

# The Waterloo Society 1940s

Newsletter 2023



## The Potter Pavilion



▲ The newly refurbished Potter Pavilion

For the past year, College has been undertaking a thorough modernisation of the Pink Pavilion. The work has transformed the interior of this iconic building, whilst importantly retaining its original external character.

The new pavilion will provide high-quality co-educational changing facilities, as well as providing the opportunity for Wellington to host representative sport both on Turf and around College more widely.

Upon its reopening in May, the Pink Pavilion was renamed 'The Potter Pavilion', in honour of the Potter

family who have given so much to generations of Wellingtonians over the last 90 years.

This legacy began with Arnold Potter, who joined the Common Room in 1932 where he served College for a record 42 years as a highly respected HM and a distinguished teacher of Mathematics. He and his wife, Fraye,

brought up a family of five sons and two daughters here, most of whom attended College in the 1960s and into the 1970s.

Chris, their second son, has had an immeasurable impact on College life and many readers will readily identify with his powerful, understated and enduring presence around campus and the positive affect he has had upon the lives of countless Wellingtonians and their families both as a teacher, an HM and for the past 10 years, as a member of the Wellington Community Office.

The ties between Arnold, Fraye and their family with the Wellington community are manifold. Together, they have served College for well over half of its history and the College is so pleased to be able to honour the family in this way.



◀ The Potter family **Top row, L-R:** Chris (C 60-65), Arnold (CR 32-72), David (C 59-63)  
**Middle row:** Fraye **Bottom row, L-R:** Tim (C 65-70), Mark (C 71-76), Suzanne, Jacqueline (Day), Hugh (C 63-68)

## Memories of James Wort

One of the more popular teachers at Wellington during the 1940s was James Wort. His enthusiasm as a teacher, Dormitory Tutor and much more was recalled by many contributors to our 'Decades' project.

Mr Wort joined Wellington in 1935, making him one of the younger members of staff, particularly during the War years. Richard Buckley (C 41-45) described him as 'young, full of energy and ideas', while Pat Stacpoole (C 44-48) commented 'he stood out from his grey colleagues.' John Flinn (C 44-49) simply called him 'outstanding among the people who taught, advised and cared for me.'

Wort was active in the College's wartime activities, being Second-in-Command in the Home Guard and one of the first on the scene when the Master was killed by a bomb in 1940. His words the following morning have passed into legend: he was teaching a Maths class and one of the boys complained that his inkwell was blocked with glass from the bomb-shattered windows. Wort quickly replied, 'On this occasion, child, you can use a pencil. And,' he added with a sardonic grin, 'one day you will tell your grandchildren about the day you couldn't use your inkwell because it was bunged up with broken glass.'

His influence was probably most felt by those in the Combermere, where he took over as Tutor in 1942. An enthusiastic rugby coach, he wanted his dormitory to excel at all sports. Pat Stacpoole, referring to Wort's characteristic lisp, wrote of 'a redoubtable, humorous and encouraging Master snuffling, "Huthle, buthle Combermere!" on the rigger touch line,' but also commented, 'It seemed to us that Combermere was the only dormitory where art as well as athletics was encouraged. This was a reflection of Mr Wort's skill in seeking out some accomplishment in each boy, on which he could build self-confidence and achievement.' For Pat and many others, this took the form of encouraging them onto the stage.

Wort had been a leading member of the Footlights during his time at Cambridge, and brought to Wellington an enthusiasm for the theatre which never left him. Under him, dormitory plays reached a high standard, whilst he also did the stage make-up for School productions. From its foundation



James Wort (CR 35-73)

in the 1930s he was involved in the 'Sing Song Society', a group which performed for the School and local institutions, contributing songs and humorous performances as well as directing sketches for others. The reviewer of a 1939 concert singled out 'the really excellent imitations of Mr. Wort. Why ever did he become a schoolmaster? He seems equally at home in the dialects of Lancashire, Oxford and Cinema American.'

Another of Mr Wort's passions was cricket and in 1945 he took over leadership of the 'Occasionals', a team for boys who enjoyed cricket but were not a high enough standard for the School teams. Under him, the Occasionals played many games against local teams. One, in 1949 was particularly special: played in Windsor Great Park, the King and Queen and Princess Elizabeth were among the spectators, and the Duke of Edinburgh played for the opposing team! Were you lucky enough to take part? If so, we'd love to hear your recollections of the day.

**The King and Queen and Princess Elizabeth were among the spectators at one of the Occasionals' cricket matches in 1949.**

◀ Occasionals v Captains Cricket, 1942



Top photo: James Wort and members of the Combermere, 1948  
Bottom photo: James Wort explaining rugby tactics

## Fagging

'Fagging' – the allocation of various menial duties to younger students by older ones – was universal at Wellington, as at most other similar schools, during the 1940s. Our recent 'Decades' project brought in many memories on the subject.

All our respondents had experienced being a fag during their time at Wellington, although only those select few who made it to the rank of Dormitory or College Prefect had the privilege of commanding a fag themselves.

During their first term, all new boys would be given about three weeks to study for the 'fag's exam', under the tutelage of an older boy who was their 'fagmaster'. The newcomers were expected to learn the layout of College, the names and nicknames of the teachers and senior boys, and various nuggets of School history and folklore. Many recollected being asked the number of stone pineapples around College (there is no definitive answer!) and the trick question 'Where does the Path of Duty lead?' – the answer being, of course, not to glory but to Grubbies! The exam itself ▶



How many pineapples?



took the form of a verbal grilling by the Dormitory Prefects. Most passed first time, but those who failed might be subjected to some form of punishment and a re-test in a week or two.

Armed with the knowledge of Wellington's places and people, the new boys were ready for their first and lowliest role, that of the 'running fag'. This consisted of running errands or taking messages for the House or Dormitory Prefects. In an age before email or mobile phones, and when senior boys were expected to do much of the administration for their Houses, sports teams and so on, the running fags provided a valuable service. To obtain their services, a senior boy would simply go into the dormitory corridor and shout 'fag!' All first-year boys were expected to come running: the last to arrive would be given the task. The Prefect might also call 'somebody!' or 'anybody!' thus differentiating the age of those who had to respond.



▲ Fags collecting swipes, 1956

After a term or two as a running fag, most boys would move on to other duties, the most well-known being the 'room fag'. For this, you would be allocated to a particular senior boy and required to do regular menial tasks for him, such as making his bed, folding his clothes, polishing his shoes and so on. In retrospect, some OWs thought that such services were quite unnecessary, but most did not find them too onerous. Very few felt that the older boys took advantage of their position to bully them, although one personal task passed into College legend – that of being sent to pre-warm the lavatory seat on a cold morning! Only one respondent, Alan Munro (T 48-53), had actually been asked to do this – he declined!

Other specialist roles included the 'brew fag', who was required to make hot drinks and snacks for the Prefects and to wash up afterwards. Depending on the attitudes of the Prefects in question, this might be a more or less enjoyable task; one respondent recalled: 'If what you made was edible, you normally got a bit!' Another food-related duty was to collect the bread, jam and so on for the daily 'swipes' and bring them to the dormitory. Yet another role was that of the 'time fag' or 'call fag', whose job was to get up early and to announce the time every five minutes in the morning, thus ensuring that no-one in the House would be late for breakfast.

In retrospect, some OWs felt that 'there was little to recommend the fagging system. It could be frightening to a new boy and contributed nothing to his general education'. Others disagreed, feeling that it served a

useful purpose. Hugo White (Hg 44-48) wrote that 'leaving prep school as cock of the roost, one was brought back to reality, finding oneself at the call (literally in this case) of one's elders'. At the time, most boys simply accepted it as the norm and made the best of it. Some even enjoyed it: Robert Waight (O 42-46) wrote that 'cleaning one's hero's shoes, washing up his tea mugs or taking his insulting messages to mates in other dormitories was educational and exciting fun'. Fags did receive a few rewards, in the form of favours or perhaps a monetary tip, plus the termly 'fag's tea' provided by the Prefects. At one of these, John Hoblyn (Hg 45-50) recalled one boy eating 26 buns for a dare!

Fagging endured at Wellington into the 1980s, but has now been consigned to history, with one exception: it is still the duty of younger members of the House to collect the daily 'swipes' from the kitchen!

▼ Fags' tea, 1944

