

## IAN PRATT (1942-2022) R.I.P.

Some thoughts from his contemporary at Christ's Hospital, Brian Walling, following the news of Ian's passing published in the CHOBA Newsletter 1 Nov 2022.



*Ian at his last workplace before retirement in 2011, Woodhouse College in Barnet, North London. The photo shows Ian exactly as I would have expected him to be, a half century or so on from our last meeting. It captures what I believe is the essence of Ian and it is how I shall remember him.*

Ian Pratt (MaA 53-61) became a Classics teacher and remained in this role until his retirement in 2011 at age 69. His skills and personality seemed to be ideally suited to such a role and he appears to have been much liked by his students. The news of his passing, posted by his last employers in their College Newsletter, mentions that "he had great charm and a lovely gentle wit." Ian seems to have found a role that he was good in, that he liked and where he was a success with his students.

Ian and I were close contemporaries at CH. I could perhaps be considered his closest contemporary and therefore feel some obligation to provide some thoughts about him – to complement any more complete news that may emerge from his family members or from other quarters.

Ian and I were part of Maine A's intake of six new boys in 1953, just eight years after the end of the 2nd World War. Strong memories of the War still persisted at that time among our families and could also be sensed in various aspects of school life. Today, with Ian's passing, only two of our original six survive: myself and David Lucioni (who participated this year in a "60 years on" reunion at CH and has been in correspondence with me).

Ian and I were not only in the same House, but also in the same Form at each stage of our CH career. We both joined the Classics stream and worked our way through, under the strict regime of Head of Classics Derek Macnutt, to open scholarships at Cambridge in late 1960. At that point we parted ways. I left CH at Christmas 1960, needing to earn some money before taking up my Cambridge place in autumn 1961. Ian, as was more usual at that time, stayed on at CH until the summer term and left in July 1961. I had been House Captain in Maine A and after my departure Ian assumed that role for the rest of the 1960-61 year. Derek Macnutt was a fearsome taskmaster, renowned not only for his output of classical scholars from CH, but also for being the creator of The Observer newspaper's difficult "Ximenes" crossword every Sunday.

At Cambridge we headed for different Colleges: Ian to Corpus Christi where he continued to study Classics; myself to Peterhouse, where I made a planned switch to Economics. At Cambridge we saw little of each other and crossed paths rarely, generally only in the street from time to time. We did in 1962 together make the tedious cross-country journey by train one day from Cambridge to Oxford and return, to catch up with one or two Old Blue contemporaries at Oxford and in particular a third member of our six 1953 Maine A new boys, Leslie Harris, a more-than-brilliant mathematician. He had been recognised and fast-tracked by CH to an open scholarship at Oxford one year ahead of the rest of us. After graduation in 1963, Leslie went immediately from Oxford to the government's GCHQ in Cheltenham in some form of cyber security role. (He stayed at GCHQ for the whole of his working career.)

We new boys in Maine A in 1953 were generally from homes in central or suburban London, except for one of us who came from Southport in Lancashire – typical of the sprinkling of provincial UK boys in the school mix at that time, which was otherwise heavily weighted to London and south-east origins. Ian's home while at CH was in the centre of London, close to Victoria Station. His family, with several children of which he was the eldest, lived tightly packed in a top floor flat at 1 Ebury Bridge Road. (Curiously, I can still remember the exact home addresses of all the other five boys who joined Maine A with me.) I seem to recall that Ian's family had earlier associations with Essex (Chelmsford, Southend etc). I do not know whether the Essex connection was long-standing or ancestral, or simply a result of War-related relocations away from central London.

At CH, Ian distinguished himself as a very serious person, dedicated to studying. He was methodical, analytical and well organised. He had a deep intellect, but never flaunted it. He gave no hints anywhere of flamboyance or extravagance. He became a regular award winner in various subjects at the school prize-giving ceremonies that took place in connection with Speech Day and other occasions.

Along with all this Ian was a quite private person, seeming not to be interested in having a wide circle of friends. He was kind, calm and considerate always. I believe, based on my limited contact with him at Cambridge, that he carried these qualities with him into life after CH. All these qualities, as I look back, probably suited him ideally to be a teacher of Classics – which is the career path that I believe he followed after Cambridge. I do not know where exactly he went to teach for his first 25 years after leaving Cambridge in 1964, but it is confirmed that he subsequently spent 22 years from 1989 to 2011 as Classics head at the Sixth Form College, Woodhouse College in Barnet, North London, retiring from there at age 69.

Ian's father, I believed, was a civil servant of some type working for Westminster Council – possibly a librarian; that is a thought that somehow seems stuck in my mind.

During school holidays from CH, Ian regularly spent time with his grandmother in Wallasey, Cheshire, and seemed to regard Wallasey almost as a second home – and relishing the lengthy train (steam at that time) journeys up from London to Liverpool and back.

Ian's younger brother Graham followed him to CH (to Maine A in fact) five years later in 1958. This was a couple of years before I left, but I have no specific memories of Graham. Records show that Graham went to Durham University, where he graduated in Psychology, and subsequently followed a career in Educational Psychology in Essex. At the time it was widely understood that there was a pipeline of several more Pratt siblings being lined up for Maine A. From recent comments on the CH Forum it seems that this did in fact materialise, with three more boys in Maine A after Graham, plus two girls at Hertford.

Ian, in line with his private lifestyle, seems not to have been active in Old Blue events after leaving – although both he and his brother were listed as members of the old CH Club, early on.

As far as I am aware, Ian did not marry nor have any children. Records show that he took up residence early on in the centre of Streatham, south London, and remained there at the same address for most, if not all, of his life.

Had I not moved away from UK, early in my career, to a long series of foreign workplaces, I might have had more Old Blue contact with Ian and been able to report more precisely on him now.

*Below are three photos from beyond the usual sources of house photos.*



*An early photo of Ian (on left) in his first year at CH, spring 1954, taken by me beside the railway line to Littlehampton alongside CH. The other boy is another of the six in 1953's Maine A intake, David Lucioni, who is the only other survivor in 2022 beside myself. Ian was very interested in trains and railways, being a frequent long-distance rail traveller in the school holidays between London and his relatives near Liverpool.*



*A quite rare Class photo (as distinct from House photo) taken by Form Master Michael Cherniavsky (Cherny) on Big Side in July 1956. The class is Cherny's UFA form, many of whom progressed to university at Oxford and Cambridge. This was the third year at CH for most of us and Cherny taught us the core subjects of English and History while we each started started to follow our various specialist paths through CH and beyond. As far as I know, this was the only year that Cherny's teaching duties included a relatively junior Form, teaching only at the Grecians/Deps level before this and after this. I believe that most of us enjoyed Cherny's often unorthodox teaching approaches – I certainly did – and that these helped us on our way through CH and beyond. Ian is one row from back, at left (touching his bands). I am immediately in front of Ian. To the right of me in the photo is Tony Cline (PeA) and in front of me is Chris Slade (ColB). I believe, from photos of that event, that both of these were at the 60 years-on Old Blues reunion at CH this year.*



*Another photo taken by me on the same day as the other 1954 photo above of Ian beside the railway track. This photo of nearly 70 years ago helps to show how far back our period together at CH was. Although the main rail line passing CH had long been electrified (third rail), various branch lines in the region still depended on steam traction until those lines started to be closed in the mid-1960s. The photo shows the "Brighton Flyer", the steam-hauled train that ran from Horsham to Brighton, entering the cross-country branch line that diverged from the main Littlehampton line at Itchingfield Junction at the bottom of Sharpenhurst hill.. There used to be a level-crossing at this spot, right on the junction, on the old direct path from the CH playing fields behind the 1st 11 cricket pavilion up to the reservoir on Sharpenhurst. Incidentally, there was a serious train accident at this exact spot 10 years later in 1964, when a goods train from Brighton, emerging from the branch line into the junction, collided with a goods train on the main line, due to some failure of signalling protocol. The 1905 steam locomotive seen here in the photo continued in service until 1964 when local branch lines in the south on which it ran started to be closed down. Ian was something of a railway buff (and this rubbed off a little on some of those around him in Maine A – including myself). I am sure that he would have appreciated the inclusion of this CH-related image at the end of my note about him.*

Brian Walling (MaA 53-60), Penang, Malaysia, November 2022.

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