

Letters from my Housemaster:

1973 to 2009

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Letters from my Housemaster

Introduction

Richard Rhodes James, affectionately known as 'R-J', was my Housemaster during my time in Melvill House, Haileybury, from January 1969 to July 1973. After I left school, he wrote letters to me while I was in Kenya as a 'Youth Service Abroad' teacher with Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1973 to 1974, and when I started at Cambridge in 1974 to 1975. I kept those letters, and also kept letters he wrote later in life, from 2006 to 2009. He wrote to me at other times between, but I have not been able to find those letters.

The letters that I kept and could find are presented in this document, along with some diary notes (from our first meeting in 1968 and at other times), and excerpts from his accounts of Iwerne Minster and the Haileybury Revival of the 1960s and 1970s.

Preface – 1968 and 1969

Excerpt from Memoirs (September 1968)

In September 1968, perhaps just before term began, my parents took me to Haileybury to meet Mr and Mrs Rhodes James, my future Housemaster and his young wife (Richard and Rachel were married at the end of 1967). Given the influential part Richard was to play in my life, this was an auspicious meeting (over afternoon tea, I think it must have been). I sensed that Richard was a kind and caring person, and Rachel was very nice – bright and cheerful. I clearly remember her announcing “baby in six weeks”, and given that Richard’s later autobiography records Clare’s birth as taking place in October 1968, the early September date of the meeting can be established. I don’t remember much else about this afternoon tea, though I suspect we must have discussed the forthcoming Scholarship examinations, and that I was looking forward to starting in Melvill in January 1969...

Excerpt from letter from Nick from HMS Maxton

Letter written from HMS Maxton, BFPO ships (in Singapore), dated 18 September 1968:

How has your last term at Packwood started off? I remember mine was about the most miserable I ever spent there, since all my friends had left the term before. Hope the same doesn’t apply to you. V tells me you looked up R-J the other day. I suppose he won’t come into your life really till next term; he can’t be any worse for being married, and with me he was certainly the best bloke to have as housemaster even though he was a little stupid at times.

Excerpt from Memoirs (May 1969)

It was my second term at Haileybury, and Adrian S had invited me to attend R-J’s ‘Bible Reading Society’ (‘R-J’s’, as it was affectionately called), which took place in Richard and Rachel Rhodes James’ flat after morning chapel each Sunday. On this particular occasion (I did not record the exact date) the guest speaker was the Reverend David Fletcher (leader of Iwerne Minster camps). He gave me the impression of being friendly and warm-hearted. During the traditional coffee before the meeting he shook my hand and introduced himself – and in the course of conversation asked me where I lived. When I replied, “Highgate”, his face lit up, and he told me that he lived not far from there and often walked his dog around the Highgate ponds. I felt reassured, ready to listen to what he had to say...

I don’t remember the details of his talk – generally it seemed to be an excellent description and explanation of what it meant to be a Christian. Having heard many subsequent talks by David Fletcher on the subject, I imagine that he explained the Cross by reference to Isaiah 53 v 6, using the famous book illustration (“Where has my sin gone? On Jesus. How much of my sin has gone on Jesus? All of it...”) I am also sure that he introduced me to Revelation 3 v 20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...” He must have gently challenged us at that point, suggesting that if any of us had not invited the Lord Jesus into our lives as Saviour and Lord, we could do so in the quietness of the dormitory that night. I know for a fact that on that very night, in Melvill dormitory, I prayed, asking Jesus to come into my life. I realize now that from that moment I belonged to Him, a child of God (John 1 v 12).

Iwerne Camps and Haileybury Revival – 1972 and 1973

Excerpts from ‘The Pioneer’ by Richard Rhodes James

(from Eddison, J (Ed) (1983), Bash: A study in spiritual power, Marshalls, UK):

In 1940 it was clear that Eastbourne was no place for a Camp. It lay in the path of the German bombers and possible German invaders. So Bash [*the Reverend EH Nash, affectionately known as ‘Bash’*] with others toured the south to seek a new site. They found it in the little Dorset village of Iwerne Minster, in the lovely rolling country between Blandford [Forum] and Shaftesbury. The buildings that the camps were to occupy from that day on were those of Clayesmore [School], originally the home of a wealthy shipowner. Here we came (the writer recalls vividly that first arrival when he had just been made an officer) and here we stayed, planting the name ‘Iwerne’ firmly in the Christian’s vocabulary.

We must examine Bash’s vision a little more closely. He aimed to concentrate his mission on a highly select clientele, the privileged and largely speaking the rich, who made up perhaps five per cent of our school population; not just the public schools but the top thirty or so. This was his field. He knew no other. He staked everything on this one work. Why this intense concentration? The first answer is a simple one. These schools contained a high proportion of the future leaders of the country. Therefore to reach them with the gospel opened the possibility of reaching our future leaders, men with an immense influence over their contemporaries. A phrase often used was that our converts could be ‘multiplication tables’. Such reasoning is open to, and has been exposed to, much criticism from two quarters, from Christians and from egalitarians. The Christian response has often been: the gospel knows no class distinctions, every man is as valuable to God as any other. Indeed, to quote scripture, ‘God is no respecter of persons’. To which Bash would reply with that quiet assurance that could at once mollify and frustrate, ‘Yes. Of course.’ He left it to others to articulate a detailed defence of the work to which his spiritual instincts and his passion for souls was calling him. If he did not reach the leaders, who would?

The fact is that the public schools were a largely unevangelised field. Others were catered for by the Boys Brigade, the Crusaders, the Pathfinders and similar organisations. No one was reaching the people who would most influence the way this country was going. Why should the top people be passed by? ... There was another compelling reason for this work, and that lay in the nature of boarding education. The boarding school boy falls between two religious stools. He sees little of his home parish and so misses the kind of pastoral care that is available to the boy at a day school. He receives Christian teaching at school – indeed the English public schools were founded on a strong religious basis – but in an environment in which conformity is the norm and religious enthusiasm not always welcome. School religion is institutional, and although heroic efforts are made to inject meaning into both Chapel and RE, circumstances are against the emergence of a strong, informed and committed Christian faith. There was a need for a work to fill the gap. And so Bash committed his life to this work.

Having seen the vision, he also saw with devastating clarity the means by which it could be realized. It involved the use of manpower more lavish than had ever before been seen in Christian work, and an attention to detail that startled those who entered the work. It also involved a total devotion to the cause. From the start there was a very high ratio of officers to campers. With other Christian work sometimes seriously short of manpower, this has not always been easy to understand. It was due to Bash’s insistence on the highest quality of pastoral work. He learnt early the lesson that the Christian world as a whole took some time to digest, that the difficult part of Christian work is not leading people to Christ but nurturing them in a faith that lasts. Counting the saved is in one sense a less significant exercise than counting the sanctified. If Bash’s aim was to win

Britain's leaders for Christ and his strategy was to work in the top public schools, the tactics were to lavish huge resources in the battle. This manpower Bash used to see that no boy was ever overlooked, no camp activity ever undermanned. He sought perfection and he saw its price. It was not only quantity he sought. His officers he chose with great care. They had to meet his standards on at least three levels: totally committed Christians, totally devoted to the work of camp, able to mix and deal easily with boys between thirteen and eighteen. At camp they should be willing to take part in any activity, oversee any department, look after those in their dormitory with ceaseless care, seeing that they were happy and trying with tact and encouragement to nurture their faith. After camp they were to keep in touch by letter, recalling for the boys their fun and Christian fellowship together, at a time when perhaps discouragement was wearing them down. It was a standard of 'man management' that set new patterns for Christian work.

All this gave future Christian leaders a grounding that they have acknowledged; and the present Bishops of Aston, Liverpool, Norwich, Southwell and Thetford all passed through the Camps, and would admit their indebtedness to them and to Bash. It is an impressive list, and to it could be added well over two hundred others who are now in the ordained ministry. Bash had put his unmistakable print on the Church of England. The new officer entering the officers' room for the first time saw a meticulous attention to detail. This was particularly true of the talks. The titles and the sequence of the talks were the result of endless thought and discussion. Those chosen to speak were exactly briefed and they were chosen because they came up to the required standard. Eternal truths demanded exceptional care. Everything in Camp must be right. Each day the officers met, once for prayer and once for a detailed review of how things were going, how they could be better done, how the day in question could be arranged. No issue was too small to be raised. It was God's work, and it must therefore be done properly. And on all these little things the minds of a number of able young men were concentrated. Was this extravagance? Bash did not think so. And to make sure that the paperwork was equally faultless he engaged the loyalty over a number of years of a secretary of spotless efficiency, Philip Thompson.

The most important and perhaps the most delicate part of the work was the relationship with the schools. It is from there that the Camps draw their boys, it is there that the boys return and where they seek to practise their newly won faith. In the jargon of the work, it covers both recruiting and follow-up. The delicacy of the relationship is obvious, but it took some time to learn. For an outside organization to enter a boarding school, seek to gather boys for holiday camps and then, when they return, to visit them and sustain them spiritually requires much mutual understanding. In the early days the zeal of Bash and his helpers sometimes outran their discretion, and misunderstandings arose, some of them quite serious, though in most cases they were resolved by friendly confrontations. You could not talk for long with Bash without being disarmed. Housemasters naturally wanted to know the credentials of the organization so that they could inform and reassure parents; and they would not be happy to find that their charges had been taken out by strangers without leave. School chaplains did not want to feel that their own work was being by implication criticized. Bash quickly learned that in this Christian work, while the gospel is free, the way in which it is spread abroad can have at times quite severe constraints. Bash also learned that if he was to win the confidence of the schools among which he worked, the surest way was to have as his officers those who taught at these schools. It was a plan that has had a quite remarkable success. Somewhere around 150 of those who have helped run the Camps have taught or are still teaching at public schools. A number of these have become Housemasters, and six have become Headmasters. This has given the Camps a secure base from which to operate, and it has reassured the schools themselves about an organization that has puzzled many and antagonized a few. At times when there were dark words about emotional pressures, it was reassuring to know that the Camps were staffed at least in part by remarkably sane men, most with a well-developed sense of humour. It has also given the schools a body of men who are not only committed to a strong Christian faith at a time of increasing

spiritual uncertainty, but who have also infused the schools with a sense of vocation and pastoral concern that has been more and more recognized and appreciated.

Bash's vision, and the logic of his work, took him in other directions. When these boys left school, what would happen to them? It was assumed, rightly in many cases, that they would go to university, probably Oxford or Cambridge. Their faith must be nurtured, too. From 1944 Bash started inviting undergraduates to Camp to continue the teaching they had received at past Camps, or in some cases inviting them there for the first time through contacts made at Oxford and Cambridge. In 1950 there came an important development, the creation of the 'senior camper'. They were largely undergraduates. They came to help, to do the chores that a Camp demands, to serve tables, but also to receive teaching geared to their age and experience. An increasing number of people found their faith at university, and many of them came to Iwerne. In 1957 there were no fewer than 145, in 1977 139 and since then about 80 a year. Many of them became officers, some of them went on to other Christian work, all received teaching at a time when they most needed it. Back at the university they continued to receive spiritual guidance from camp officers and encouragement from each other. On arriving at the university they often found that the first to greet them were those whom they had known at Iwerne. Bash's vision of a complete Christian work was becoming a reality.

In the war years, when many enterprises had to cease, the Camps at Iwerne thrived as they had never done before. This was largely due to the fact that they undertook farming and forestry which the country at war demanded, and which parents were only too willing for their sons to participate in. Numbers grew. In the Easter and summer camps of 1941 there were 226, in 1942 261, in 1943 331. Numbers remained round the 200 mark, rising in 1948 to 322. The work widened further. Winter camps were started, largely to consolidate the evangelistic work of the summer and Easter camps and to build up young Christians. From 1941 these took place at Iwerne, but Iwerne is hardly cosy in January, and in 1960 it shifted to Eastbourne. In 1962 it split into two separate house-parties, one for sixth formers and one for undergraduates. There were few 'activities'. The young men went there to be instructed in the faith. To the charge that the Camps exposed adolescents to emotional pressures, Bash could reply that he was submitting them to more solid teaching than any other comparable Christian work. Growing numbers caused the Easter Camp to be split into two in 1949, when the total at Easter was 105, and in 1955 the Summer Camps were increased from two to three, though sadly that year the third camp had to be cancelled because of an outbreak of glandular fever. The numbers at Easter have dropped quite sharply in recent years for a number of reasons. Summer numbers reached a peak in 1976 and 1977 of 283 and 285, declining since to about 185...

This was the remarkable family that Bash fathered. Over seven thousand boys have passed through Iwerne alone and many hundreds in other camps. Bash officially retired in 1965 and handed over to David Fletcher, who has continued to carry out and develop the methods that he pioneered. Bash himself continued to come to Iwerne, to speak and to counsel and to reflect with what must have been profound gratitude how God had used him down the years. His name appeared for the last time in the address lists in summer 1979. Others have taken up the work that Bash started those many years ago. They have made changes to suit the passing years, the changing tastes and interests of the public schoolboy, refusing to get stuck in a cultural posture or a frozen idea. But they have also refused to relinquish the principles that Bash pioneered: concentration on a carefully chosen objective, meticulous attention at every stage and in every detail of the operation, the ceaseless care of those in their charge and total faithfulness to the gospel. Some have questioned these methods; none have been able to deny their fruit.

Excerpt from Memoirs (December 1972)

Back in December 1972, as I lay in bed in the San, recovering from flu, my Housemaster Mr Rhodes James came to visit me, and gave me the welcome news that I had gained an Exhibition to Clare College, Cambridge! What relief and joy, as suddenly the next five or six years fell into place. I seem to remember that Virginia picked me up and drove me up to Legbourne, detouring (for some reason) through Cambridge.

Haileybury Revival Notes by Rhodes James

Excerpts from *The Road from Mandalay* (2007)

... we were a Christian school. This framework instructed the boys in the faith and in the worship patterns of the Church of England, but it was not signally designed to instill zeal for this faith or personal commitment; that in the opinion of some was to bring excessive pressure on one's pupils. But once a year we invaded their hearts. This was the Lent Mission in which a speaker was invited to come for several days to expound the Christian faith and invite response from the boys. Each evening they were offered the chance to come and listen, and if they wished to have an interview with the Missioner. The impact of these talks varied with the quality of the speaker, but they always aroused interest. In 1966 remarkable things happened. The speaker was the Reverend David MacInnes, a very gifted proclaimer of the Gospel. And he set the school alight. Eh? I repeat: he set the school alight, unearthing a huge hunger for the truth. My house prefects, in whom I had not detected any great religious zeal, came to me and asked if I could suggest a way in which they could hold Bible studies. I contained my surprise and made suggestions. Many sought David's counsel and I believe found faith. The Christian Union which met under my auspices found itself crowded; and many were eager to go further in their faith by attending the Christian house-party that I had helped to run for many years. Something had happened to the school which delighted some but perplexed others: what was going on? Was this zeal healthy? There was that word that sat so uneasily in the minds of the mainstream of the Church of England – emotion. The fact that I appeared to be sane helped matters and the boys affected seemed to have been strengthened.

The revival – for that is what I was bold enough to describe it – continued unabated. In 1974 the Lent missioner was the Reverend David Watson, that most remarkable and charismatic figure of modern times who held spellbound all who listened to him – he had filled the Albert Hall – and he did it without histrionics, just a compelling and totally focused conviction. The boys flocked to hear him. He had interviews with 135, and he believed that 61 found faith. I have the names in front of me as I write. The Sunday meetings, gatherings for Bible study that I had been presiding over for some years, became so crowded that they filled two large rooms in the flat which I now shared with my wife and we had to install a relay. I watched amazed as the movement of the Spirit continued, as it did for many years.

But was this a passing emotional phase, the zeal of youth? On the 11th of May 1996 about seventy Old Boys met at Haileybury for a Christian reunion, a day of remembrance and thanks. We met in the school Chapel and sang and remembered those days of epiphany and heard testimonies from those who told of their coming to faith and we lunched and prayed and talked to each other and wondered if any school had witnessed anything like this. Many others wrote and said they were sorry they could not come. Their faith had stood the test of time in many places and in many callings. And one wrote in terms which warmed my wife and myself in moments of doubt. "The Rhodes James", whose ministry seems to have had such a profound significance over the years for so many of us...." 'Over the years.' It was for real...

Letters to Kenya – 1973 and 1974

Excerpt from Kenya Diary (September 1973)

Friday 7th September 1973: Walked up to Haileybury, cross country from Hoddesdon, and saw Mr and Mrs R-J [*Rhodes James – I will always remember R-J, dressed in a tropical safari suit, in one of the classrooms in sweltering heat; I inquired, jokingly, “Is this Africa?”*].

Letter from Rhodes James, 5 November 1973

Letter from Richard Rhodes James written from Haileybury, dated 5 November 1973, postmarked Iriwa 10 November 1973, but not received until 13 November 1973.

[In this letter R-J refers to a letter he had received from me “so full and exciting.” Apparently this letter was circulated among Christians at Haileybury, as in 2011, nearly 40 years later, Nick W sent an e-mail to me in which he wrote: “I remember R-J telling me he had received a letter from Kenya from you and he was going to put it in cold water...”]

Dear Adrian, It was marvellous to receive your letter, so full and exciting. This journey across the world must have opened your eyes very wide and enlarged your imagination. You must indeed have had a trying time initially and it is wonderful how things have worked out. You must find it refreshing to have the sharp distinction between Christian and non-Christian. This is true of avowedly pagan countries and a good deal more satisfying than the grey pretences of faith in England. The problem in countries like Kenya is to add knowledge to zeal.

Here we have had a good term. For the first few weeks the Sunday meeting was good but not exciting – not quite the warmth we had before. Then on 21 October just before the half term week Stephen R and Tim M came down and things suddenly lit up – with a very big crowd. We hope and pray that the fire will not die out. Still a shortage of older and more experienced Christians. But Tim C and Brand R are stalwarts. I am beginning to wonder about David C – he has hardly turned up this term. Paul C still seems far away, and I hope to have a session with him. The group in Trevelyan is going very well and several went to the meeting. In Melvill Paul O is shepherding the flock very well and a number of the group have been turning up. But Nick G, our Head of House, has not come at all, which is sad. Edmonstone still untouched.

We have just finished our half term week – a week plus one day added for the Royal Wedding. We went up to Cheshire for a few days to my wife's home, a very pleasant change from Haileybury, and we had time to do much with the family. The children are thriving. Clare started school this term and is loving it and showing immense keenness to learn. I marvel when I see three children around me. I hope you continue to prosper. Fellowship is of great value and I am glad you have missionaries so close at hand.

Learn to laugh at the absurdity of the world, as you take it to be [obscured]. And grow quietly in grace. Knowing that we are in the right hands is a wonderful 'de-tenser'. Faith is the ability to relax.

My wife sends her regards. She read your letter with much interest. I am passing round the news. With every good wish and many prayers.

Yours sincerely, RichardRhodes James.

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 10 June 1974

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, written from Haileybury, dated 10 June 1974, and received on Tuesday 18 June 1974:

Dear Adrian, Thank you so much for your letter. It gave us both much joy, and I hope you will forgive a not very prompt reply. I am using the half term break to write this

letter. Your life seems so full of worthwhile things and much joy in the Spirit. It is exciting to hear. We pray that you may continue to be encouraged and that you may daily add knowledge to your faith, searching the scriptures for the truth about God.

Here, as you say, exciting things have been going on. David Watson's mission last term had a great impact. About 80% of the school turned up most nights, and he and Andrew Cornes who came with him were scrambling [?] around the clock. When David left he handed me a list of names of those who had 'committed themselves'. This was a staggering total and presented us with big questions. How genuine was their commitment? How were they to be nurtured in the faith? How many would continue? Mr Steward [the Chaplain] arranged to have Bible study groups under masters. I think that some of these are functioning. There are over nine house groups, which is most encouraging, and the 'inner circle'... are keenly alive to the task ahead. They are grafting people in as much as they can [?]. The Sunday meeting has been going very well. Numbers between 30 to 50, and a good spirit. Generally very encouraging.

Prayer needs (i) To cover everyone who professed – a huge task; (ii) Iwerne applications, coming in slowly, though many prospectuses have gone out; (iii) the senior boys – the top of the school has not been much affected; (iv) strength for Rachel and myself to run the meeting as well as everything else; (v) openings in the comparatively untouched houses – Kipling, Lawrence, Edmonstone. The houses most affected by the mission were B Frere, Colvin, Hailey, Thomason. Allenby doing very well. Melvill under Paul quite encouraging – 15 have been to the meeting and there are two weekly groups. Altogether a situation for which we have cause for great praise and thanks. We must continue in prayer 'that none of them be lost'.

We very much look forward to seeing you when you return and I hope you may be able to talk to the boys of your experience. Continue to enjoy all that life has to offer and keep your laughing mechanism in good tune! It is God's great safety valve. The richest blessings to you from us all.

Yours sincerely, Richard Rhodes James.

Letters to Cambridge – 1974 and 1975

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 2 October 1974

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, dated 2nd October 1974, from Melvill, Haileybury College, Hertford:

Dear Adrian, Many thanks for your long and interesting letter. You poor fellow! We were distressed to hear of your illness, which sounds no light matter. To be laid up at such a time is so frustrating and how much patience you will need. God's ways are clearly not our ways. We will certainly pray much for your speedy recovery.

It was fascinating to hear of your adventures in Africa. Your mind and your spirit must have been greatly enlarged by your experiences, and you will have much to tell us and teach us. The speakers for the rest of the term's Sunday meetings are: 10 November John H; 17 November Tim M; 24 November Stephen R; December 1 OH's (I am hoping to ask someone from Cambridge! Can you come then?); December 8: Andrew B (Mr Nash and Mr Fletcher came earlier).

[December 1st was the day I made it back to Haileybury to give a talk to the 'R-J's' group – I remember the talk well (it included the story of the moonlit walk down from Wundanyi after my weekend in Mombasa), but I don't remember clearly who drove me from Cambridge – it could have been Hugh P.]

We have been having great times here. In fact this term our meetings have been unprecedented, both in size (we were over 60 two weeks ago) and in spirit. It is amazing how the Spirit continues to flow through Haileybury. The group of senior Christians here now is a more powerful body than I have ever seen before. Great openness and hunger for the faith, record numbers for the voluntary services. It is marvellous. It is difficult, amid all this, to concentrate on the matter in hand, which is teaching and looking after Melvill! The House seems in reasonably good shape, and has a good Christian nucleus, though perhaps not at its peak.

My wife sends her regards. The children are doing splendidly in every way and are a great joy to us. We have been greatly blessed. We pray for you and may you have many blessings in your confinement.

Your sincerely, Richard Rhodes James.

Excerpt from Cambridge Memoirs

I made two trips back to Haileybury, to see old friends (like Richard T-D, Jeremy T and Nick W, and of course Mr and Mrs Rhodes James), and on one of the occasions I spoke at 'R-J's' (Bible Reading Society), sharing some of my recent experiences of Kenya. I remember the boys were particularly impressed with the story about my bus journey back from Mombasa into the Taita Hills towards the end of my year, when I learned to praise God in all circumstances, and the thunderstorm that threatened became a beautiful clear moonlit night as soon as I got off the bus at Wundanyi.

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 19 January 1975

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, dated 19th January 1975, from Melvill, Haileybury College, Hertford SG13 7NU:

Dear Adrian, Many thanks for your letter. I am delighted that you will be able to come on 16 March. I enclose the talks scheme. You will see your slot in it. A challenging subject: (i) What the Bible says about the Second Coming and a warning against fanciful interpretations and predictions; (ii) How the fact of the Second Coming should affect our Christian life. I am reading a splendid book on the subject "The Jesus Hope" by Stephen Travis (Word Books), which you might find helpful. The first meeting here today – over 70, a very good atmosphere. Much talk afterwards.

Our immediate needs are (i) Applications for Iwerne – many keen to come; (ii) How to cover the girls – about 10 of them altogether; (iii) How to get a balance in teaching about the Holy Spirit; (iv) The Lent Mission, March 2 to 6, Canon A C Warren, Missions for the Coventry Diocese. I believe he is trying to get the Fisherfolk over.

I'm glad you are picking up the ground you lost. I have not seen your squash racket [?], but I will try again. We are hoping for big things this term, and the strength to sustain them. Blessings to all at Cambridge.

Yours sincerely Richard Rhodes James.

Note from Richard Rhodes James, 3 February 1975

Note from Richard Rhodes James, possibly dated 3rd February 1975, to the Haileybury Prayer and Praise Meeting (HPPM) group at Cambridge:

Haileybury: Edward L spoke to 60 to 70. He found it an especially warm audience. Many from Hailey, mostly young. There remains a gap in the middle. He had a very useful time with two groups over tea. Nick W remains a tower of strength. This term a house debating competition clashes with the meeting each week. Please pray that this may not affect too many people. Next week there is no speaker, but we hope to arrange something attractive; perhaps a tape ordered from St Helen's which is long overdue. Please pray for Iwerne prospectuses being given out before half term (13 Feb).

1996

Haileybury Christian Union

Sponsors: Richard and Rachel Rhodes-James, Nick Cuthbert, Rev Moray Thomas, Nick West, Richard Tyrwhitt-Drake, James and Charlotte Featherby

HAILEYBURY CHRISTIAN REUNION SATURDAY 11th MAY 1996

Dear *Adam*

I do hope you can come to the Haileybury Christian Reunion on Saturday 11th May. The reunion was first announced in an article in the Haileybury Society Annual Report, and you might find it interesting to read that article as reproduced below before reading the rest of this letter.

Initial responses to the article have been very encouraging:

'I was delighted to see your column'... 'it would be great to meet up with others and see who has gone on as Christians since those wonderful days'... 'I remember well what you refer to as "the joys of revival" ... I feel we were blessed for some particular purpose'... 'it was not until 1970 that I became a Christian - on my Wedding Day in fact!' ... 'thank you for such a forthright article'... 'I became a Christian in Australia in 1990'... 'I should love to play a part in praying for 11th May'.

The day will start with a service of thanksgiving in Chapel at 11.30 am. This will be followed by lunch, more informal fellowship and finally tea together before finishing around 6.00 pm. As indicated on the enclosed application form, the sponsors would appreciate your advice on how the afternoon's activities should or should not be organised.

All Christians who were at Haileybury, are married to an OH, or helped in any Christian activity connected with the school are extremely welcome to come to what promises to be a great day of thanksgiving, fellowship and prayer.

Do please pass this invitation on to those who you believe may be interested by photocopying the enclosed duplicate letter and application form. **Please include the same blank duplicate letter and application form with letters you send**, so that the chain letter effect continues until the most remote OH missionaries become appraised of this event - possibly many times over!

The sponsors would be most encouraged to hear back from you, even if you are unable to attend on 11th May.

Yours sincerely

Richard T-D

The geography may be difficult - but I thought you might like to know we were doing this.

Sorry not to have replied to a very kind letter ages back. Thank you for your help to me all these years ago. Paul Dunningbury also has

Haileybury Christian Reunion

Remember - thank - reflect - pray
11 May 1996

Last December, at a national Christian conference, I was delighted to discover that Nick Cuthbert (L 61), someone I had respected as a church leader for a number of years, had first committed his life to the Lord Jesus Christ, like so many others, at a Lent Mission at Haileybury.

Nick felt as I did, that our meeting was not a coincidence, and suggested that with the help of my father - for which I am extremely grateful - a reunion should be arranged at Haileybury for all those who would like to thank God for faith gained and friendships formed through the many Christian activities connected with the School over the years, as well as those who have become Christians since leaving Haileybury.

I, personally, am extraordinarily grateful for the encouragement of Richard and Rachel Rhodes-James (Staff 47-81) in my Christian life at Haileybury and am delighted that they have agreed to 'sponsor' and attend this event, as have the Revd Moray Thomas (Ha 67), Nick West (BF 70) - with whom I well remember sharing the joys of revival from 1973 - and James (M 72) and Charlotte Featherby (Th 74).

As well as a service of thanksgiving in Chapel, we plan to have a meal together and to give plenty of opportunity for renewed friendship, discussion and prayer. Our prayer is that the whole day will be a cause of great thankfulness for each person and an encouragement to press on in all that God has for us.

Please write to me at 21 Elaine Grove, London NWS 4QG or call me on 0171 267 4824 for more details and with any suggestions if you are interested in taking part - and please do encourage other Society members, or heads and former heads with a strong Christian commitment, to get involved. I very much look forward to hearing from you and to seeing you at the reunion.

Richard Tyrwhitt-Drake (BF 71)

with a very amazing letter in response. Could be you in any way.

Haileybury Christian Reunion.

Remember - thank - reflect - pray

11 May 1996

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Richard Tyrwhitt-Drake (BF 71)

2006

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 8 March 2006

15 Almoners' Avenue
 Cambridge
 CB1 8NZ
 (01223) 513634
 rhodes-james@ntworld.com

8 March 06

Dear Adrian,

It was very good to hear again from you and to have news of all yours.

This is quite a late reply.

For us this has been a year of travels and grandchildren.

We went to Tunisia for a week to visit some of our mission partners. A remarkable country showing the imprints of many civilisations.

And in November we went to Burma. This was a special visit arranged by the British Legion for those who had served there and also a visit to an Anglican church to rededicate some restored windows. The windows were in honour of my grandfather and the church was where my parents were married and my elder brother was baptised! Extraordinary. It was in every respect a remarkable journey, and for Rachel her first look at this bit of my past.

Grandchildren. Clare was married last December and now has a little boy. And in January Lizzie had a girl. You may know that in the previous November she had a tragedy losing a baby at seven months, strangled by the cord. So we give thanks. And in June Jonathan is expecting his third.

I am just completing my memoirs and recall when a bit of plaster in our flat collapsed and you had to retail the news to me by the rugby field. I still remember those days with wonder.

Cambridge, despite not being Oxford, continues to have much to offer. The church is a very lively community; very young and rather too loud and I am allowed to preach.

David and Janie Beales continue their remarkable work in Colchester and we try to keep in touch.

I do hope all goes well with you in a country whose prosperity and self-confidence seems to grow. Is that the whole story?

*Ever yours
 R. James*

Richard James

2007**Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 8 January 2007**

Letter written from 15 Almoners Avenue, Cambridge (received 16 January 2007):

Dear Adrian, Many thanks for your card and all the news. It is good to keep in touch. Your children are clearly achieving much. The people you mention. It is remarkable what David B is doing. Kipper C sent his splendidly illustrated Christmas card. We are told that he is doing very well in Liverpool parish and has been made a canon. His brother Peter is working with typical commitments in the Yemen. He has overcome big health problems. Andrew G we have lost touch with. No contact with Richard C or Adrian S, who I believe is doing well. What memories these all bring back, and what the Lord did.

Our own year has been of fewer travels and more children. After our exciting journeys last year to Burma and Tunisia, we have remained at home. Three grandchildren have arrived. Lizzie had a daughter in January, as I told you after their tragedy... Jonathan had a third girl in June and Clare a second boy in December – we spent Christmas with her just after the birth. Clare and Jonathan continue at their engineering. Lizzie having come out of the army is considering her next step. Motherhood and working are posing challenges. For us all this is a delight and a cause for much thanks. We are praying that our children may find their way back to faith.

Our Church is as lively as ever, and very young. I preach about once a month and I hope I will continue to have the strength to do so for the foreseeable future. In the Church of England evangelicals are increasingly in command. More and more people are seeing that in a world in which Satan is so hard at work, comfortable worshipping is not the answer. Alpha is now a well-known and discussed word. While Christians abroad are suffering as never before, what are we doing here?

My memoirs. I have at last found a publisher willing to read my script – the one that brought out Chindit, and I am hoping that something may happen. Remembering has been quite an experience.

Our love to you all. Richard

2008

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 21 January 2008

15 Almoners' Avenue
Cambridge
CB1 8NZ
(01223) 513634
rhodes-james@ntlworld.com

21 Jan 08

Dear Adrian,

Thank you so much for your card and all the news . It is very good to keep in touch.

Your children seem now fully launched. This doctoring is quite a marathon. I was interested in the change of management at the top in Australia. I understood that the new man was a strong Christian.

Here our family continues to increase. On 13 January Lizzie had her second, a boy. I may have told you that four years ago there was a tragedy and she lost a baby boy at seven months, so this is a great joy – she also has a girl. She has left the Army and has been working in a consultancy. This is our seventh grandchild. Jonathan has three girls. He is still working with Arup on various constructions. Clare married quite late and has two boys. She is still with Mott Macdonald and is concerned with cost-benefit studies in power. Clare and Lizzie have to do today's juggling act as working mothers. Sadly none of them seem to have kept up their faith. We just have to pray.

Rachel has not been too well. A chest infection has dogged her for many months, but it has not prevented her from doing many things for many people.

Our church occupies much of our time. A very young congregation and we hope we can add a little weight – and perhaps wisdom. I continue to preach about once a month.

My memoirs have been published. It is called *The Road from Mandalay*. You can get it from Amazon or from the publisher. If ordered from the UK the website is: Authorhouse.co.uk or it from the USA: Authorhouse.com (It is an American firm with a branch in the UK).

Gathering up the past has been quite an experience. I have included my Christian journey and described the revival at Haileybury I hope you can get a copy without too much trouble. If you are stuck I can send a copy out. Those who have read it have given very good reports, so... Incidentally, there is one place in which you appear anonymously. I wonder if you can spot it.

The world is as mad as ever, and the truth has never been more desperately needed. Perhaps this is a wake up call. Meanwhile – there is much work to do.

Every good wish to you both, and may the year have much to offer.

Richard

2009

Letter from Richard Rhodes James, 15 February 2009

15 Almoners Avenue
 Cambridge
 CB1 8NZ
 (01223) 513634
 rhodes-james@ntlworld.com

15 Feb 09

Dear Adrian,

It was good once again to hear from you. I'm glad you enjoyed my book. Putting it together was a fascinating business, just regretting that I could not remember more. And there were quite a lot of editing mistakes. Looking back at Haileybury and the amazing movement of the Spirit was particularly memorable. I wonder what non Christians make of it.

In recent days our thoughts have been with you and the terrible fires. The country must have been devastated. I believe you have had one of your hottest ever summers. And water at a premium.

Here life goes on much as before-on the surface. But underneath is a great mess. The world's money tumbling and many ruined by greed or criminal carelessness. I believe some echoes have reached you, though in gentler form. Man is as fallible as we have always thought.

Our family is our continuing care and joy. Located in Birmingham, Maidenhead and Brighton they require quite a lot of travel. With seven grandchildren it is quite a busy life. For me it's a bit of a miracle after my "mature" marriage.

At the end of March we are visiting Cornwall and calling in on a Melvill OH from 1954. So there will be a lot of remembering to do.

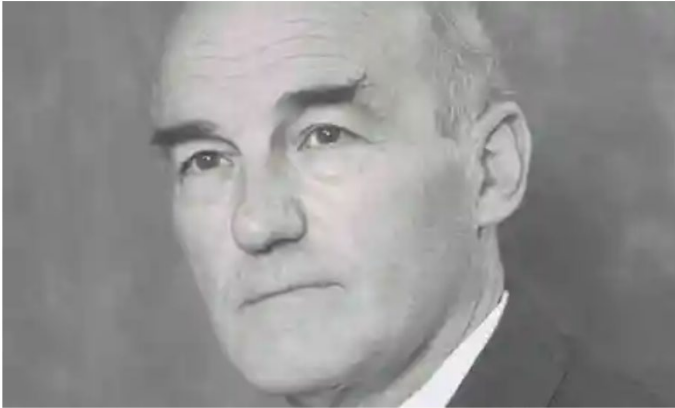
The church continues to take quite a lot of us. I preach about once a month to a small early morning congregation. Re-examining the truth and finding new things is a constant encouragement.

We hope all goes well with you in a world that is as lost as it has been for some time.

with my love
 to you all
 Rich

Obituaries

Richard Rhodes James obituary



Richard Rhodes James joined the 3rd Gurkha Rifles in 1942 and was mentioned in dispatches. He related his experiences in his book *Chindit*, 1980

My uncle, Richard Rhodes James, who has died aged 91, was a teacher who influenced generations of pupils at the Hertfordshire school Haileybury, many of whom remembered him with deep affection. He epitomised the best of a certain kind of brave, retiring and modest – but tolerant and wide-thinking – Englishman.

He was born in Mandalay, Burma, second son of Colonel William and Violet Rhodes James. His family were distantly related to MR James, of ghost-story fame, and had links to clergy, lawyers, diplomats, soldiers and sailors who had served across the British empire. His oldest brother William served with the Gurkhas in Burma and later became a schoolteacher. His youngest brother, Robert, became a well-known writer and MP. His sister, Iris (my mother), also became a writer, historian and translator of Gaelic and Assamese folk tales.

Richard was sent to board at Sedbergh school in Cumbria, and described his time there and later years in amusing and insightful books: *The Years Between: A Tale of the Nineteen Thirties* (1993), and *The Road from Mandalay: A Journey in the Shadow of the East* (2007). His time reading history at Queen's College, Oxford, was interrupted by the second world war. Richard joined the 3rd Gurkha Rifles in 1942 and related his experiences in *Chindit* (1980). After the Chindit expedition he was mentioned in dispatches.

Returning to Oxford in 1946, Richard gained another degree, in philosophy, politics and economics, and then went in 1947 to teach at Haileybury. He liked to point out that he was the first to teach economics at the school since the great economist and demographer Thomas Malthus. He remained there until 1981, including 21 years as a housemaster.

Richard then taught for 10 years at sixth form colleges in Cambridge. He also wrote for journals and newspapers, and did some broadcasting. Christianity was important to him and for 30 years he was an "officer" at the evangelical camp for independent schoolboys at Iwerne Minster, Dorset. He preached into his late 80s.

His dry wit was mixed with kindness and a Christian concern for others. He was a voracious reader and recounted with feeling the experience of being a late child of the Raj, dedicating his last book to the "memory of those who bore the burden of empire".

Richard married Rachel Bateson in 1967. She and their children, Clare, Elizabeth and Jonathan, and seven grandchildren, survive him.

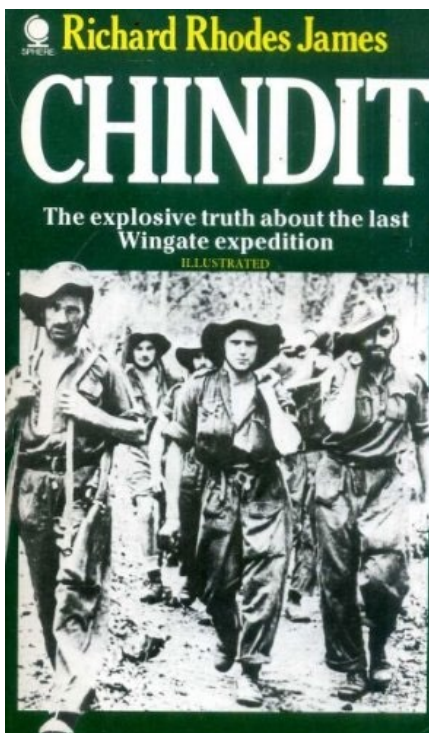
The Haileybury Society Newsletter, 2020

Richard Rhodes James (Staff 1947-81), former HM of Melvill and erstwhile Haileybury Head of Economics, must count as one of those people who, if you'd never met him, you wish you had known.

We were recently contacted by his widow, Rachel, who in passing reminded us of three books written by Richard which tell of his extraordinary life; in particular, his reflections on the war in Burma (now Myanmar) and, in his autobiography, a reflection of the impact of British India on his life and those he knew.

Educated at Sedbergh and Queen's College, Oxford, Richard joined the 3rd Gurkhas Rifles in 1941, which ultimately led to him signing up with the maverick garlic-chomping Major General Orde Wingate, DSO - an extraordinary leader who placed great store in single-mindedness, personal strength and attacking the enemy where he least expected it.

In Burma with Orde Wingate



(Above: *Chindit* - a remarkable account of the guerrilla warfare in Burma during WW2)

Chindit - the explosive truth about the last Wingate expedition (published 1980) was Richard's first book and covers his military service as a cipher officer with 111 Brigade in India 1943-44 and in northern Burma with the Chindit expeditions in 1944, which he describes as "a campaign of uncertain wanderings and unsuccessful battles". He was mentioned in dispatches.

In a gripping narrative, Richard described in vivid detail a type of special forces warfare which was plagued by lack of resources, indifferent political and military engagement, disease and constant danger. This squalid and exceptionally dangerous form of warfare, despite its limited tactical impact, nonetheless had a significant impact on Japanese strategy in terms of their plans against India.

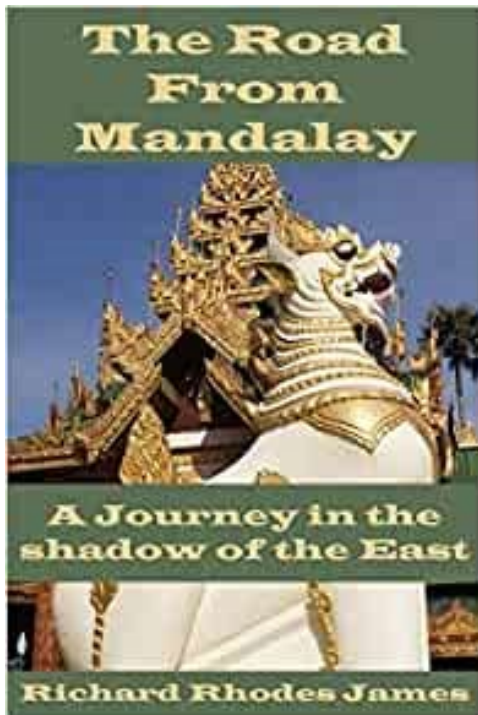
Chindit is currently out of print but can still be found second hand through most online retailers

June 2022: We are delighted to share that **Chindit** has been republished by Penguin in partnership with Al Murray and James Holland's podcast: 'We have ways of making you talk'.

A novel of life in the thirties

Richard also wrote a novel about life in the 1930s, although, as a novel, it has less of the urgency and strength of books written as primary source historical material. *Years Between - a Tale of the 1930s* is interpreted as semi-autobiographical, and has been described by one reviewer as a book about "when children were still sent off to (usually awful) public school, and whose parents were separated as the husband worked for the Empire". Clearly this background did not impact on Richard's later life - spending his career teaching at Haileybury!

Copies of Years Between are hard to find but copies can be found on Amazon



(Above: *The Road from Mandalay* - published by Richard in 2007)

Richard's last book, published in 2007, *The Road from Mandalay - a Journey in the Shadow of the East* is one of those gems of autobiography which delivers much more than it appears to promise. Richard was born within a tradition of British India and the east at Mandalay in Burma (a place which, as he points out, despite the famous poem by Rudyard Kipling, had never been visited by the great man).

This was a world known to itself which would, after WW2, come suddenly to an end. This book is a reflection of a life and family history which originates in a world which has now completely disappeared. As he says, when he came to Britain he had no birth certificate; the only proof of his existence was the copy of a page of the baptismal register of St Mary's Church, Mandalay in which his baptism was recorded.

It is difficult to imagine now a way of life, an infrastructure, a whole sub-culture of Britishness existing in a state of local renewal on the far side of the world. Yet this book opens a window on that world, and also reflects upon it. It is, as the cover suggests, a heartfelt goodbye to a way of life which had followed Richard around all his life.

In LP Hartley's magnificent comment, the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there. It is fitting therefore that this book is dedicated to "the memory of those who bore the burden of Empire".

The importance of memory

Everyone carries with them the lives and experiences they have lived. They are shaped by events and by people but also by the unseen; of culture, of nuance, of serendipity. From his early years at Sedburgh to his experiences in the war and his life of service postwar at Haileybury, Richard Rhodes James saw a world in transition yet had the generosity of spirit and independence of insight to reflect upon his life and the times in which he lived.

In 1995, after he had retired from Haileybury, Richard appeared in Charles Wheeler's BBC documentary, *Burma*, in which WW2 veterans retraced the steps of their fighting careers. It is so hard to imagine today the contrast between the mud and disease of the Burmese jungle and an afternoon spent in the English sunshine with a view over Lightning Oak.

Postscript - a devout man and a profound influence for many OHs

Richard Rhodes James (universally known as 'RJ') was housemaster of Melvill in the '60s and '70s. He is perhaps best known for his huge contribution to the Christian life of the school which extended into the '80s by when he had moved to Hertford Heath. Hand in hand with his wartime heroism was a profound faith which influenced countless Haileyburians not just in Melvill but across the whole school. Every Sunday between Chapel and lunch, he and Rachel threw their home open to anyone who wanted to come along. A communal coffee was followed by a bible-centred talk from a visiting speaker. The talks were always lucid, witty and great fun, without ever losing sight of their serious core. At its peak this was such a popular fixture that there was not enough floor space in their sitting room to accommodate everyone and a sound link had to be rigged up to an overspill room. Hundreds of Christian Haileyburians will regard him as a formative influence on their faith and remember him with enormous gratitude and affection.

Richard was a gift to Haileybury who remains fond in the memories of all who knew him.