ECSOSA

Edmonton County School Old Scholars' Association
Website www.ecsosa.org.uk
Newsletter - December 2026

Dennis Patten (ECS 1944-1949) –
It is with great regret that we record the death of Dennis Patten on the 12th October 2026
We can do no better than repeat his entry in the ECS Notable Alumni booklet produced to celebrate the School's Centenary

Magician – Ventriloquist – Punch & Judy Man

Dennis used characters such as Percy Penguin and a live white rabbit called "Hunny Bunny".
He also had a large collection of ventriloquists dummies on which he advised for use in stage plays and television shows.



He started performing while still at school and had to turn down a booking offered by Teacher Mr. Elengorn because he had been previously booked on the same day by his Form Master, Mr. Doubleday!
A member of the Inner Magic Circle he was one of the Paul Daniels' team appearing in TV's "Wizbit" show. He worked on 64 television programmes and 4 feature films. "Chitty Bang Bang", "Mountains of the Moon", "Elephant Man" and "Jamaica Inn". He also performed in St. James' Palace and at No. 11 Downing Street for the Lawson family.

Four books of his own have been published, 2 on ventriloquism, 1 on puzzles and another on magic. He also illustrated over 30 magic books for other authors. He was Art Director on two magicians' magazines, one for 10 years and another for 20 years.



Photographed with Prince Charles when he did close-up magic at the "Not Forgotten" Association Christmas dinner at St. James' Palace.
He appeared on Antiques Road Show at Forty Hall with his collection of Punch & Judy puppets.
Along with his wife Jean (nee Wilson) 1947-52, he edited this Newsletter for several years. He was a member of ECSOSA from leaving the school and was a Committee member for many years,
A jovial character, he always had many jokes to tell and his unforgettable "Infallible Mouse Trap."
Dennis's funeral was on the 9th November at Woollensbrook Crematorium. Hoddesdon.



Arthur Spencer ECS 1945 -52

It is with great sadness that we report the sudden death of Arthur Spencer on the 20th October. He moved to a retirement village in Romsey 3 years ago, to be near his daughter Christa. This, to his great, regret prevented his ability to attend our lunches



Arthur 1950s

Arthur's 90th



Arthur was a long term member of ECSOSA and submitted many anecdotes and stories over the years,

His latest contribution was due to be printed in this Newsletter and your editor has decided to feature this in the March edition.

His funeral took place on 27th November at Romsey

Gordon Hammond 1948 -53- Deceased March 2026
From his son Richard.

FROM ROY E SMITH ECS 1951-58

There seems to be a fairly consistent note of sadness at the way in which the school has evolved in the years since many of the ECSOSA members attended it.
I cannot claim to know all the reasons for this, but I must confess to a suspicion that a significant part of the reduction in 'collegial' spirit amongst the newer ex-scholars has to do with the transition from a scholastic model to the so-called 'comprehensive' model.

I believe that a clue to, and symbol of, the reduction of pride in connection to the institution can be seen in the re-painting of the Assembly Hall - which I believe occurred shortly after the transition. The Hall had panelled walls, probably of varnished oak (if memory serves correctly) and on those walls, in gold leaf, was inscribed the names of pupils who had achieved scholastic honours. Seeing those names inscribed there for posterity, each morning at assembly, instilled in me a sense of pride in having been admitted to a school that could produce such excellence. I don't think I ever thought that I could attain that level - but I was proud to be in a group that had members who could do so. I don't know whether all of those who feel pride in their connection to ECS include that among their reasons for feeling that pride. There are undoubtedly many other factors in individual responses - but I do anticipate that, if a survey were done, the fact of being associated with a group of achievers would be a very common thread in their subsequent success. As well as the simple fact of the obliteration of those names from the wall, I find it almost equally disturbing to note the colour that those glorious walls were painted - grey!! Highly indicative, in my opinion, of the direction the school was to take.

Some years ago I contacted the school to determine whether they could relay to me which school prizes I had won during my tenure there. In circumstances I will not go into here, I had lost the prizes themselves, and my memory of which subjects they were for, and when, wasn't reliable. I not only didn't get the information I was looking for - I didn't even get an acknowledgment that I had asked for it. This indicated to me that the posture of the school's administration was no longer one in which recognition of achievement was important - even if it was important to the individual so recognized. The first time I won a prize for academic achievement if made me realize that I could do it. To remove that incentive is a philosophy that, in my opinion, favours mediocrity - and it is quite difficult to feel pride in being associated with mediocrity. I hope that this will not be misinterpreted. I'm sure that there have been high achievers emerging from the classrooms at ECS in all the years since I and my cohorts inhabited those hallowed hallways. I wonder, however, how many didn't get that extra incentive that would have pushed them higher. I do think that the absence of tangible recognition of those achievements must have reduced the cohesion and sense of pride that was prominent when I was there and still exists in those of my classmates, who meet as a group on an annual basis, and who communicate frequently from far-flung places around the world, close to 70 years after we left that incubator, to face challenges new.

From Malcolm Blunden - ECS 1949-56

It occurs to me that, if your alter ego is short of material, the account of my first visit to the U.S.A. may be of interest.

My first trans-Atlantic trip (in 1969) was to deliver a test set to the customer's facility in Arlington TX (between Dallas and Fort Worth and it was necessary for a team to travel out with it). An air freighter had been chartered for the purpose, with a row of seats installed for us between the cockpit and the load. The pilot found that the height-lock was oscillating up and down, so he switched it off and flew it manually (rather more comfortable). Being a freighter, it did not have the range to reach Texas in one hop, so we had to make an overnight stop at Gander.

The following day, we completed the journey to Texas, landing at some airfield convenient for Arlington. We had to stand around in the Texas sunshine, waiting for the unloading to be completed. By the time we reached our hotel (S*ix Flags over Texas*), we were ready for something to cool us down. This is where we found that Texas has rather strict laws governing consumption of alcohol. Alcohol can be served in public places such as restaurants only if it is to accompany a meal of some sort. So, we had to ask what was the minimum that would count as a qualifying meal. The suggestion was a club sandwich, so we opted for that. It was a long way from the British idea of a sandwich. (If we wanted just to drink, it would be necessary to join a private club. They had such a club but, because if its limited purpose, it served only spirits and liqueurs. None of us joined).



For the next five weeks, the daily routine was to have breakfast in their air-conditioned restaurant, then dash to our air-conditioned car, then from the car to the air-conditioned office, and back again in the evening. It made me wonder what it must have been like for the pioneers in the nineteenth century.

Air-conditioning started to come into widespread use in the 'thirties although, as I was told by our representative, who lived there, it was only since the 'sixties that new-build houses came with central air-conditioning installed.

Here, I saw something of which I had already read. In Texas, where the sun shines every day, they have buildings without windows that are lit by electricity. That is not as crazy as it sounds. It turns out that the cost of the electric lighting is more than offset by the saving resulting from the air-conditioning not having to work as hard as would be needed if the sunshine were allowed to stream in through the windows.

In rural North America, public transport is practically non-existent, and that was the case at Arlington. Therefore, we were provided with two cars, in case we needed or wanted to go to different places at the same time. I usually got to drive the Chevrolet Impala (1969 model). Compared to what I had read about American cars, I was favourably impressed by it. In fact, of the various cars that I had on subsequent visits, that Impala was my favourite.



A week or two later, one of our Test Programmers came out to complement the team. The next morning, he asked "do you use an electric shaver?" "Yes", I replied (I did then but not for years now). "What did you do about plugging it in?". "I bought an adaptor before I came". "*You would,* wouldn't you?". Well, I believe in being prepared, especially for things that I already know about (in this case, different voltage and frequency, different sockets). He eventually found some "fudge" to do the trick (I think it involved a kettle lead or somesuch).

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Well, you did say your were short of material!

FROM STAN FLETCHER MScCEngMICE **1950 -54**
A career as a Civil Engineer 1955 - 2023

I left Edmonton County Grammar School in 1954 with enough 'O' level GCEs to do almost any job I fancied. Then after one false-start, I ended up in the offices of civil engineering consulting engineers R.Travers Morgan & Ptns. in what remained of No.11 Victoria Street after the war. I was taken on as an 'assistant under agreement' in a design/drawing office working mainly on long span pre-stressed concrete bridges under the direction of partner, Alfred Goldstein. My starting wage was four pounds ten shillings a week plus 3 shilling luncheon vouchers. I took over from Les Williams as office-boy (later an ICE professional review examiner). I was given a hand towel, duster, bottle of black ink, pen with nib, allocated a stool and drawing board on a bench with 'T' square and set squares, instructed how to use a scale rule, ruling-pen and slide rule (that I had to buy) and learn how to print in block capitals. In between running errands as office boy - such as buying train tickets and sandwiches for A. Goldstein, hailing taxis for Lawson Scott White (the partner in charge) distributing hand towels and dusters, taking/collecting drawings from the printers and making tea for everyone, I checked design calculations prepared by the engineers for arithmetical errors, prepared simple sketches and amended drawings under instruction then graduated to doing my own drawings – mostly RC details for bridge decks, beams and piers, along with preparing bar bending schedules and weight lists.

I studied at Brixton School of Building, commencing with an evening class for an ONC in Building Construction and 'day release' for an ONC leading to an HNC in Structural and Civil Engineering along with evening classes at Brixton and Enfield Technical College for the endorsement subjects required for associate membership of the Institution.



Shell Brent Spar Buoy.due for sinking.in the Atlantic

A koker, a sluice between river and canal designed by Stan



I left RTM soon after my three year 'assistant under agreement' was up and embarked on a career that over the next few years took in mechanical & civil engineering as a designer draughtsman, underpinning, soil mechanics and structural alterations as an engineer, RC multi-storey flats construction as site engineer, food factory conversion & extension as sub-agent, RC deep basement construction as site agent, pipeline estuary/river crossings for oil, gas and water and long sea outfalls as project engineer and contracts manager.

In the early 1970s, my experience of underwater pipelines led to many years in the offshore oil & gas industry 'freelancing' as a project engineer/manager working for a diving/construction company, oil companies, project engineering & management companies, consultants and offshore contractors, including BT Marine - taking me on to pipeline lay-barges, construction barges, dredgers, survey and diving support vessels, a Voith Schneider propelled tug on a 'bottom tow' pipeline installation in the North Sea and the Apache pipeline reel-ship (evolved from PLUTO) in the South Atlantic, offshore Brazil.

As a director of an explosive engineering company, other work during the 80s included carrying out underwater rock blasting for the first power sharing cable across the Channel using shaped charges, demolition of power station structures, engineering studies for decommissioning offshore installations in the North Sea and later, assisting with the intended sinking of the Brent Spar Buoy in the North Atlantic, using shaped explosive charges.

Towards the end of the 80s, as a mature student, I obtained a masters degree in project management from the University of Reading (26181/38500B/47).

There followed a period as an associate with a forensic engineering firm investigating and settling building insurance claims, writing expert reports for disrepair claims, contractual disputes and personal industrial accidents claims and as an expert witness before a tribunal on a underwater pipeline international contractual dispute offshore Ghana.

In 2001, I was accepted by the VSO as a volunteer and for two years worked in Guyana as the Regional Engineer for Region 2, reporting to the chief executive officer and vice-chairman, supervising and designing the construction of drainage and irrigation structures - among many other things.

Returning from Guyana, I expected to retire but Les Williams introduced me to SERCO, who were providing services to the London Borough of Merton and among other things, I worked for the Building Control Department as a consultant checking Building Control Applications for compliance with Part A of the Building Regulations and later the same for the London Borough of Sutton, making use of the structural engineering I studied at Brixton School of Building 45 years before and which led to private work, providing structural engineering services to architects and builders - mainly for loft conversions, extensions and alterations.

At the same time, I was a director of a family firm converting properties enabling people with disabilities to remain living in their own homes.

I retired from working for the London Boroughs but continued with private work until approaching 85, bringing to an end a most enjoyable, varied and fulfilling career as a civil engineer. **Stan Fletcher**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY
Lunch at The Plough
Wed December 9th 12.30