

“BGS Then and Now” – A North American Perspective

To the casual observer, heading into Bradford along Manningham Lane, BGS would appear little changed over the past 60 years. The external façade exudes timeless stability, but it is what has happened behind that façade that is truly remarkable: the transformation from the rigidly disciplined house of learning, into a dynamic society in which conformity has given way to individual expression, subservience to spirited interaction, and suppression to enlightened leadership. The school I attended in the early 50's was one of academic excellence; the school today retains all of that, but has grown in ways beyond the imagination.

Eleanor and I have had the privilege of visiting the School on many occasions; we have witnessed the transformation, slow at first, but gaining momentum, particularly in the past decade. The visits have themselves transformed from a privilege to a pleasure. Gone are the days of the cold shoulder, when in the early 80's we were bluntly told by the then Second Master that no North American “educated?” boy would be fit to attend the School, replaced by the warm welcome of the Headmaster himself, a man who clearly recognizes that there is indeed value in the Diaspora, whether they be Aussies, Yanks, or Canuks.

The growth in the physical facilities of the School is impressive. While the timeless glory of the main building has been retained, the use of its internal space has been greatly enhanced and educational equipment augmented. The Woodworking Shop has been transformed to include electronics and computer assisted lathes, the Delius Room into a language laboratory, and the old pool (remember no bathing trunks allowed – gallery off-limits to the only female teacher at the time) into a fully integrated music facility together with individual practice rooms and a small theatre. The gyms too have mutated, gone are the symbols of torture, the wall bars, the beams, the ropes, replaced by the kind of exercise equipment you would find in most health clubs. On a grander scale, the Science Building, the Library, the Theatre Complex, the Sixth Form Common Room represent major additions, most if not all benefiting from the generous support of alumni. Last but not least, the Pavilion has been replaced; gone are communal muddy rugby baths.

The transformation in physical facilities, no matter how significant, pales in comparison with the transformation of the social climate within the School, the human interactions,

between pupil and teacher, between teacher and administration, between all of the above and visitors such as us. Twice in the past three years we have been given a tour of the School, guided not by a teacher, not by the Head Boy, but by younger pupils, pupils proud of their school and keen to show it. This past June we had the pleasure of being escorted by three young ladies, two completing their first year at the School; what was most impressive was their sheer confidence in conducting the tour, the warm and considered reception by teachers into whose “space” we were led, and the trust shown in them by the Headmaster. I cannot imagine being asked as a boy in 3D by the then Head to conduct such a tour, nor can I imagine having the confidence to carry it out.

Such a dramatic change in the social climate could not have occurred without leadership, from the Board of Governors, from the Headmaster, and from the Staff, all in the interest of creating a student body comprised of confident young people, each striving to do their very best, not just for themselves as individuals, but more particularly for the greater glory of the School.

It was a privilege to attend BGS in the 50's – today it must be a truly life changing experience.