchers and Fire Service, would put on their uniforms, polish their shoes, and march past some important visitor who would take the salute. One occasion the visitor was a retired general, and we had a band from the local Naval Air station. Just as we were marching, the band struck up with Colonel Bogie, for which the following set of words had just gone round the school:

Hitler has only got one ball
Goering has two but very small
Himmler
Has something similar
And poor old Goebbels has no balls
At all!

We all exploded with guffaws of uncontrollable laughter. Just then the Army Cadets, who formed the last group to march past, received the order Eyes Left!

In his summing up later, the general said complimentary things to the Sea Cadets, the Watchers and the Fire Service. But he was furious with the Army Cadet Force.

“They dared to laugh at me!” he spluttered.

Once in my life, I was a member of a winning sports team. The sports master decided that one rainy afternoon the whole school would take part in a cross-country race. He laid out a roughly rectangular course of about six miles along country lanes. The method of scoring was that only the first four boys, and the last four boys, from any house would count.

I am much too lazy to run that far, and I walked much of the distance. I was last to cross the finishing line to jeers, laughter and a slow handclap. The results were announced immediately: my House was last.

As the afternoon wore on, reports began to trickle in of boys who had cut corners. Later that evening the revised result was declared:

Duffus House: First.
All other Houses: Disqualified.

One day there was an accident just outside the house. One of the School's Maths teachers was a Commander Wood, whom we used to call Scratchwood since he was always scratching his beard. He drove a very old car with the steering wheel tied on with wire.

On this occasion Scratchwood knocked down a boy called Hickman. He jumped out of his car and said,

“Oh I hope I haven't hurt you!”

“Oh yes you have, Sir” came the reply. “You've broken my bloody leg Sir!”

Early in 1954 I went down to Oxford to take the entrance test. I remember writing an essay about Einstein and Relativity, and I met Eric MacIldowie (from Sedburgh) who was to be my Best Man and a lifelong friend.

My interview was not what I expected. After waiting some time I was called by name, and entered a room with a long table covered in a green cloth. Chairs on one long side and the ends were occupied by elderly gentlemen. The other long side had a single chair, to which I was directed.

After a while, one of the gentlemen asked,

“What is your name?”

I told him, but they must have known since they had just called me in.

“Do you play Chess?”

“Yes”

“Do you play it well?”

“No”

“Alright. That will do.”

In 1953 there was a bad earthquake in the Greek Island of Cephalonia.

Kurt Hahn’s group of schools, which included Gordonstoun, Salem in Germany and Anavryta in Greece, proposed to mount an international expedition to help repair some of the damage. The School announced the scheme and asked for volunteers among the older boys. I put my name down, but only got as far as first reserve. Then another boy pulled out and I was in!

In the summer of 1954, all exams finished but two weeks before the notional End of Term, we set off on our final school activity - the trip to Cephalonia.