

**Mr. Collette**  
A member of staff during 5 decades



**Fond Recollections**



Mr Collette taught me Maths in year 1 and 2 then English for the 3rd, 4th and fifth years. He awoke a passion for the English language for which I have always remembered him. For example, he encouraged his charges to carry a small notebook and to write within it any "new" words heard by them. Then from time to time he would set aside a little time and out came the notebooks and he would explain the meaning and context in which the word may be used. I remember the fascination as I listened to him explaining the meaning of the word "sanguine" and how that had evolved over the centuries. I was astonished that a word's meaning could change - naive or what?

In class I recall his gentle sarcasm too. He would tell us that there were fairies at the bottom of his garden. In Mathematics he would scan the spider scribbled numbers and his eye would alight on the final answer. If there were no units he would wheel out the inevitable "Cows, Pigs or Elephants, Graham?" Beneath all this was such a loveable, humorous man however. His come-uppance was an occasion in an Assembly for something or other of senior school boys. He had a little more trouble than usual in achieving an attentive silence. Having succeeded, he came out with a statement to the effect that in the male of the species there was a growth in stupidity which was directly proportional to age. It took but a few seconds for him - and for us - to realise the implications for Mr Collette in that statement. To his great credit, he fell about laughing with the rest of us at his faux pas.

Like many boys, I experimented with smoking and being one of the select few, a Grammar School boy no less, we used to buy Piccadilly. None of your Woodbine rubbish for us. We were ensconced in the "bogs" one day puffing away when Mr Collette's severest tone was heard summoning us out of the cubicle in which we thought we were safe. He instructed us to report to his Senior Master's room later in the day which we obeyed. There we received a very stern ticking off behind his closed door. We were all fifth year lads and just as we were about to leave, Mr Collette added as a parting comment "You haven't the sense you were born with. Were I in the fifth form and wishing to smoke at school I would at least have the gumption to go to the other end of the North Walk." We sensibly took that to heart but above all it indicated to me that beneath that severe facade there was a humane man who profoundly understood his little acolytes and the frailties he shared with them.

Finally, Mr Collette had what I imagine were the "administrative" duties supporting School and Staff play events. Part of that was overseeing the procurement, storing and deployment of interval ice creams. As a total sporting Philistine I was heavily into choirs and the Arts at school and used to work with Mr Combs on the scenery for these plays. One of them was the Importance of Being Ernest, another When we are married. I have adored these plays ever since and can watch them over and over again. Both were I

recall, staff plays and revealed a high standard of acting not least by R W Hamilton I digress. Recruited by Mr Collette for ice cream logistics it was my job with a colleague to ensure that it was stored safely in the refrigerator until required and then sold to the eager public in the intervals. Mr Collette was a great delegator by which I mean that he devolved responsibility and above all trust to those who served him. That is one of the most important things that the old can do for the young and is so important to developing self respect and confidence.

On this occasion Mr Collette doubtless in jest told us that the heating had been cranked up so that at the interval the doors would burst open and we would sell lots of ice cream to thirsty, over heated guests. We went to the fridge some hours before the performance began just to check the stock and found to our horror that we had switched off the refrigerator. You can imagine our feelings of fear as we confronted Mr Collette with the news of our incompetence. His humanity shone through however as laced with a liberal amount of humour he calculated that we had time to allow the silver foil wrapped ice creams to re-freeze before they would be required. He added "What the eye doesn't see, the heart never grieves after." A saying new to my young ears but eagerly added to my collection of things gleaned from the man who by this stage in my school career was rapidly becoming my hero! The ice creams did re-freeze but anyone could have surmised the history of the mis-shapen package that they got for their 6d or whatever they cost. I suppose that they were desperate as they escaped from the oven of a hall and past caring so long as it was ice cold.

If there was one teacher to whom I must award my most special regard, it was Mr Collette.

**Geoff Graham**

### **Mr. Collette's Gown**



I can't recall Mr. Collette ever raising his voice in his English lessons, or using any kind of threat, or threatening gesture, but, somehow, he managed to keep perfect order at all times. When we walked into his class, he was usually there before us, sitting at his desk, reading his notes, and it was like entering a cathedral. Even the rowdier elements among us would reverently make their way to their seats, and sit down without the slightest murmur. If we happened to arrive before him, which was a very rare event, there would be the usual banter between the students but, as soon as he walked into the classroom, there would be an immediate hush. He was a small man, slight in stature, and he had a quiet, well-modulated voice. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles, his grey hair was combed straight back without any kind of fuss and he had a close-cropped moustache; and I never saw him without his teaching gown in the 5 years that I spent at H.G.S. I couldn't imagine him without it! All the other teachers would use a mixture of various devices for keeping order. They would shout your name; they would glare at you menacingly; stab their finger at you; throw chalk at you; make you stand to attention, if you were inattentive, and make you recite what you were supposed to have learnt in the previous 5 minutes, over and over again until you got it right. All that Mr. Collette had to do was say your name quietly, and you were immediately engrossed in what he had to say. If anyone dared confer with his neighbour, when he should have been working on his exercise, he would say a name, depending on who the culprit was, without even looking up from what he was occupied with at that moment, and the culprit would return to his work in a thoroughly-cowed manner.

Nine years after I left school, I was in the Beverley Arms at Ackworth with my new girl-friend, who was to become my wife, and who should walk in through the entrance doors but Mr Collette. I expected the general hubbub in the pub to cease automatically -- but it didn't. Everybody just carried on talking, laughing and joking as if he wasn't there. I couldn't understand it --- until I noticed that there was something different about him. He wasn't wearing his teaching gown! Now, you can think what you like --- but I know that there was something strange about that gown. It was the first time that I'd seen him without it --- and it was the first time that I'd seen people carry on as if he wasn't there. I just wish that I'd had that gown when I was bringing up my 3 kids!

**Bob Taylor**

### **Fond Memories**



After reading about Mr. Collette on the web site, I remembered when we had his wife on the ward. There were four ex HGS qualified nurses on the ward, and we were all quaking in anticipation of his visits, but his manner was impeccable, his voice so well modulated and he was so much the gentleman, my memories of him will always be fond.

**Daphne Slater**

## Mr. Collette and the Main Staircase



For this tale to be understood, one has to remember the first landing of the main staircase, which had a couple of steps leading off it, up towards a stained-glass window. To the left was the doorway to a classroom at the top of more steps (room 12?), and the sick room was also thereabouts, and to the right of this little landing was the Staff toilet. Continuing up the staircase, one would arrive at the homework pigeonholes on the right, and the female Staffroom door on the left. It was here that the story begins. I was standing alone at the top of the Main Staircase, near the female Staffroom door and the homework pigeonholes, preparing to descend, when Mr. Collette came up behind me, and asked if I was alright. I said I was fine: there was no-one else around, and then there was a pause, as we looked at each another. I was low in spirits at the time, and it must have shown in my face, because after a quick look to the right and to the left, Mr. Collette --- MR. COLLETTE.... cocked a leg over the bannister and slid down in schoolboy fashion to the bend in the rail, his gown flapping as he whizzed along! I stood in disbelief at this scene, the amazement compounded as the Boss emerged from the Staff toilet to witness the final yard or so of the slide. Ignoring Mr. Hamilton completely, Mr Collette regained his feet and continued down the stairs, looking upward to me and giving me a wink on his way. Mr Hamilton stood rooted to the spot for a second or two, showing no facial expression, and then continued on his way. I was left wondering whether it had really happened. It's a true story of a special moment in time which speaks volumes about the participants.

Frances Harrison

## Book-keeping



Mr. Collette was one of my teachers. He taught me book-keeping among other things and my favourite recollection was of him telling me that my ledgers appeared to have been written by a demented spider.

Keith Vest

## Senior Master



From the School Magazine 1950

"...at the beginning of next term (after Easter 1950))....Mr Crossland's post as Senior Master will be filled by a worthy successor, Mr. Collette."

## Cover



Dave,

In my first year as a teacher at HGS I was given a cover lesson for an absent colleague last lesson Friday afternoon. I went into the Staff Room to collect some marking, when Mr. Collette, who had retired but was visiting the Staff, asked how I was getting on. I had a word with him but said I would have to go and do the cover. Where is it he asked? "Sit down. I'll do it to keep my hand in". That was the character of the man. Not many like him around anymore.

Regards,

Terry McCroakam

## Mr. Collette's retirement in 1965



The end of this term sees the end of an era in the history of Hemsworth Grammar School. The School opened in 1921 and five years later in January 1926 our present Senior Master, Mr. L. N. Collette, joined the staff. He has served the school for 39 years and a term. This is a record that is unlikely to be surpassed by anyone in the life of the school. When Mr. Collette came to the school there were approximately 16 teachers on the staff. Today there are 43. The buildings consisted of what we today call the Main Block, plus the Woodwork Shop and the other rooms in that block, plus the Dining Room. The additions to the school have been the Junior Block, the Science Block, the Gymnasium and the extension to the Dining Room. The playing fields consisted of the present cricket area, the 2nd XI. hockey field and the, 1st XV. field. All the rest of the playing areas have been added since. The present Gardener's Sheds and the Fives Court were on the site where the Science Block now stands. The Cricket Pavilion, too, was placed where the Science Block now stands. Even the Assembly Hall was not then available, for Mr. Collette well remembers Morning Prayers being held in the Library. The number of pupils was much less, about 250 to 300. Our present number is about 790.

Pupils of today and of just a few years ago think of Mr. Collette as the Senior Master and a teacher of English. In the days of the 1920's, however, a young teacher was expected to teach many subjects, and he did. In his time Mr. Collette has taught such subjects as Mathematics, History, Religious Knowledge and, above all, Commercial Subjects, - Shorthand, Typing and Bookkeeping. After English this last subject was probably his favourite. Many hundreds of boys and girls owe their present positions to the skill they acquired in Shorthand and Typing at the hands of Mr. Collette. For many of these pupils the word "hands" will have a significant meaning!

I wonder how many of the present pupils could imagine Mr. Collette clad in white flannels with a ring of bells tied around his knees and coloured ribbons flying from each shoulder, and thus adorned, tripping lightly through the most intricate of dances as he took his place on the greensward with the Staff Country Dancing Team. How many think of him as a stalwart member of the Staff Cricket Eleven. Yet he was and many were the school wickets he took with his googly. Not one of the present members of the School has had the pleasure of seeing him on the stage in a Staff Play. Yet many are the roles he has played and many are the tales he can tell of what went on, both on the set and behind the scenes. One of my clearest memories of him is as a Cocktail Barman. He looked exceedingly smart in his little white jacket and he was no mean hand at shaking a cocktail either!

An activity of his which has brought much joy to the individual pupil and much profit to the School, has been his organisation of the school tuck-shop. As was to be expected from one keenly interested in Commercial Subjects, it was he who volunteered to be responsible for this venture. As a result of his activity in this field the School was able to provide the chairs and curtains for the Library and the clock for the Tower. For many years to come these will be tangible marks of his service to the School.

Whatever the activities of the school Mr. Collette has always been in the forefront of those who willingly gave of their time and labour to make those activities a success. There are hundreds and hundreds of Old Hilmians who will gratefully testify to this. Rugger, Soccer, Cricket, Tennis, Folk Dancing, Acting, Producing, Business Manager - in all these spheres he has been active at one time or another. Nowadays, of course, he limits his sporting activity to golf, but it will be for his interest and participation in activities enumerated above that he will be gratefully and affectionately remembered by his former pupils.

Although at one time School Librarian, a post where as usual he left his mark, his enthusiasm for Commercial Subjects led him quite naturally to the post of Careers Master. This post he has held for more years than he would care to remember and the number of pupils he has helped to secure their first job just cannot be counted.

His outstanding quality was his kindness and consideration for others. But he was not soft! Woe betide the offender! Many a former pupil will tell you that he quaked in his shoes when Mr. Collette's eagle eye was upon him. He stood no nonsense. He had no use for the shirker. But he would go to any lengths to help one who was trying, as long as he was not too trying!

His colleagues, both present and past, wish him everything good in his retirement. Not a few of his ex-colleagues have freely and gladly admitted how much they owe him for his kindly help during their years on the staff of Hemsworth Grammar School. Many who began their teaching career here have later gratefully acknowledged the friendly advice and support he gave them during their early years as teachers. All of us who have been privileged to serve with him, sincerely wish for him and Mrs. Collette many, many years of happy retirement. Right well has he earned them!

R.W.H.

## Mr. Collette and Fred Johnson's first day



Speaking of being a 'sprog' and seeing the Salvete and Valete lists on the website for the first time in years reminded me of my first morning at Hemsworth. The girls were always referred to by their Christian names and surname whereas the lads were always referred to only by their surnames.

Well I'd never experienced that before and this little incident goes to show how we think the world revolves around ourselves especially when you're only 11. We were all assembled in the Dining Hall opposite the 1st year block and Mr Collette was 'marching' up and down, gown flowing and making a speech. I'd sort of drifted off and not really paying much attention as it was all going over my head. I believe he must have been telling us about the great sporting traditions of HGS. Suddenly he referred to the fact that Kenny Johnson had been picked to captain the England Schoolboy Rugby Union team, except his words were "...and Johnson has been picked to captain England at rugby..." That woke me up. I must have gone white with fear and I nearly fell off my seat in panic thinking "I don't want to captain England at rugby I've only just got here..." Of course I daren't tell anybody about this but was mighty relieved to discover that he actually meant Kenny Johnson and not me.

Fred Johnson

## Dave McKenzie



When I was in the Sixth Form, he always called me "Mac". Mr. Hamilton was far more formal.

Dave McKenzie

## Geoff Booth



Mr. L. Collette was my Form Master in 4S. I didn't know what sarcasm was until now, but he instilled in me a fondness and understanding of our unique Language and Literature, which I am passing on. My 13 year old granddaughter is just starting to read my complete works of Charles Dickens and she said to me "Grandad when you die can I have your big Oxford Dictionary?" I wouldn't have had either the Dickens or the dictionary if I hadn't been taught by Mr. Collette.

Geoff Booth HGS 1939-45

## Record few could equal

The "Mr. Chips" of Hemsworth Grammar School is to retire. A teacher at the school for 39 years, and now Deputy Head, Mr. L. N. Collette will finish at the end of the Summer Term, but will continue to live in Hemsworth. Mr. and Mrs Collette were guests of the Old Hilmians' Association at a dinner-dance in Pontefract on the eve of Mr. Collette's 65th birthday and at which they were presented with a cheque for £100. As mid-night struck the whole company sang birthday greetings to their beloved former master. The presentation was made by Miss Freda Swaine, first Head Girl, who spoke of Mr. Collette's distinguished career and of the immense debt owed to him by countless old students. She said he had always been an invaluable link between the school and the Association, and they were pleased the link was to continue because Mr. and Mrs. Collette were to remain at Hemsworth. The Headmaster (Mr. R. W. Hamilton) proposed Mr. Collette's health and said he had a record of service to one school which few

teachers in the country could equal. It was estimated that 5,000 students had passed through his hands - a truly wonderful record. Mr. Hamilton said Mr. Collette's outstanding quality was his humanity. A renowned disciplinarian, he also had high qualities of duty, humour and courtesy, and a loyalty which extended through the school to old students and which had been valued by him (Mr. Hamilton). Mrs. Collette had become part of the School, and their family of three were all Old Hilmians.

Mr. Collette, expressing thanks for the gift, said he had had a wonderful time at Hemsworth. He recalled early days at the school, when assembly was held in the library, the friendship of his predecessor as senior master - the late Mr. Philip Crossland - and the old Commercial Forms.

May 1st. 1965