

Devonport High School in Penzance.

I joined the school in the First form in Penzance in September 1941. Prior to this I had attended Hyde Park Elementary School, as Junior schools were known then, until it was bombed during the blitz on Plymouth in March/April 1941. This school was one of the pre war schools of four stories and the top floor was set alight by incendiary bombs. Fortunately, the Fire brigade was able to extinguish the blaze and save the rest of the floors.

The building had to have the roof lowered and this all took time causing the children to be transferred to other schools in Plymouth or evacuated from the city. I, along with approximately 30 youngsters were evacuated to a large country house in very large grounds near the village of St. Keverne on The Lizard peninsular and there I stayed until September 1941 when the scholarship results were announced and I joined D.H.S. in Penzance.

In Penzance the boys were distributed across the following premises:

- The Rookery in Marazion.
- The Marine Hotel on Penzance Promenade.
- The Mounts Bay Hotel also on the Promenade.
- Tredarvah.
- Mount Prospect Hotel (overlooking the station).
- Royal Hotel (overlooking the railway lines exiting the station)
- Ponsandane. A large country house in extensive grounds on the edge of town.

First year pupils on arrival in 1941 were accommodated, either in the Rookery or at The Mounts Bay Hotel from which they were transferred in their second year to one of the other establishments depending on to which school house they were allocated.

- Drake House was accommodated at Ponsandane.
- Raleigh House at Mount Prospect Hotel.
- Grenville House at The Royal Hotel.
- Gilbert House at the Marine Hotel and Tredarvah*
- * these were smaller establishments.

Tredarvah was bombed in 1941 and pupils were transferred to Trevidren, another substantial house in Penzance. Fortunately there were no casualties. Some of the boys were reputed to have taken shelter in the local girls' boarding school which was adjacent!

The office of the headmaster was situated in the administrative offices of the Methodist church and the first formers were educated in these offices and school assembly took place in the church hall on Wednesday mornings.

Later, the first formers were educated in a large residential house in a street adjacent to the church which I think was Pendarves.

The other centres of education were as follows:

Causewayhead for the Latin stream. This was originally the Y.M.C.A. situated in one of the two main streets of Penzance and covered the second form to the fourth form and a very large art room.

Morrab Road. A very large, double fronted terraced house near the library. This was for the German stream and was next to the official chemistry lab and the official physics lab for Cornwall County. It was in these labs that we had our weekly chemistry and physics lessons

The science stream took their daily lessons in a suite of offices in the "Greenmarket" which was situated just off the junction of Causewayhead and Market Jew Street (the two main streets of the town)

Pupils remained in their classrooms and the masters commuted from building to building apart from physics and chemistry. For Physical training we had the use of the facilities of Penzance County School. The school had the use of the St. Clare sports field which encompassed a first class cricket field with pavilion, a full sized football pitch and a rugby pitch with a full length wooden stand. This field was situated on the edge of town to the north and was across the road from the hospital which was handy for the rugby team!

During my time at Mounts Bay, our swimming was controlled to the extent that we not allowed to enter the water until at least one hour after our evening meal. This meant sitting on the beach until Mr.Hutchin or Mr.Drake appeared on the promenade and blew his whistle which gave us the all clear.

Barbed wire ran along the length of the promenade with just the odd gap allowing access to the beach. The swimming pool at the end of the prom was filled with coal and the ornamental gardens there were occupied by an anti-aircraft site and barred to civilians.

Many of us learnt to swim there in the sea as there was a lower promenade with varying depths of water. Mr.Drake organised boxing matches between all the boys whether you liked it or not. This took place in the dining room with the tables moved back and the chairs forming a square. The non-participants occupied the chairs and cheered the boxers on.

Our walk to school was very pleasant, through Morrab Gardens, a spacious. sub-tropical public park and then up through Causewayhead. Probably a walk of half a mile at the most.

At the end of my first year I was transferred to Ponsandane as a member of Drake House. This was a very substantial country mansion in grounds of several acres on the eastern edge of Penzance and had been run as an up market hotel by the Holiday Fellowship. The grounds were sub-tropical with many camellias, rhododendron and azaleas. The house was set well back from the main road with a long curving drive and a gatekeeper's lodge at the entrance.

Ponsandane accommodated 51 pupils and two housemasters and their families. It had a large games room which had a full size snooker table and a table tennis table. In our first year there we were accommodated in a dormitory sleeping sixteen and subsequently in smaller rooms sleeping four mostly in the attic rooms. The attic room that I shared with three other boys for our second and third

years there overlooked a secondary road leading to Gulval and it was up this road that the Women's Land Army had a large hostel for many young women. Down this road the young women would come in the evenings to seek out the entertainment offered in Penzance!

With the long evenings of Double British Summertime we would see them returning up the road with their escorts-----usually American G.I.s. A large contingent of Americans had been posted to Penzance in 1943 to train for D-Day. Needless to say we offered some encouragement to them from our window, much to the irritation of Mr Nicholas, our housemaster.

As part of their training it was decided to hold a mock invasion of Penzance with the Americans attacking and the local Home Guard and a detachment of British troops defending. A number of us boys were recruited to act as casualties This involved having a label attached to the jackets indicating your injuries so that the troops could practise the skills of their medics. We were then posted to various positions in the town to await developments. My label indicated that I had suffered from flying glass and had damage to my eyes. I sat on the kerb halfway up Market Jew street and, suddenly, what turned out to be a tear gas grenade landed at my feet and exploded. Needless to say, I did have damage to my eyes and this brought a certain realism to the occasion and I was despatched very rapidly to hospital where I had my eyes very thoroughly washed out.

Very tragically we had a fatal accident at Ponsandane whilst we were there. On the roof above the impressive staircase was a glass skylight and below this in the ceiling was a very large, horizontal ornate glass panel. This was covered by a double thickness of thick brown paper as part of the blackout precautions. One afternoon, as a result of a minor electrical problem, one of the six formers and his younger brother went up into the roof space to investigate. Whilst there the younger brother, following an electrical wire, stepped on to this brown paper and fell through with disastrous results.

This brings home the tremendous responsibilities the housemasters and their wives had to look after so many boys of varying ages. We had a virtually free rein as long as we kept to the set times for meals and to be on the premises for two hours "prep" before time for lights out.

The pupils living at the Rookery in Marazion travelled to school each day on the train to Penzance and then had a fairly long walk. They took their lunch at the local British restaurant. (a subsidised public restaurant serving cheap wholesome food)..Those of us living in Penzance returned to our accommodation for lunch.

On a lighter note, I list below, some of the master's nicknames some of which are indicative of their disciplinary attitudes!

"Tiger" Truman Chemistry.
Dickie Bird. House Master at the Rookery.
Johnny Gore. Latin Very commanding presence
Nobby Clarke. English No nonsense.
Harry Ferraro Deputy Head
Fritz Ferraro. Maths. Calm and good humoured
Buns Beckerleg History A gentle man, Butt of mischievous jokes.

Bunny Warren. Raleigh Housemaster Popular.
Chas Coombes. Physics. Strict. No sense of humour.
Edgar Harris. Very popular Physics. Rugby master.
"Cow" Armour, French master. Elderly-named after tinned beef.

Finally, I have visited Penzance once or twice since I retired and have dined at Ponsandane and had a tour of the house and gardens---most enjoyable. Latterly I believe that it has become a retirement home.

I hope my ramblings down memory lane might be of interest to you.

Kind Regards

Maurice Brereton.
Penzance 1941----- 1945