

Woldgate School Alumni

Pocklington and District Local History Group - WOLDGATE SCHOOL HISTORY

We will be trying to fit the history of Woldgate into the context of the development of education nationally since 1945 and locally (the East Riding). We are hoping that the personal accounts and memories that you provide will illustrate these national and county developments on a very local scale.

Name Chris Spencer

Date Saturday, June 27, 2020

Please answer the questions below about your past time at Woldgate School

Date or year you started at Woldgate 1986

Date or year you left Woldgate 2001

My role at Woldgate

Teacher

Please enter your highlights of your time at Woldgate

- * Summer 1986 - advert in Times Educational Supplement - Woldgate School, Pocklington, wanting Head of Geography. A quick check on an atlas map confirmed the school's location and from what the school's name had obviously been derived. This was an obvious appeal to a geographer.
- * At the Rotherham school where I was employed at the time, we had a young English teacher who had come to us from Woldgate. His opinion described a very good school with friendly, supportive staff and a pretty impressive guy as headteacher. Eventually I found him to be correct on all counts!
- * I quickly got to know my department colleagues, on interview day, then the first day of the 1986 summer term. I was immediately made to feel welcome, not only by them but also the staff at large, many of whom went out of their way to greet and welcome me.
- * My department colleagues over 15 years were combinations of: John, Roy, Maggs, Merle, Neil Rob, Brian, Valerie, Fiona, Marjorie, Sally, Amanda, Marion - a wide range of characters and personalities, all good to work with.
- * I have clear memories of many pupils. To mention individuals is a bit like being asked to name favourite grandchildren! I'll stick my neck out and name, from my earliest time at Woldgate, Marc Harrison; then, a few years down the line, Ben Webster also stands out. Another feature of the school was the good many sons and daughters of staff on role. From a quick count, I believe I taught 19 individuals in that category. They covered a range of ability, though very much skewed towards the upper end; more important than that, they were all delightful young people; the burden of having parents as teachers within the school seemed to be borne lightly by them all.
- * Fieldwork was always a highlight, especially the Lower Sixth Residential week which, beyond the obvious academic purpose, gave an opportunity to get to know our most senior student members much better as individuals. Attending evening lectures, provided by branches of the Geographical Association in York, Hull and Bradford, fit into a similar category.
- * Much of the positivity I felt within my time at Woldgate was tempered by significant changes in education imposed by Government initiative. The imposition of a "National Curriculum" might have sounded like a natural thing to do. However, what was dictated was, especially in early stages, patently not achievable in the time allocated. Indeed, when attending in-service training towards coping with the new order, it was described, by the individual leading the programme, as a "belt, braces & garrotte" affair! Another initiative which led to considerable frustration was "Records of Achievement." It

quickly became very obvious that students would much prefer to learn something new, rather than tediously record what they had done previously.

* I had a leading role in organising the School Sponsored Educational Walks for 12 consecutive years. This provided an unforgettable opportunity to work with the entire school staff. The individual walks that most readily come to mind were "The Great Hot Walk," then, 4 years later, "The Great Wet Thunderstorm Walk," or was it the other way around? To say the weather played a big part in fixing those two days firmly into memory would be a big understatement, but we did get everyone back pretty much unscathed!

* In my first 6 years at Woldgate, I enjoyed the well established 5-a-side football in the sports hall, after school on Fridays. A fellow participant was Gordon Williamson from the Art Department. Gordon and I possessed similar skill sets and it was usual for us to play on opposing sides. In my wildest fantasies I would think that we cancelled each other out, much like Bobby Charlton and Franz Beckenbauer in the 1966 World Cup final! In 1992, my footballing came to an end when I tore my left knee cruciate ligament. It was a tackle from Ian bites-yer-legs Robson that resulted in the damage. I hasten to add that Ian's tackle was perfectly legitimate and that the damage was caused by my own clumsiness.

* From 1989, I organised annual school clay shoots. The first 3 years the shoots were national affairs, for state schools only, laid on by BASC (British Association for Shooting & Conservation). The Woldgate teams were remarkably successful in these events when, as well as very good strength in depth, we had the skills of our star performer, Neil Holloway, to depend on. When those national events were withdrawn, after 1991, our local shooting ground, North Wolds Gun Club, continue to host two shoots each year for Woldgate, along with smaller numbers from other local schools. When North Wolds had to disband following the loss of their ground, in 2017, Derwent Valley Gun Club kindly offered to host future events, which continue to this day.

* The friendly, supportive people I worked with at Woldgate came up trumps when, in 1999, I fell ill with what became a chronic and very limiting condition, eventually leading me to ill-health retirement. A lot of trouble was taken, over the course of four terms, to attempt to provide me with a timetable I could cope with. This was much appreciated, but eventually all to no avail. I was very sad to leave Woldgate under that cloud. I couldn't fault anyone for any short-comings in the support and practical help I received. On the contrary, I must pay tribute to one individual who, so typical of the man, was the individual who, outside of family, went the extra mile and further still. My good friend John Brown (who had retired himself 2-4 years earlier). For 11 years he had been my headteacher and I his head of department. Over that time, what was a strong professional bond had evolved into a firm friendship which, I am delighted to say, continues to this day.