

Chapter 63

1962-63
Novice Teacher



My first appointment as a teacher of mathematics and physical education started in the new High School of Stirling in mid-August, 1962. The ancient 'School on the Rock' up near the castle in Stirling - that I had attended from 1951 until 1957 - and my father as a pupil from 1923 to 1925, then as head of its primary department for most of the 1930s until 1942 - had outlived its relevance to, and fitness for, modern education by 1960.



Thus, it was sold to a hotel consortium by Stirlingshire Education Committee who meantime had purchased a 'green-field' site for its replacement at Torbrev just next to the County Cricket Club ground, Williamfield, and the school's

existing playing fields. The exciting modern complex was ready by early 1962, and the formal ceremonial processional move was undertaken by staff and pupils in time for the April to June summer term of that year.

Simultaneously, the fields to the south of the new school grounds were purchased by developers for private housing, thus Olive and I moved smartly to reserve the three-bedroomed semi-detached house adjoining the school grounds that eventually became our first home – 29 Springwood Avenue – just before Christmas, 1963.

Our house is just to be seen at the left hand end of the row of bungalows



However, as house construction proceeded slowly over the next fifteen months, Olive - still at home with her parents Betty and Robbie in Glasgow – and I - in Bannockburn with my parents, Jim and Nancy – got on with the business of teaching and saving for our future together.

My work allocation was diverse and onerous for a probationer – 27 weekly periods within the normal 6-period mornings comprising teaching, Mathematics to 1S, 2C and 4E, and Arithmetic to 3D and 4EF; then Physical Education to various classes for 11 weekly afternoon periods ...plus last period from Mondays to Thursdays taking sections of Year Groups for Outdoor Games. In addition I had been appointed Master i/c Rugby Football to manage and organise out-of-school matches with other Scottish schools for our schools' **9 teams** ... plus sole responsibility for coaching the school's premier squad of seniors who competed to be selected for the Saturday morning **1st XV**.

Apart from the immediate challenge of, for the first time, preparing daily mathematics/arithmetic lesson plans for five classes, and keeping up with loads of correction during free-periods and in the evenings at home, I found my 'other-self' up-to-the-eyes in sports coaching and administration ... thus my Rector, Mr Geddes, duly extracted his 'pound of flesh' from his so-called prodigy (!). However, as befitted, an ex-Colonel in the Irish Guards, he had set out my terms of reference and our mutual objectives very clearly well before I had been appointed. Indeed he had stated at the outset, " Give me at least three years of your career – make sure some of these slow-learners in 4E gain an 'O' Grade Mathematics after two years - bring all your undoubtedly successful rugby experiences to bear on improving standards in that sport throughout the school – also, as soon as possible, help our lads earn a fixture for the 1st XV with Dollar Academy 1st XV for the first time in our respective schools' histories ... do these things, and, in due course, I'll move heaven and earth to get you the first promotion that you and I both consider suitable."

"Sound in mind and body" were the Rector's watchwords, and thus, by using his powerful personality, and his apparently considerable influence over elected members of the County Education Committee, he had gradually built up a school staff who shared this ethos. Therefore it was no surprise that the majority of my 80+ male and female

colleagues turned out to be under 30 years of age; most were committed to one sport or another; many had enviable talents in the expressive arts ... and all were highly qualified in their academic subject or subjects. Thus extra-curricular activities were well catered for, as was the ambitious four-day-weekly diet of Games Periods.

Three of my fellow 'youthful' colleagues -Charlie Ross (Classics), Andy Miller (English), Angus Kerr (Science)



I travelled from Bannockburn into Torbrex for this exciting 1962-63 school session; and, although I had gained my car driving licence (at the second attempt!) I did not possess a car. Thus I was only too happy to get a lift to and fro from our next-door neighbour, Charlie Ross, a member of the school Classics' Department, and a part-time professional football goal-keeper with Stenhousemuir FC.

These early days at work and play were very enervating ... exhausting more like! But at least I had no problems with pupil discipline to worry me as it sometimes appeared to trouble others. The reverse indeed was the case as my popularity with pupils was transparent ... and, for this blessing coming my way, I was eternally grateful for the example shown to me by my father in his professional dealings – fairness, decisiveness, firmness, friendliness, and a ready sense of humour. Week-ends were devoted to seeing Olive as she accompanied me to the rugby matches I continued to play for Jordanhill; and when this involved home fixtures, I stayed overnight at her parents' home in Ruchazie ... occasionally attended their Mission Sunday School in Possilpark ... met more of my future in-laws ... and generally allowed them all to get-to-know me better.

It would be fair to say that my Autumn term of orientation as a very busy member of staff of the High School of Stirling was dominated by rugby football much more than academic commitments – (a) taking the large group of enthusiastic but variably talented 4th/5th/6th year lads 'by the scruff of the neck' for practical field training sessions, and conducting regular after-school-hours' 'talk-ins' about both the basic and finer aspects of the game particularly from my extensive knowledge and successful experience of defence in set-positions and open-play. and, (b) continuing to travel all over the country for Saturday afternoon matches with the College 1st XV.

I got tremendous support from the School 1st XV captain, John Innes in my coaching of his fellow players ... although, as it turned out, he had fairly moderate talent available to command that season. Taking a longer view, however, I kept up the knowledge pressure on many of the younger lads whom I had quickly identified as very, very, promising material indeed. That this group were the most diligent attenders at 'talk-ins' was very encouraging. In the event, we were spared too much embarrassment in defeats because, from Christmas 1962 until the middle of March, 1963, snow, ice and frozen grounds prevented any match-play over all but the milder SW of Scotland, the exception

side field. To shouts of derision, Andy pulled-in about 100yds down the road ... and to further calls that there was no woodland for him to clamber into to relieve himself .. he jumped the dyke further back up the road, retrieved the hatch ... and returned triumphantly to continue the journey unabashed!

The game itself was rather farcical ... a typical game of two-halves we scored 15 points down-gale in the first and they 8 points after the turn-round. I scored a try and three conversions ... but my location for one conversion of a try near the corner-flag in particular was a never-to-be-repeated occurrence for me. The ball was held for me about two feet from the goal-line about thirty yards out-wide from the posts. I then kicked it across and backwards into the wind with all my might and prayed that, if it reached the front of the posts, it might just hover and blow over the bar and between the uprights Mother Nature smiled on me ... and my prayer was answered!

Lastly, one brave (foolhardy) spectator measured the amount of time that was spent during the game retrieving the ball from its constant visits away down onto the next pitch and beyond ... and estimated that about three-quarters of the curtailed duration was taken up with this 'pursuit' while we, the players, shivered and strived to remain vertical! Latterly, in order to keep warm evidently, groups of players, rather than just one would indulge in the regular leather chasing down-wind!

The following week, not surprisingly, I went down with flu as the holiday period started. I struggled in to see 'Doctor John' [McFadyen]... our family doctor from our infancy and he said after taking the usual soundings etc., 'My son Peter tells me all about you ... even helping with his 2nd year outfit as well as the big boys ... and how you encourage him to tackle you as hard as he is able ... he worships the ground you walk on. He also says that you seem to work non-stop. Well it's all catching-up with you. Remember that you have a long career ahead of you and that Rome was not built in a day. I prescribe iron pills and a good rest until January ... now off you go and take care of yourself.'

However, I was well enough to enjoy a nice Christmas with Olive and her family in Glasgow. Then together we spent Hogmanay and New Year's Day with my sister Elizabeth and husband Cameron and all their family and friends in Bridge of Allan. The early morning walk in the snow up Bridge of Allan Glen was magical.

Bridge of Allan Glen

