



From Public Nose to Private Eye

Thursday 10 November 2005

This article by Alex Went was originally published in Conference and Common Room, and was reproduced in The Salopian in November 2005.



In 1954, a group of 'unusual and talented' boys took on the editorship of the by then boringly staid Shrewsbury School magazine *The Salopian*. Their names, Richard Ingrams, Willie Rushton, and Paul Foot, were later to become synonymous with the satirical movement which characterized, in its free-thinking, balloon-pricking attitude, the Sixties. That these schoolboy 'radicals' were allowed to have anything to do at all with the mouthpiece of the establishment owed much to the inspired stewardship of Laurence LeQuesne, who taught history here until 1994, and who as master-in-charge of *The Salopian* readily responded to the lively intellects of Ingrams and Foot, and the accomplished penmanship of Rushton. It was also an early example of that intellectual give-and-take between pupil and teacher which would come to be the mainstay of the educational philosophy of succeeding generations. When he got engaged, LeQuesne's fiancée was warned, only half-jokingly, that her future husband was 'the man who was responsible for the 1960s, through his relations with the editors of *Private Eye*'.



From Shrewsbury, Foot and Ingrams passed to Oxford, from within whose seemingly conservative walls the two schoolfriends drafted, with Rushton, the pilot of the magazine which would become the single most successful satirical organ in the world. And indeed, today's *Private Eye* (as it was christened) is ever looking over its shoulder to its schoolboy and undergraduate roots.

*Rushton on banjo, Booker on trombone,
Foot on cornet, Malcolm Mitchell on euphonium,
GW Jones on bass, Laurence LeQuesne on drum.*



For example, the 'Neophiliacs' column, which relentlessly mocks those who insist that 'white is the new black', takes its title from a book written in 1960 by Christopher Booker, another Shrewsbury contemporary and editor of the school magazine. Equally, the present-day Private Eye retains elements from its surrogate mother, The Salopian. The 'Pseud' of 'Pseuds' Corner', for instance, appears in embryonic form in early editions, and his iconic figure is firmly established in the following verse from July 1954:

*There is a tribe that in the world exists
Who might be called the pseudo-culturists.
Who think they can to heavenly realms aspire
By warbling Handel in the concert choir.
He who acclaims as masterpieces all
The tawdry paintings of the mad Chagall
Who quotes from Blake or from Professor Freud
This man I label with the title 'Pseud'*



"PSEUD"

Perhaps the most interesting indication of things to come had been the underground publication, while the three were still at Shrewsbury, of a parody of the official school magazine. The Wollopian was, in their own words, 'a scurrilous lampoon'. Financed by advertising from local businesses, it went further than The Salopian in knocking some of the more hallowed institutions of school life. In its pages can be seen the germ of the St Cake's school calendar - which in its original Eye incarnation contained references to such arcane Shrewsbury pastimes as 'The Bog' (a cross-country run); and this infant version of an item that might have come from the Eye's Court and Social pages:

An assorted company of gentry was present at last week's tennis party. We noticed R.M. Downes, one of the South Downes, and also from the south, J. Broad, from Norfolk. Chatting to T.H.E. Moore, one of the Yorkshire Moores, was A.F. Bell, one of Hell's Bells, no doubt. Also present was J.R.G. Banks, one of the Midland Banks, and A.J.G. Heath, one of the Hampstead Heaths.



Fairly tame stuff, you might think. But this gentle jibbing of the upper classes was only one facet of Wollopian humour. Two articles make for much more heady reading: Satanic rites practised by the Classics Faculty, and the front-page headline 'REVOLTING!' - accompanied by a photograph of two boys giving workers' salutes from the balcony of the venerable Main School Building while a crowd excitedly looks on. If it had never been invented, this pastiche of ten years earlier might have become the iconic image of student revolution.

The spirit of rebellion is never far from the surface of boarding school life, so it is hardly surprising that The Wollopian should find its imitators in today's Shrewsbury. Since 2000, Public Nose, ever-conscious of its proud ancestry, has offered a platform to Salopian journalists and sixth-form sceptics alike, providing a mixture of establishment reportage and surreal satire that owes more perhaps to Chris Morris than to Richard Ingrams. Columns such as 'Nigel the Marine Iguana', the observations of a reptilian roving reporter, and 'Save Me Stalin', an agony-aunt column penned by Uncle Joe, are typical of present-day Salopian humour. Unsurprisingly, the Nose too has spawned a variety of unofficial (and far more subversive) parodies - the most successful the mercifully occasional Pubic Noise.

In June 2001, only a few days after the untimely death of Willie Rushton, Ingrams paid his first visit to his alma mater. He was introduced to the Nose editors, and was photographed with them holding a copy of their latest edition, while the boys brandished that week's Eye. Though the photograph is sadly lost, the memory of this meeting of satirical minds remains as a testament to a proud Shrewsbury journalistic tradition.