ECSOSA

Edmonton County School Old Scholars' Association

Website www.ecsosa.org.uk

Newsletter September 2026

What Were We Taught at ECG — and What Did We Learn? Musings by Martin Holst 1951-57

Continued from June Edition.

3. Lessons That Stayed With Me

A Change of Direction

Later in my career I volunteered for redundancy with a "good package" and moved into negotiating funding deals particularly involving European funding, and later became Alumni Coordinator. This meant writing many submissions and later editing articles, aided by a secretary who typed them for me. Much of the history of the College is now preserved in the magazines we produced. At last, my English skills were being put to use.

Campaigning

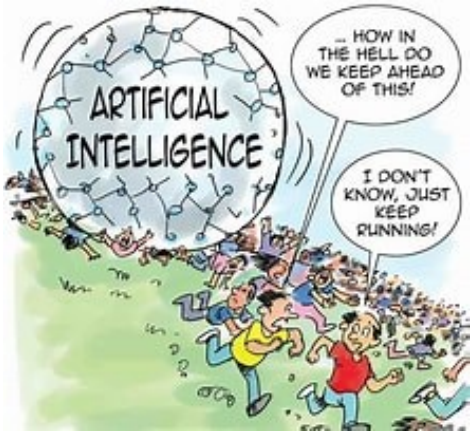
After I retired, my wife allowed me to have a PC at home. This meant developing my touch-typing skills — with the added advantage that spelling and grammar could now be corrected at the touch of a button. Soon I became involved in a campaign to defeat or amend a bill going through Parliament. I had been involved in campaigning before — to save the College, a story in itself — so I knew what I was getting into.

Perhaps one day I will write a fuller account of both campaigns. For now, it is enough to say that they involved several trips to Parliament and a great deal of document writing in collaboration with people across the country. In the final Commons division the crucial amendment passed by a margin of just one vote.

Since then I have campaigned on other issues — not always with such success — and I am still doing so today, seeking peace on the basis of justice.

AI and the Future

The difference now is artificial intelligence, which I use every day. It is right that we seek sensible controls over how AI develops, especially over those who may exploit it irresponsibly. I find AI extremely useful, provided I already know a good deal about the subject. That way I can ask the right questions, judge whether the answers are reliable, and shape the documents it produces so that they reflect my own ideas.



I sometimes wonder how our old school is making use of AI today. Perhaps we should ask what is now taught about English grammar and literature — and how AI is beginning to influence the way pupils learn.

Looking back, ECG taught us many things — some intentionally, some accidentally, and some we only understood much later.

Today pupils are learning in a world of artificial intelligence and instant information. I sometimes wonder what they are being taught about language, literature and thought itself.

Perhaps the real question is not only what we were taught, but what stayed with us.

Martin Holst.

ECOSA NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTION.

Les Williams. 1964 to 1969

Back to the 60's

I became a pupil of Edmonton County Grammar School in 1964. Over the years, I have often wondered why ECSOSA newsletters are seemingly dominated by former pupils from the 1940's and 50's but rarely feature pupils from the 60's and 70's. The reason, of course, is that those representing the 40's and 50's have obviously gone to the trouble to support and contribute to ECSOSA while those of us from subsequent decades seem to have not. So, when I was talking to David Day about this, he encouraged me to share my memories, which I am more than happy to do.

Surprise!

According to my very proud parents, my passing the 11 Plus was evidently a pleasant surprise to the teachers at Wilbury Way Primary school in Edmonton, where I was much better known for sport rather than the academic side of things. It was also highly unusual for children living in my neck of the woods to get into grammar school. Indeed, I can think of only one other boy, Keith Priest, who made it through. We stood out like sore thumbs going to school in our school caps and blazers. We were a particularly rare breed that year because only 32 boys from the whole of Edmonton County's catchment area were accepted, whereas there were exactly 100 girls. I look back now with a great sense of pride although I was too young and immature to realise the wonderful opportunity that I had been given, but more of that for another time perhaps.

A lifelong positive impact

Naturally, I could never have imagined how getting into 'County' would impact my life in so many positive ways. Some of my experiences were certainly not positive at the time but as life so often has a habit of doing, they turned out to be a blessing in disguise. But I digress.

As I sit here now writing this, a great many old scholar names from my era come to mind and I would like to share those names with you in the hope that the word will spread before it's too late. Firstly, as shown in the photo, are, from left to right, Steve Harrison (1966), Jill Shirley (nee Buckingham, 1966), me (1964) and John Thompson (1967). We have all have been very close friends for well over 50 -years beginning, purely by chance, when Jill's husband Roy, Steve, John and I played for the same Sunday morning football team, Bush Hill, in the 70's and 80's.



Steve Dean (1964) was also in that team from which emanated a wide circle of strong friendships that seems to connect up like a huge family tree. For example, Len Palmer (1962) and his wife Sue (1964) are very good friends of ours, as is Pete Simpson (1966). And there are circles within circles such as Jill (Buckingham) who is good friends with a group of ladies from her year, while Steve Harrison still meets up with Pete Simpson and Greg Smith, both classmates from 1966, and others such as Les Barnes, from 1965. Occasionally I see Roger Savage, my best friend at school and the tallest, while I was the shortest. It seems surreal that we've known each for over 60 years.

Proud of our school heritage.

While it is fair to say that so many of these friendships were more the result of coincidence rather than a direct link to our school days, what we all share, without exception, is a sense of pride in Edmonton County Grammar school, its history and its standards including the high standard of its teaching. I often think, "If those teachers could see us now, they would be amazed". For example, I am sure that Mr. Hudson would be very pleased to know that we all, without exception, turned into patriotic, upstanding, hard-working citizens who have all succeeded in life. For me personally, I think that now, as someone who earns a living as a writer, Mr. Doubleday, the head of English, would be surprised to say the least. He quite understandably saw me as a lost cause. I wish that I had the opportunity now to say, "Thank you, sir".

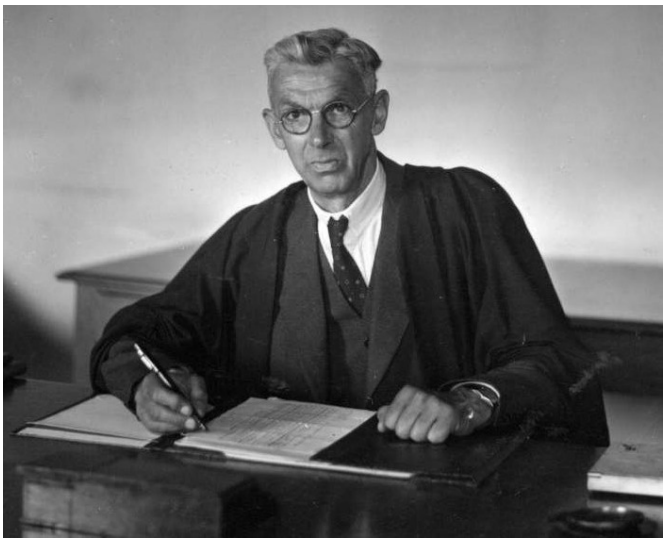
I have so many other memories of my time at County and I hope that I get another opportunity to share them.

Les Williams

If you recognise any of the names mentioned and/or would like to share your memories of your days at 'County' in the 60's and 70's then please contact the editor.

There is no denying that The Latymer School is the great rival to Edmonton County School and with a tradition that is 400 years old. The following story appeared on the Edmonton County School Friends group on Facebook and is worth repeating.

A Story about James North (1883 - 1954), before he was headmaster of Edmonton County School by Kaya Emin 8th September 2025



When Richard Ashworth, the headmaster who remade Latymer School into the largest secondary school in the country, died on Christmas Day 1928, his successor, Victor Davis, did not arrive until the following September. For nine months, the school was without a formal leader, yet it prevailed. The man who guided it through that uncertain time was James North.

He had been there from the start. When Ashworth opened the new Latymer school in 1910, he chose James North, a young man of twenty-seven from Cornwall, as a mathematics teacher. The role was initially part-time, but North was a full member of staff by Christmas and became senior master in 1917. His value was evident from the outset. In a 1912 newspaper, Ashworth praised North and senior mistress Jane Davies, declaring, "No words can exaggerate the value of the work they have put in, and the school and indirectly Edmonton owe them a deep debt." As the school grew, their partnership became central. Ashworth was the school's inspiration, a man of vision and spirit, but he was not an organiser. North was the practical force, the senior master who gave structure to Ashworth's ideals and made the school run day to day.

Pupils knew him as 'Jimmy'. He was a tall man who stooped, with a worried look and ill-fitting suits. A born teacher, he taught mathematics with a unique gesture, holding up a right forefinger whose top joint was permanently bent sideways. But his great passion was sport. A professional football referee, he gave up his spare time to coach the school teams. In a telling habit, he would begin his Friday religious education lessons with a few minutes on the bible before leading the boys outside for soccer practice.

When Ashworth died, North was thrust into the role of Master overnight, providing continuity and comfort to grieving staff and students. He knew the school's rhythms and routines better than anyone. While he had rarely taken the main school assembly during Ashworth's life, in this period of shock, he stepped out of his comfort zone to keep the school steady.

The arrival of Victor Davis in September, however, brought a sharp change. The new headmaster felt the constant praise for Ashworth was a burden and wanted to make his own mark. He was heard to declare, "I am fed up with the name of Ashworth!" The break with the old guard was swift. Before the year ended, James North, the man who had been there from the beginning, was gone.

Latymer's loss was a gain for another Edmonton school. That same year, North became the headmaster of Edmonton County School (certainly using the experience he had gained as acting-master) a post he held for fourteen years. He took with him the values he had helped Ashworth establish: a belief in hard work, a strong holistic school spirit, and a deep care for the pupils. His long tenure is a clear sign that he had found his new home!)

And yet, at the school he helped found, James North is largely forgotten today. On the wall at Latymer that lists the school's headmasters, a place is kept even for those who served briefly in an acting capacity. But his picture is not there; his name is absent. He remains what he was in 1929: the headmaster between, essential in his moment but missing from the formal record.

He was not the great visionary, nor was he the moderniser who followed. He was the man who was there at the start and there in the crisis. He ensured the school one man built did not falter before the next arrived, and then took those same values to build a legacy of his own.

James North was there when the new Edmonton County School Cambridge Campus was built. Before then it was fragmented over several premises and was not the familiar structure we know today. It celebrates it's centenary in 2031. Here is Jimmy North laying the foundation brick.in 1931. We owe him a lot.



Editorial Note..

The feature on the previous page leads us to comment on the group on Facebook, ***Edmonton County School Friends.*** Whereas ECSOSA has about 260 members, Edmonton County School Friends has about 1000 subscribers. Another group is ***Edmonton County School Reunion*** which has 800 members, no doubt with some overlap. The difference is that members of ECSOSA have paid a subscription to join and receive Newsletters whereas Friends and Reunion are free to all who care to look at the site. However, ECSOSA has ceased to charge annually for Membership and is proceeding until the cash runs out, which is in about four years (providing no donations are received or new members join at £12,50 for life.) Since it is unlikely that others will step in to take over the reins, the Association will terminate when the funds and the Committee dry up.

ECSOSA **does** have a Facebook Group accessible only from the website, www.ecsosa.org.uk. A look at the site reveals in excess of 500 subscribers which indicates that a lot of old Eds are viewing it without paying for membership.

Looking at the chatter on the *Friends and Reunion* groups it is obvious that attitudes to education have changed somewhat to that of those from the Grammar School days. When ECS went Comprehensive in 1968, pride at achieving the privilege of joining ECS no longer relied on the result of an entrance examination, (which interestingly still applies to Latymer). Comments also reveal an amazing ignorance ot the School's history and a lamentable lack of grammar.

Edmonton County School is now unrecognizable to anyone who is still alive from the Jimmy North era. (most now in their mid 90s). It is now an Academy with over 2000 pupils and occupying five sites with an Executive Head, Dr Susan Tranter. Look it up.

A potted history of the school from 1919 to 2019 was produced by our late archivist Beryl Cushion (Levitt) together with a booklet on Notable Alumni. These are now out of print but if anyone would like copies we can order a reprint if sufficient requests are made,

Contact David Day at diddy11cg@gmail.com

Chairman's Rant.

In view of the lack of contributions for this edition the following few musings are offered as a filler.

Your Chairman has got in to trouble in the past for allowing personal comments to be aired. I do hope that the following musings will not result in similar complaints.

I have been grumbling at the telly and radio for some months over what seems to me to be the introduction of a new word. That word *is* ***"impact",*** or ***"impacted".*** Whereas, in the past, a comment has taken the form, "The resulting decision has ***affected*** the outcome", we now see "The resulting decision has ***impacted on*** the outcome". Since when has ***"impacted"*** replaced the previously useful word ***"affected"?***

Another irritant is the use of the phrase ***"I am liking it"*** as opposed *to* ***"I like it"***. ***"I like it"*** is the correct Present Tense***." I am liking it"*** is informal but incorrect grammar in that context and yet is used frequently and annoyingly.

Another thing that irritates me at present is the variety of uses of a small word thus: ***There, Their, They're***. ***"There"*** can have several meanings, ***"Their"*** only has one – belonging to them. *"They're"* again has only one – ***"They are".*** The use on ECS Social Media of ***"there"*** in place of the other two variants is common, which is unfortunate for a site for members of a secondary school with a history of teaching good English.

This reminds me of my own son's education. He brought home an English essay that had been marked 10/10. I counted 20 spelling mistakes. At the next Parent/Teacher day I accosted his English teacher and asked why his spelling had not been corrected. "Oh" replied the teacher, *"If I correct his spelling in an essay, I will destroy his creativity".* I caught my wife's warning look and remained silent. Similarly, he received 10/10 for a history essay with 20 spelling mistakes. Again I asked the History teacher the same question, to receive the reply, *"I am a History teacher, not an English teacher".*

Dates for your Diary

Lunch at The Plough

Wed 16th September 2026—12.30

Wed 9th December 2026—12.30

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