

**Nick Ahad** (1988-1995) a columnist on the *Yorkshire Post* specialising as Arts correspondent, and an Author and Playwright writes:

### School Memories

Cricket during lunchtime in a classroom if it was raining outside or on the artificial wicket near the KRB if it was fine with Ben Moore Del Maitland and Si DeVerteuil. I am still regularly in touch with all three. Playing lots and lots of basketball with Ben Moore.

Inspiring and still resonant drama lessons with Mr S Taylor, who was also an early English teacher. Sixth form was Religious Studies with Dr Valentine and English Literature with Mrs Brear and Mr Taylor for the first year, then Mr Harwood. One particular text ended up being very important: Hamlet. Thanks, I think, to acting with Mr Taylor in plays like Twelfth Night, directed by Mr Harwood (I was Toby Belch, Ben Moore was Andrew Aguecheek), Shakespeare's language really opened up to me. Hamlet remains my favourite play and I can't wait to review it in Sheffield this coming autumn with John Simm - he'll be my sixth Hamlet!

I once arrived late for Mrs Brear's lesson (alright I missed it entirely - basketball) and I had to try find out the homework. It was an essay on 'the famous speech in Hamlet' Simon Wilkinson told me as he jumped on the bus. I wrote an essay about the wrong speech - it was supposed to be the Gravedigger's scene and I wrote it on 'To be or not to be'. While writing the wrong essay I learnt the speech by heart and was incredibly moved by the power of the words of this long dead writer.

### Further Education

Long story short, religion fascinated me, so I studied Theology at Kent University in Canterbury. I chose the course because it would involve spending a year in Jerusalem: when we were due to go, it all got very dangerous and we didn't. I enjoyed studying lots of religions, having spent two years just on St John's Gospel for A level (although that did help last year when I went to Oxford to interview Philip Pullmann at home. He was fairly disinterested until I mentioned my degree - he was in the middle of writing his recently published book about Jesus. We watched cricket and discussed the gospels all afternoon. Theology qualified me for nothing, but fortunately I'd got lots of life experience and, importantly done a whole lot of acting while at university. I was offered a part with a theatre company, turned it down and went home to Keighley.

### How I got into Journalism

Hard work, luck, the kindness of strangers. At home after graduating, a stint of work experience on the *Keighley News* (I wanted a job, they wanted free labour!) gave me a couple of bylines and the determination that I'd found my career. Seeing my name in the paper was - and remains - a huge thrill. Malcolm Hoddy, the editor of the *Keighley News*, was incredibly generous and encouraging. He suggested I go on a journalism postgraduate course in Hastings. I did the equivalent of a year's course in 15 weeks, learning shorthand, doing law and government exams and learning how to be a journalist. I was well prepared to start my career at the *Wiltshire Gazette and Herald*. I was the reporter for Devizes: it made Silsden look like London.

Three days into the job, my editor said he was 'holding the front page' for a story I was chasing. Nothing has been as exciting since! Because it was a little, rural town, I had to work seriously hard to fill the front and page 3 of my edition and after a year I'd moved up to the Wiltshire daily, *The Swindon Evening Advertiser*.

Being a bit belligerent, I got quite a lot of good stories. I went undercover to expose a brothel in the suburbs, and, despite being warned against it, got the paper's first interview with members of a travellers' camp - we were forever writing stories about them, but had never interviewed them. I've got quite a strong sense of social justice.

I won a couple of national awards, that got me noticed by the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and I joined as a news reporter in 2001, the week after 9/11.

During all this time I volunteered at all the newspapers where I worked, to review theatre shows. I also suggested and started a weekly arts supplement at the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, so when the job of arts correspondent came up at the *Yorkshire Post*, I was in with a good chance.

I've been the *Yorkshire Post* arts correspondent / chief theatre critic for six years now.

### Notable Stories covered

I've been sued quite a lot! My favourite time was by Jim Davidson - I called him a bigot, he complained about my review, I left the paper a week later, we won the case.

I was also looking after the newsdesk with another reporter when 9/11 happened. All the senior staff were out at some lunch together. I remember saying to Barrie: "Some idiot's crashed his plane into the twin towers." Then the enormity of what happened unfolded. That was a really emotional week.

Since becoming the arts correspondent I've met lots of famous people. Ian McKellen was very amusing and Alan Bennett (done him three times now - and I think I'm the only journalist this year to get an interview with him) is so much fun. Emily Blunt recently asked me what I thought of Wolfman when I interviewed her about the movie that made me squirm. The one person I keep trying to get and failing is another old boy, David Hockney. One of these days...

Lots of stories get forgotten about quickly. It's a bit cheesy to say it, but as a member of the fourth estate you really do have a front seat at the stage of history, the problem is there's not always time to appreciate that when the next deadline is hurtling towards you.