

How Not To Be Famous

What do we want from life? I suppose at some time in our lives we all have dreams of being famous or of doing something important on the world stage, be it as a famous artist, musician, sports person or, in today's world, someone in the pop world or maybe in the tech industry.

I had such dreams at Chailey. When it came for my time to leave and enter the main stream of life, I was summoned to Matron's office for a chat with the Head Teacher (I think it was Mr Marchant), together with Matron and, I think, a doctor. I had recently been fitted with my first prosthesis, although the word was not in general use in those days and was referred to as my artificial leg. I had previously successfully applied to stay on at St Georges for an extra year to be better acquainted with it and that time was now fast coming to an end.

Reality was now staring me in the face and decisions had to be made. I was gently asked what I wanted to do when I left, this time for good. I had been at Chailey since 1939 and now here we were in 1949-50, my mind is blurred on the exact date. I knew exactly what I wanted to do and that was to see the world. So, I replied, I wanted to be a seaman.



Marriage of Mr White Head
House Master (L) to Matron

I think my answer somewhat startled them, there were slight movements of bottoms on chairs, and I was asked if I thought it would be a suitable occupation, with my disability, for me to be running about on deck in rough seas. Not to be put off, I suggested that I could be a steward working on a cruise ship. Once again a sharp intake of breath in more or less unison, told me I had not made a wise choice, so hurriedly I added, or perhaps a lift attendant on the Queen Mary. That too went down like a lead balloon.

Eventually after going through several other suggestions for outdoor occupations, we skipped through gamekeeper and farming until they reluctantly agreed to look at the prospect of poultry farming for me, and we would have another talk later. However, when later arrived and I had time to think about things, it was mutually agreed that I wouldn't be a chicken farmer either, I just wasn't cut out for it.

End of term was fast approaching and as I would soon be saying farewell to Chailey Heritage for the last time, a decision had to be made, and everyone seemed to be pleased when somehow the words boot and shoe repairing seemed to spring spontaneously from my lips. After all I had just spent the last two or three years under the tutelage of Mr Holgate and Mr Noble in the Boot and Shoe workshop learning the craft of making handmade boots.

It was during this time that I learned how to make a waxed thread from several strands of hemp, how to draw and cut a pattern from a large side of cow hide, I learnt about inner and outer soles, I knew how to use a bradawl, and to hand stitch a pair of boots. I remember well the last pair of boots that I had hand made and which I wore when I left St Georges to catch the train at Hayward Heath. There was no feeling of elation that I was leaving Chailey, indeed I pondered the future during the train journey that carried me to a new life, one in which St Georges gradually faded into the mist of time, only to resurface again after spending many years in what now seems to have been a different world. I still don't know how I ever managed it, but I'm still not famous.

Jack Hayward (1939-1949)