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A History of the RGS in Ten People
ONA magazine is the magazine for the Old Novocastrians’ Association

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The Editor reserves the right to edit, alter or omit all submissions to the magazine. Copy may be carried over to the next edition. The Editor’s decision is final.

Contribute!

We are always looking for articles and news from Old Novos to include in the magazine, so send your contributions, via email (if possible) to:
ona@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk
or to the ONA Office at the school.

Please include relevant pictures if possible. They will be returned as soon as the magazine has been printed.

The deadline for acceptance of copy for the Autumn 2012 issue is Monday 13 August. Copy may be carried over to a future issue.

The ONA Magazine is now available online

Please note that the magazine is now circulated both in hard copy and by email to many members of the Association. Each edition is added to the ONA website shortly after circulation. By submitting an article or news for inclusion the contributor is accepting that it will be available through both formats and will also be accessible beyond the Association membership through internet search engines or any member of the public viewing the ONA website.

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Welcome

In this issue we are continuing our series on school camps, moving on to the 1960s. In these days of school tours across the globe, it is right to acknowledge the massive amount of organisation by the early pioneers which went into the wide variety of camps in the Dales, Scottish Islands, Lake District and beyond. This is a series we hope to continue well into future issues, so keep your memories flowing.

Many ONs will be interested to learn of the retirements of teachers Howard Baker, Phil Taylor, Ken Wilkinson and Liz Temple and will remember, no doubt with nostalgia, their great contributions to school life. They will each be invited to the ONA Dinner on the 19 October, when the guest speaker will be Nick Brownlee (76-86), journalist and crime thriller writer. Make a note in your diary now.

A History of the RGS in Ten People continues on page 12. Almost five centuries have produced some notable characters, so this subject promises to run and run! ONs are again invited to add comments and suggestions by emailing the ONA Office. A full version of this feature will eventually appear on the ONA website.

I am delighted to have met Alastair Leithead (80-90) at the recent London ONA dinner, where he gave a witty and amusing speech. In a previous issue (83) of the ONA Magazine, Alastair wrote about his support for the bursary campaign. In this issue Nigel Paton (66-76) tells us why he chooses to donate to the campaign.

The Association is supporting the school’s funding of the restoration of the memorial organ in the school hall. Mike Barlow (53-64) writes about this on page 2. After many years of ‘non-maintenance’ of this iconic part of the school, the organ, so much part of the school’s daily life from the 1920s to 80s, will gradually be brought back to regular use.

RGS Day will be held on Saturday 30 June and all ONs, families and friends are invited. The Association will again be presenting prizes for history and economics as part of a continuing quest to forge closer links with current students. ONA gift bags will also be presented to all leavers.

Finally, details of a possible Penrith reunion can be found on page 3. The wartime evacuation took place from 1939 to 1944 – it’s an incredible tribute to the camaraderie of ONs, that there is still loyal support from those who took part in this intrepid adventure.

Enjoy the magazine and have a great summer!

Adam Goldwater (87-97)
ONA President
I was saddened to read about the death of ex-RGS teacher Rocky Forster in the ONA Magazine (issue 82). This news reached me shortly after I attended the funeral of an Old Novo, Peter Rooney (61-71), who died earlier this year aged only 58 after a short illness. I had known Peter for many years as we lived for a while in the same street in Jesmond. Both men died too young but, sad as these early deaths were, there was a connection for me.

When I was in the fourth form Rocky Forster took a group of us on a winter walking weekend in the Cheviots, where I noticed some signs bearing the letters ‘PW’ which Mr Forster informed us stood for Pennine Way, which then was a relatively new long distance footpath. He told me that the Cheviots were the northern end of the 270 mile route which started in Derbyshire. I do not think we were very well travelled in 1969 as I had only a vague idea of where Derbyshire was, but I knew it was a long way from the Cheviots. My imagination was fired and I sought out the few available books on the walk including Wainwright’s detailed guide. After some careful planning a group of us completed the walk in summer 1969. This group included Old Novos Duncan Watson (64-71) and Keith Davey (66-72) as well as Peter and me. I met up with the two others who had been on the walk at Peter’s funeral, one of whom produced a logbook he had written, and we shared some very happy memories of the walk with old friends and Peter’s family.

I will always be grateful to Rocky Forster for introducing me to the Pennine Way and encouraging a love of walking and climbing. If Duncan Watson and Keith Davey read this it would be good to get in touch again.

Nimmo Clarke (62-72)
ONA Membership – Standing Orders
If you still have a standing order set up to pay the ONA subscription fee, please cancel it as soon as possible. ONA membership is FREE to all Old Nos and former members of staff.

1709 RGS Library Catalogue
The ONA is delighted to announce that it has been successful in helping to secure the purchase of a rare manuscript – the RGS Library Catalogue dating from 1709. Thanks to the generous donations of a number of Old Nos, and a joint fund from the RGS and ONA, the catalogue will be returned to the school from which it originated.

The manuscript is an important document for several reasons. It is a relatively early example of a library catalogue; it records the fact that the RGS had a very fine collection of books for a provincial grammar school; it records loans and includes the signature of the then Headmaster Thomas Rudd; it reflects the role of the RGS as a centre of learning and indeed an institution connected to the wider world of scholarship through its Headmaster, an Anglican clergyman, who would have had links to Durham Cathedral and Oxford and Cambridge Universities. The Royal Grammar School of 1709 was far from an intellectual backwater.

We will detail this important and historic acquisition in the next issue.

Daniel Simpson (86-93) has written a book about why he quit his job as a journalist to get embroiled with Balkan gangsters. His memoir, A Rough Guide to the Dark Side charts a gonzo career at The New York Times. Ambitious and idealistic, he was hired to report on the Balkans but quit within months, aghast at his editors’ zeal for invading Iraq. Disillusioned, Daniel went native in Belgrade. Together with the charismatic G, who’d appeared one night in lavish puffs of dope smoke, he decided to organize Serbia’s version of Woodstock: a festival on an island in the Danube.

Music could revolutionize the country. It was run by a wartime mafia, and young people with ambition tried to leave. But what if it became Ibiza crossed with Glastonbury? To fund this transition, they hustled Daniel’s contacts, but shady Balkan businessmen had other ideas. When a local Mr Big muscled in, being robbed by his henchmen would feel like a lucky escape.

Why do good intentions go awry? With brutally honest humour, Daniel recounts his trip towards the edge, and a desperate drug-fuelled quest for the truth.

The book is being published in the summer, and further details are available online: www.roughguidedarkside.com

Another Penrith Reunion?!
7–9 September 2012
If any Penrith evacuees are interested in meeting up between 7–9 September, please contact B. Jones (42-48) on 01661 842 100, or G. Orde (40-49) on 01434 682 233. (Please note there will be no pre-bookings, you will have to make your own travel and accommodation arrangements).
News and Events

Neel Bhatt (95-00) went to University of Manchester Medical School, and qualified in 2006. In 2009 Neel published a paper titled: A 10-year follow up of ocular hypertensive patients within the Bolton Corneal Thickness Study: Can measured factors predict prognostic outcomes? in the Contact Lens and Anterior Eye Journal. He gained his nMRCGP qualification in 2011 and is currently working as a GP in Manchester.

Christopher Fraser OBE (51-58) is Partner at AIME Associates, Chairman of ChinaEuro Capital, and also Managing Director at ChinaEuro Associates. Christopher has 40 years experience in and around the China market. Christopher received his OBE for services to business (he was instrumental in bringing Nissan to the North East.)

Keith Porritt (69-79) is commercial director for UK TV, the biggest supplier of TV channels in the country. Keith has overall responsibility for the management of UKTV's platform relationships, all commercial activity and business development, programme supply from both BBC Worldwide and other suppliers, as well as legal and business affairs.

Sir Gregory Winter (64-69) has been appointed Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Richard Best (56-66) former ONA Secretary and President writes: I am enjoying my retirement with some ups and downs. Life is very hectic in the peaceful village where we live, in Ravenstonedale, Cumbria. I’m a keen member of the Local Cobweb Orchestra in Tebay. We have regular residential events and have performed in Italy, Germany and more locally in variety of venues which include Durham Cathedral, The Sage Gateshead and The Black Swan Hotel in Ravenstonedale. Several ONs play with us – Toby Lipman (59-69), Andrew Cottrell (58-68) and in January I had the pleasure of meeting Paddy Neligan (56-67) at a Cobweb workshop near York for the first time since I left school in 1966.

I married CNHS pupil Joan Hunter in 1972. We had sung together in the school production of Iolanthe in 1965. Unfortunately she contracted a disease some two years ago, which has proved very difficult to manage and has limited her mobility and activities. Nevertheless, she continues to do watercolour paintings and now has her own computer and so is developing her IT skills.

Our family – Andrew Best (83-93), is married with a 22 month old little girl. He is a partner in HSR Law in Doncaster and is head of their Corporate and Commercial Department. Nicola is also married with two girls and lives in Utrecht with her Dutch husband.

Congratulations to Eleni Papadopoulos (08-10) who has been selected as an Olympic Torchbearer. Eleni is very honoured, proud and delighted to be carrying the flame through Newcastle on the 15th of June. As Eleni is half-Greek, the significance of the flame is even closer to her heart.

Eleni has recently swum in the Paralympics trials, where she did exceptionally well, gaining personal bests in all her swims. She regained the British crown in her signature event, the 100m Butterfly, and also broke the British record twice in the final with her final time and the 50m split. Eleni is hoping to secure a place in the GB Paralympics swimming team in Rio 2016.

Bill Elliot (retired RGS teacher) writes: Since retiring I have been busy researching and writing about local history. My writing started in 1995 when our street, The Grove, Benton reached its centenary. I researched the history of the area and traced all inhabitants back to 1895 including professions, when the electricity was installed, etc. We closed The Grove for the day and held a full day of celebrations with the Mayor of North Tyneside present to unveil a plaque. My wife and I made a film of the occasion.

I also published a hand-made copy of the research material. I realised that
ONs of all vintages are warmly invited to this year’s RGS Day. The morning is taken up with senior school prizegiving ceremonies, and there will be live music and refreshments in a marquee and the junior school’s summer fair will be in full swing. There will also be a number of exhibitions, demonstrations and gymnastics displays. Full details and timings will be on the school website nearer the date.

At 11.30am there will be a short ceremony in the Main Hall when the Chairman of Governors will present Fellowships of the RGS, an honour created to mark the outstanding generosity of particular individuals or organisations to the bursary campaign. This will be followed immediately by the Headmaster’s ‘State of the Nation’ address. That is followed by the upper sixth prizegiving and a special lunch for them and their parents.

Visiting ONs would be more than welcome, after the Headmaster’s address, to a tour of the buildings, guided by the new prefects, and then join everyone else for lunch. In order that we can be properly organised for you, and make you properly welcome at that stage, please get in touch with Tove Elander to let her know that you intend to come and, on arrival, make yourself known at the reception area on the school field.

Finally, 3pm will see the world premiere performance of Flotsam, a musical written by the Headmaster, Bernard Trafford, and performed by students. Bernard originally got the idea for Flotsam from reading a book about the perils and hardships faced by street children in Brazil (Anthony Swift: Children for Social Change). The story moves that scenario to a present-day or near-future UK altered almost unrecognisably by climate change events: rising sea-levels; perhaps a tsunami; certainly credit crunch plus a fuel/peak oil crisis causing the breakdown of lifestyles hitherto taken for granted.

Tickets are free: again, so that we can ensure availability, please let Tove know if you would like some by contacting the ONA Office on: 0191 212 8924 ona@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk
The sixties saw the twilight of traditional, technology-free camping. At the beginning of the decade, we still utilised the same heavy canvas bell-tents that our forefathers would have recognised from the Boer War – or even the Crimea. The ancient oval dixies too, placed on angle-iron supports over wood or coal fires would have been familiar to earlier generations, as would the heavy wooden trestle tables for the manufacture of sandwiches on an industrial scale. Add in some serious enamel serving equipment, shovels and a pickaxe (pit latrines for the digging thereof) and you had the complete kit.

Travel arrangements likewise reflected the twilight of British Rail in all its post-war, seedy steaminess. Grimy express took us to places like Thirsk or Northallerton where we would debouche with all our paraphernalia into local buses – or, in the case of Eskdale, for some odd, traditional reason, a coal wagon from Drigg. We’d then proceed to sing until the driver’s ears bled – again songs our forefathers would have sung, some originating in the trenches of the Great War.

Even pop music was still in its infancy. At Swaledale in 1962 I recall Mr. Howarth, a rather formal young Languages Master who had clearly had a sheltered upbringing, being convinced that Mike Sarne’s popular hit Come Outside was in fact entitled ‘Gunnerside’. By the time we reached Eskdale in ’64, all that had changed. Clandestine Radio Luxemburg after lights out on early, battery-crunching transistor radios was the norm, and the songs we had sung with such gusto just a year or two before were as dead as the Dodo. It was a vivid example of how swiftly a bit of popular culture can be totally expunged.

A decade later the bell tents and dixies were still in evidence. But our sacks of coal had been replaced by the vaguely controllable primus stove. Coach travel from door to door had replaced the ritual of assembly under the Central Station clock. And instead of a motley collection of woollen jerseys and the odd school raincoat doing double duty, jeans and anoraks had entered our lives, along with footwear rather more adapted to squelching across moorland and scrambling over scree than plimsolls or hobnailed shoes.

These external changes were, however, superficial compared with the changes in outlook and expectation of the participants. In the early 60s a school camp was often the first time we had escaped from the protective cocoon of the parental holiday. A first taste of relative freedom. For many town-bred boys it was the first time they had come close to real nature. To swim in a beck rather than a swimming pool. To discover the perils of boggy moorland, the frustration of climbing only to reach a false summit and the exhilaration of finally reaching the real thing.
By the end of the decade, it seems doubtful whether camps still represented the first slipping of the parental leash, and certainly that sense of slightly exotic isolation was gone. The natural world was on TV in our living rooms. And, most significant of all, foreign travel was now within the reach of ordinary family budgets. The idea of spending a week in a field not that far from home no longer seemed as strange or adventurous as it undoubtedly did to my generation.

The school, as usual, adapted with commendable speed. We were given the opportunity to ski in Switzerland, and to visit Athens and Cephalonia. Both trips were led by Gordon Forster, and it was not the least of ‘Rocky’s’ considerable services to the school to have brought us through these experiences relatively unscathed – two broken legs out of a skiing party of 18 being regarded as an acceptable casualty rate. However I’m sure he hadn’t envisaged challenges such as reviving one of our number who had imbibed so freely on the cross-channel ferry that he’d passed out in the heads, or extricating another from the clutches of the Italian railway police, who were less than impressed at the fine collection of warning notices he had unscrewed from the interior of our train.

Recalling the Greek trip brings home how quickly we have become accustomed to the smoothness of modern international travel. Our journey to Athens in 1965 began with a cross channel flight from Newcastle in an ancient, prop-driven Vickers Viking. Thirty minutes into the bumpy flight the sole stewardess emerged from the cockpit area to pass around a handwritten note from the pilot. It read: ‘You are now over Hull.’ This intelligence was greeted with such a barrage of hilarity that she retreated, hurt, behind the cockpit door and did not emerge again.

From Bruges we went by train though France and Switzerland to the Italian port of Ancona. Here we boarded a venerable vessel bound for Piraeus. It was the first in a series of maritime antiques. Our ferry to Cephalonia had spent the best years of its long life as a cross-Channel packet, whilst our return voyage from Piraeus was on an ex Bibby liner of 1930s vintage whose crew accommodation now constituted our ‘tourist’ class and whose current crew appeared to live in a kind of galvanised iron hut erected on the stern.

All of the above may have seemed much more adventurous and modern than our muddy field in Ryedale of just four years previously. There remained, however, something about the camping experience that foreign travel could not replicate. Staying in hotels or, on Cephalonia, with villagers in Sami, could not compare with the experience of looking after - and cooking for ourselves. The controlled version of Lord of the Flies that constituted RGS camping still remained the best and most fun environment for developing those skills we acquire through living in close proximity with one another, helping with communal chores and sharing physical challenges. In the process we learned much about ourselves, and we owe a huge debt to the staff who created the camp ethos. It was undoubtedly the key to their ability to ride the sixties cultural watershed and emerge, still flourishing, into the seventies.

“Once we arrived on site there was a delicious sense of isolation. With the railway station miles away, once the local transport had deposited us in our chosen field, the outside world effectively ceased to exist for a week. No radios, no mobile phones, no iPods.”

Wendsleydale 1966: Larry Watson, John Hempson and Peter Wolstenholme
Mike Barlow (53-64) writes: My first experience of camp was on Arran, four years as a pupils and then another two as an Old Novo. Many changes happened during this time, the main one was probably the cooking over open coal fires was superseded by Primus stoves (which I think Larry Watson introduced), and then by Calor gas. The wartime dixie remained the main cooking pot, however, and still was when I left the staff at RGS in 1995 for pastures new.

My first memories at Ryedale were of Tucker Anderson crouched over the glowing embers at 5am in the morning, blowing gently on them to make sure the fire was going well enough to produce porridge for 30 odd at 8am. Other memories include hurtling down the hill at Dentdale from the station on the Carlisle – Settle line into the village in a cattle truck with all the equipment rattling around us, together with the remains of the last cargo! At the same camp Don Peden spent much of his time when it went dark signalling to another ex-member of the Signal Corps who lived in the village. We never did discover what was said.

As primus stoves made their appearance on Arran, so did the strange assortment of clothing worn by staff; the most startling was Peter Stephenson’s sudden appearance with corduroy shorts. We had just alerted the staff to the fact that one tent had acquired a strangely falsetto voice and seemed to be playing strip poker! The intruder was left to walk back to Brodick in the dark. Strangely no one offered to be escort.

The one major change at camp during my time was the switch from tinned food to fresh or frozen food: below is Geoff Swinden’s picture of teacher David Walton taking an axe to a delivery of frozen meat at Littondale.

Once I had finished college and it became known I was working in the north east I was roped in as the ON at Border camp by “Spuggie” Douglas, and from then on I continued to attend camp, as an ON, and later as one of the RGS staff.

Chopping up meat for dinner at Littondale

Iain Mackinnon (65-74) concludes with his memories of camp: I had a wonderful time at a succession of school camps, starting with Swaledale in 1969 (when I was in III.2) and concluding with two trips to Eskdale, in the fifth form and again as a sixth form helper.

What do I remember? Walking in wonderful countryside, stopping to stock up on essential rations in Grinton and Reeth, making vast numbers of sandwiches with sandwich spread on white bread (this was the 1960s!), washing our plates in the horse trough at the far side of the field, and someone calling out throughout the night: “2 o’clock and all’s well” (with variants at 3, 4, 5 and 6am). I also remember my first introduction to the curious fact that teachers have more to offer than simply what they do in a classroom, when Alan Mitchell organised a game of rounders!

One phrase from Swaledale 69’ camp lives on in my family. One of the sixth formers burnt the porridge one morning and, taking his inspiration from the novelty varieties of crisps which were then still new to us all, called out that porridge that morning was “smoky flavoured”. More than 40 years later, should anything burn in our kitchen even my children now describe it as “smoky flavoured”.

It’s a terrible shame that exam preparation gets in the way and the camps no longer run. I am a non-executive director of one of the big exam boards (Edexcel) so I’m hardly going to say that exams aren’t important, but the camps offered a completely different form of education, and I loved my weeks away at camp. What a missed opportunity.

(Stuart’s note: The last week of summer term is annual camping week for all Year 7 pupils, with staff and sixth formers helping out. So despite the long and often frantic exam season, the school has managed to keep some of the camping spirit going!)
Howard Baker

What year did you start at the RGS?
I began here in 1977 straight from a PGCE year at Durham University, which followed four years reading classics and philosophy (‘Greats’) at Oxford.

As well as teaching your subject, what else have you been involved with at the RGS?
I didn’t actually teach ‘my subject’ at first. I was appointed by headmaster Alister Cox to teach modern languages, so spent the first few years teaching French throughout the school, then introduced Spanish to give a fresh start to those who struggled with French. Only later did I take on some Latin and Greek classes when the classics department needed a bit of extra help. Meanwhile I became the school librarian (the management of the sixth-form library in those days was done by a teacher), responsible for the library’s staffing, budget, stock and archive. Around this time I found myself running the Debating Society, helping with school camps and founding a new Philosophy Society.

One day, quite out of the blue, Alister Cox offered me the post of Head of Religious Studies. So RS and PSE (in effect, sex education) occupied me for a while. I was also asked to take over the pastoral care of the fifth form (Year 11). In addition, because greater administrative demands were beginning to be placed on schools, what with inspections, league tables and whatnot, I was asked to run the monthly heads of department meetings, and was given the newly-coined title of ‘director of studies’. This also entailed being sent off to train as an HMC schools inspector, mainly to get the low-down before the RGS’s first inspection. My job here increasingly included whole-school roles, so Alister thought I had better be called ‘Third Master’ to complement himself and his deputy, who had always been known as ‘Second Master’.

This triumvirate worked quite well for a while, but by the time the next headmaster, James Miller, arrived a bigger management team was called for; I was asked by James to take on the job of Head of Sixth Form. Perhaps strangely, we hadn’t had one until then. I got great fulfilment from helping out sixth formers and their families who were finding life just a bit tough.

On the teaching front, I decided to replace the A-level religious studies with a philosophy course and have particularly enjoyed that (it certainly beats irregular verbs!).

Life was, naturally, pretty busy, so a couple of years ago I thought that I might perhaps begin to ease off before full retirement. The new head, Bernard Trafford, was seeking to appoint someone to give a lead with the learning support the school should offer, so I volunteered, and gave up the more onerous sixth form job to do that. It too has proved interesting and varied.

What will you miss about the RGS?
I won’t of course miss the administrative side; I have no real interest in structures or systems. But I have greatly enjoyed the intellectual life here, perhaps influencing in small ways the next generation of influential people (‘discendo duces’?), and, I hope, spreading a little wisdom. I shall miss that, I expect. I cannot really believe that I have earned a decent living all these years just by relaxing in the good company of bright youngsters and encouraging them to have interesting thoughts. The day-to-day good-humoured and intelligent repartee of colleagues will also be a miss.

What are you planning to do when you retire?
Several things: spend lots of energy trying to avoid DIY and gardening jobs dreamed up by my wife Christine; foster old friendships; get up late; read a bit; eat out a lot; go away a lot; enjoy forgetting which day of the week it is. One of my pupils recently said, ‘Sir, I think your entire career has been a preparation for now! Hmmm! Perhaps he’s right. I might do one or two worthier things, but isn’t retirement about relaxation?

Howard Baker

It’s time to say farewell and happy retirement to Howard Baker, Ken Wilkinson, Phil Taylor and Liz Temple as they retire at the end of the summer term.
Liz Temple

What year did you start teaching at RGS?
I came as a part time maths teacher in 1994, from Newcastle Church High School where I had been covering maternity leave. The job spec. seemed to require a superwoman, able to offer mind or body stretching extracurricular activities and 24/7 commitment, and so with some trepidation I began my RGS career.

As well as teaching your subject, what else have you been involved with at RGS?
Perhaps A Level Mathematics was less popular in my early days as I was asked to teach religious education to the first and second forms (Year 7 and 8). The Biblical cartoon films were popular as I remember, and gave plenty of scope for artistic expression when the class were asked to create their own versions of events.

On becoming a full time teacher, I soon became a Year 7 form supervisor and assisted Hazel Jones-Lee with voluntary service. Selling ‘buns and biscuits’ as part of the year’s fundraising was (and is) a popular event.

Later, I succeeded Pauline Perella as the teacher in charge of the 11+ entrance exam, overseeing the final ‘all boys’ cohort into Year 7 in 2006. At about the same time I joined the examinations team, ably led by Simon Squires. I just about remember the days of exams taken in the old gymnium, which stood where the STC stands today.

I was a late-comer to the joys of Year 7 camp, discovering the camaraderie and sheer fun of it in the last four years. I have to confess, though, that I managed to avoid the real camping experience and stayed in the relative comfort of the bunk house.

What are you planning to do when you retire?
I suppose I am planning to avoid the temptation to fill every waking minute with activity! I am looking forward to spending more time with my family as well as developing existing interests (mainly based on my membership of both the Methodist Church and the Liberal Democrats) and being free to learn new skills, such as speaking Japanese and playing golf.

What will you miss about RGS?
Where to start? To leave behind such a major part of my life, and the structure of each year, term by term and each time tabled week, will take some doing. Of course I think mainly of the individuals who have peopled those times for me. There were the high-flying Further Mathematicians, destined for success and eager to explore the subject, as well as the many other talented and committed students, motivated by their own ambitions and by the amazing opportunities and encouragement afforded by the school. Then there were the students who needed more support, for a variety of reasons, and I have enjoyed being part of the impressive pastoral care tirelessly given by busy staff when needed. I have found (nearly) all RGS students to be friendly and courteous and I will miss their lively company.

Other highlights include memorable school productions such as Antigone (2009) and Les Misérables (2012) and many others.

I will certainly miss my colleagues, particularly all my friends in the Maths department. In the office and classroom, the ‘buzz’ of sharing the solving of mathematical problems is alive and well, and long may it remain so.

Ken Wilkinson

What year did you start teaching at RGS?
I arrived in 1975 after having worked for my parents in their catering business- a vain attempt to rescue what was a failing enterprise. I was employed as a Year 5 class teacher with the added responsibility of teaching geography and history to the Year 6 students. My other remit was to establish extracurricular sport within the junior school and to develop rugby fixtures with the other independent schools in the area. Within six years we were also sending athletics and swimming teams to both the regional HMC and City of Newcastle championships.

In 1980 I took over the teaching of swimming in the junior school on the retirement of Jeff Knowles (the senior school master I/c swimming). I was always encouraged and supported in my early days by John Jones the junior school headmaster, John Elders the head of rugby and director of sport Paul Ponton.

As well as teaching your subject, what else have you been involved with?
In 1980 I was left in charge of the Holy Island field trip which, with the help and subject interest of other colleagues, I developed into a memorable and much looked forward to residential study week for the Year 6 students – wide games, swimming in the North Sea and, occasionally, the odd bit of field work and research!

In 1991 I joined Clive Dickinson, the then headmaster, on the Lake District activity week that he ran and when he left in 1997 I took over. With the help of Kevin Flannery, an RGS parent, I ran this residential week until 2011. I’ll really miss this trip as the centre we now use is situated at the southern
Ken Wilkinson

end of Ullswater in a beautiful location. At last count I have taken part in or run 52 residential field trips and activity weeks for the RGS.

I became Deputy Head of the junior school in 1982 and I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenges that this role presented me with. I have worked with four junior school headmasters but it was the time I have spent working with John Jones in my early years and, more recently, with Roly Craig that have given me the most pleasure. The junior school has changed dramatically in the last five or six years and the pressure on the staff has been immense at times. The junior school continues to thrive and I wish Roly and my colleagues every success in the future.

What will you miss about RGS, and what are you planning to do when you retire?

I will miss teaching in the junior school and I certainly will miss the junior school staff – I couldn’t have worked with a better team of people. However, retirement will allow me to spend more time with my wife and family and the opportunity to indulge our passion for walking: trips to southern Spain, Sicily and Sardinia are certainly on the agenda in the next couple of years. The rest will fall into place – I still play badminton (I played for over 30 years in the Northumberland and Durham leagues) and we have a huge allotment which never gets enough attention! One thing is certain – I’ll not be working to a timetable in the near future!

Phil Taylor

What year did you start teaching at RGS?

I arrived at RGS in January 1991 acting as a temporary appointment to cover for Paul Hill who was undergoing surgery for a spinal problem. That was supposed to be initially for a month, but turned out to be four months when Paul eventually got back to work. I then moved on to working in a couple of special schools in the area as well as building oil-rigs. A phone call from Paul Ponton, then Head of PE asking if I was interested in the PE post on a permanent basis was quickly answered and the rest is history, as they say. (The interview with Alister Cox and John Armstrong felt like an encounter in a Gentleman’s club!) Prior to all those events, having studied physical education at Leeds Carnegie, I’d been a teacher of PE at Benfield School since September 1973 and moved into the pastoral system as a head of year until 1990.

What else have you been involved with at RGS?

Where to start? Anything and everything involving sport, such as coaching various teams and going on lots of school trips. Eskdale Camp with Year 10 students was always very special with activities that would no doubt fall foul of health and safety but I’m sure will remain in the minds, one way or another, of those who took part. Driving a school minibus over the Hardknott and Wrynose passes with green-faced passengers, bridge jumping into the dark of night, overnight bivouacs, waking up in the middle of a stone circle in the early morning mist – all great fun. Numerous fabulous ski trips – hard work, burning the candle at both ends but also giving hundreds of students their first experience of the sport. Working with numerous staff to enable a whole range of activities to take part – their names are too numerous to mention and I’d hate to cause offence through omission. I guess they will know who they are!

What are you planning to do when you retire?

What to do in retirement? Having spent so many years watching rugby, skiing, walking in the Lakes and abroad, I’ll probably be able to do a lot more of that although some of my bones and joints are getting a bit worn! Membership of Durham Cricket Club appeals too along with following a major cricket or rugby tour abroad. Having been a keen sea-angler as a youngster, I am keen to try out my skills with coarse and game fishing.

What will you miss about RGS?

What will I miss? There have been numerous members of staff and students who have made my time here an absolute pleasure and a privilege. There have been so many occasions when I have questioned how it is that I have been so fortunate to work here. It may sound a bit of a cliché but it will be the people I will miss – they make RGS what it is.
A History of the RGS continues with the search for ten people who shaped or influenced the history of the school. David Goldwater (51-62) ponders on this difficult task.

In the near five centuries of the Royal Grammar School’s illustrious history, there has been a cast of many thousands, playing its part on the local, national and world stage. It is impossible to consider every candidate for a place in the top ten – indeed there must be a great many pupils lost in the far past, whose names were never properly recorded, or records themselves were lost as the school moved across town. At times, the school itself almost disappeared. How does one guess at even an approximate number of boys and girls who can now be called Old Novos? My own humble attempt would be about 30,000. There is also the panoply of non-pupils represented by the headmasters, teachers, caretakers, clerks and cooks who have helped to weave this institution into a fantastic story. Perhaps we should have looked at RGS in 100 people rather than ten! Wherever do we begin?

By RGS Day (30 June), we plan to mount a display of our story. RGS history students are also researching this subject and we agreed that to make the task slightly easier, we could eliminate four names, notwithstanding their importance to the school tradition. They are Thomas Horsley, born 1462, founder of the school in 1545, Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, who completed Nelson’s task at Trafalgar, William Scott, 1st Baron Stowell and his brother John Scott, 1st Earl of Eldon. These illustrious alumni have been immortalised as school houses and every student at the RGS is aware of them on a daily basis as a source of pride in their sporting, musical and other competitive fields. Four down – 29,996 (or so) to go!

This piece is not meant to represent a definitive list of ‘supernovos’, it is purely an effort to highlight those people over the centuries, connected with our school who have most likely influenced it and its students. There will certainly be omissions!

William Armstrong, Henry Bourne, Mark Akenside, John Brand, as junior school students will know from their studies this year, are all featured along with our four house heroes in the late, lamented school song. It is not surprising that Brodie and Laws, composing the anthem in 1925 would have looked back with pride at Armstrong, Tyneside’s inventor and engineer of world renown, who had recently died at the turn of the century. However, few 21st century ONs will be familiar with the work of the latter three, all writers and historians. But, there are certainly scores of school personages who have made a real difference to our lives in the here and now. I venture to offer some possible candidates:

William George Armstrong (1810-1900), 1st Baron Armstrong, attended the school prior to his following initially a legal career, then rising to international renown as an inventor and one of the world’s largest manufacturer of armaments and ordinance. Knighted in 1859 and created Lord Armstrong in 1887. Cragside in Rothbury and Jesmond Dene were two of his more benign creations.

The Reverend James Snape, D.D. (1815-80), second master 1834-47 and headmaster 1847-71. The creation of the railway and especially Newcastle Central Station meant the demolition of the Virgin Mary Hospital and the school moved in 1844 to nearby Forth Place. At the age of 19, James Snape was appointed as second master. On the death of John Wood, with matters at a low ebb and only about a dozen pupils, Snape was promoted to headmaster and told to “make the best job of it”. Within a few years, numbers had risen to 150 and continued to rise. A debating society was formed with plays staged and the first cricket fixture was played in 1861. Snape oversaw the move to Rye Hill, with numbers of 250 and the school continued to develop into the institution familiar to us today.
**Ebenezer R. Thomas** was appointed as headmaster in January 1922 and served for 26 years. ‘ERT’ led the school during the period following the Great War and through the Second World War, stewarding many of the massive changes which we can still see today. He strengthened the sixth form from a very weak position with exam results improving enormously. He appointed teachers of great distinction, including the Theakstone brothers, brought up in St.Petersburg, and pre-revolution students at Moscow University. Music at the school developed positively after Dr Thomas appointed Arthur Milner as Head of Music in 1927 and drama began its development after the school theatre was built in 1930. The school’s extracurricular activities were most significant in the growth of school camps, which were eventually to become such a major feature of the second half of the century.

The school grew physically under ERT’s headship, with the provision of several new buildings, some of which have only recently been replaced, as well as those remaining today. He instituted parents’ conferences and the good relationships which he fostered with parents undoubtedly helped them to accept the harsh separation of the evacuation to Penrith from 1939 to 1944. Dr Thomas was awarded an OBE in 1941. Retiring in 1948 at the age of 63, he accepted a part-time lectureship in the Department of Engineering at King’s College, Newcastle.

The changes referred to under ERT’s headship were largely funded through the generosity of Old Novo Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland (1878-83), governor from 1919 and chairman of governors from 1929 until his death in 1953. He was, by far, the most munificent benefactor the school has ever had. Many generations of ONs will remember him as an ever-present figure on Speech Days and other major occasions. The rifle range and armoury (1915), now gone; the organ, given in memory of the 138 ONs who fell in the Great War; the swimming baths (1930); the gymnasium (now replaced); the old junior school and the staff common room; even the cost of obtaining the school’s Coat of Arms in 1930, all given by this extraordinary benefactor. Even Sutherland Park, originally leased from the family company B.J.Sutherland & Co, (Shipping Merchants), then purchased by the school with the help of a low interest loan. He was the last private owner of Dunstanburgh Castle which he donated to the nation in 1929 and amongst many other properties, he owned Close House in Heddon and Mansion House in Jesmond.

Because we are covering a vast choice of characters over several centuries, the second part of this feature will appear in the next issue of ONA Magazine. The display at RGS Day will cover the entire subject, and a vote will be held in the autumn term to find the ‘winners’.

**Still to come:** Thomas Addison, 19th century pioneer in neurology; Thomas Tucker Anderson, junior school headmaster; John Elders, sports teacher and England rugby coach; John Forster, 19th century biographer of his best friend Charles Dickens; Albany and John Hancock, 19th century naturalists; Arthur Robert Laws, Second Master and school historian; John Lilburne, civil war leveller; Hugh Moises, headmaster 1749-1806; Oliver Worden Mitchell, headmaster 1948-60; Miss (Ma) Stevens, legendary school cook; Jeremy Thomas, Head of Drama until his untimely death in 2006; Jack Wolstenholme, music teacher; Peter Murray Taylor, Lord Chief Justice.

**David Goldwater** (51-62)
Why I support RGS Bursaries

I read with interest Alastair Leithead’s (80-90) lyrical appreciation of the foundation an RGS education gave him, the basis of his highly successful career, and why that has caused him to support RGS Bursaries. I too support the campaign, but my route to that regular charitable donation has been a little different.

By Nigel Paton (66-76)

In all honesty, I don’t remember all my school days as a time of sepia tinted bliss. I remain to this day unconvinced about the rationale for nude swimming in the junior school, and what Rocky Forster thought he was doing getting a tubby 12 year old like me to do handstands on a gym bench, resulting in a double fracture to the wrist and 12 hours in the RVI, I have no idea. It would be actionable these days. I was a scholarship boy from Hexham so the commute to school made it a long day, although in due course the train journey provided a top class introduction to three card brag, and an opportunity to practice stammering conversation with impossibly unobtainable Central High girls. No teacher ever understood that I really couldn’t do maths, I mean really couldn’t, let alone chemistry, and Bill Elliot’s valiant attempts to teach me woodwork resulted in another trip to the RVI, this time with a chisel in my hand. You get the picture. I don’t go to ONA dinners. And yet…

By the time I got to take the subjects I liked in the sixth form, I had begun to enjoy myself. I was brilliantly, inspirationally, taught. My peers were talented, humorous, individual, occasionally eccentric, several became friends for life, and, critically, not all came from highly privileged backgrounds. By the time I left I was equipped with the A levels I required to study law, a well rounded education, and burgeoning self-confidence, although nobody would have predicted a 25 year career with a chemical company, which is what actually happened. (There are those who still find the idea simply ludicrous.) Somehow, almost against my will, the school had managed to tap into my potential. I’ve been impressed ever since.

I’m older than Alastair; I have a son who has also been through the school. It’s bigger now, less eccentric perhaps and, praise be, there are girls there, but the basic ethos is still the same. My son got the A levels he needed too, and he’s not short of independent thinking either. He didn’t need a scholarship to go there; just as well – they aren’t available in the same way as they were in my day. The only way bright kids from families that aren’t so well off get to go to the RGS these days is if they qualify for a bursary provided by voluntary donation. That’s why I make a regular payment into the bursary scheme. I think it matters.

“The only way bright kids from families that aren’t so well off get to go to the RGS these days is if they qualify for a bursary provided by voluntary donation. That’s why I make a regular payment into the bursary scheme. I think it matters.”

Nigel Paton
Obituaries

Nicholas “Monty” Montgomery (70-77)
Born 1959, died 28 December 2011, aged 52.

Nicholas Montgomery, usually known as “Monty” was a popular and lively character at school, very able academically, a competent musician and well-known for his artistic skills. He was also something of a joker – I remember him telling me that he had escaped games by claiming to have “cirrhosis of the foot”.

He went up to Magdalen College Oxford in 1978 to read English. It was there that I grew close to Nick (as he was always called after leaving school). During our second year, I formed a band and asked him to join as keyboard player. This could have been regarded as a rash move on my part, as he did not possess an instrument and had never played anything but classical music! We managed to play one gig a term for five successive terms. Most were fairly chaotic. During our second term, the band actually featured three Old Novos, as Nick’s older brother Stephen Montgomery (68-75) joined us on guitar for a wonderfully bonkers cover version of Repetition by The Fall. While we were on stage, the venue (Magdalen’s Waynflete bar) was invaded by what appeared to be the entire punk and skinhead population of Oxford. Astonishingly, there was no “town vs gown” problem and everyone seemed to get along well.

After Nick graduated, he scaled much greater musical heights. During 1984 and 1985 he played keyboards for John Peel favourites Microdisney, forming a close bond with their charismatic Irish leader Cathal Coughlan. They toured widely in Europe, appearing in Poland, on Italian TV and on The Old Grey Whistle Test.

Nick came back into my life in 1989. We formed a new band, based in the North East, called Swim-Two-Birds. Drawing on his own life experiences, and on skills picked up with Microdisney, Nick became a staggeringly inventive and prolific songwriter. Over two and half years we built up a respectable local following, played at the Edinburgh Fringe and attracted some record company interest. Every time Nick unveiled a new song (which happened often) we knew we were going to hear something quite unlike anything we had heard before. His lyrics in particular were beautifully crafted, giving a hint of his later brilliance as a poet.

These were good times for Nick, and more followed. He went back to studying, picking up further degrees from Newcastle University and (like many others in his family) teaching for a living. Later in his life things weren’t always so good, especially after Stephen’s untimely death in 2006. However, this loss of a much-loved brother drew from him his most heartfelt work – a collection of Shakespearean sonnets, many of them discovered posthumously, revealing the real Nick hidden behind the witty facade. Being Nick’s friend wasn’t always easy, but many of the most enjoyable times in my life were spent making music or talking with him, and I wish that there could be more.

(A collection of Nick’s poems, working title Something Mortal, is to be published by Laurel Books. Go to www.laurelbooks.co.uk or contact mail@laurelbooks.co.uk)

Keith Jewitt (70-77)

David Rhys Edwards (41-49)
Born 1930, died 24 November 2011, aged 81.

Rhys was a little ahead of me at school but could not be missed because of his cheerful and determined character.

My first memories of him were as a First XV scrum half and a hard little boxer who won his colours for the latter sport when that was the toughest sporting honour to achieve. Mr Meaken did not confer those accolades lightly.

I played outside him for the Old Novos XV when I left school, and whilst he could not be described as a classical scrum half he made up for it in other way to enjoy his game. If we got a slow ball which was often (and I’m sure he preferred it that way), he would neglect to give me his short pass and take on the entire opposition pack, eventually disappearing in a flurry of struggling bodies. Afterwards he would apologise for not giving me the service I didn’t deserve.

After training at Sutherland Park he would always, whatever the temperature, take a cold shower, and to ‘toughen me up’ he would carry me kicking and screaming into that frightful deluge. In his powerful grip I stood no chance whatsoever.

Once coming home from an away match, we stopped at a very busy pub for a drink, where displayed on one wall very high up was an enormous, stuffed moose head. As we left we were suspiciously followed by several locals, and as we were getting on the bus, from the other direction down the street and out of the darkness came Rhys hurtling along, engulfed by the moose’s head. He was soon set upon by the locals. To this day it beggars belief how he managed to get that moose head off the wall!

Well old comrade, it is sad to learn of your demise and whilst you never did succeed in toughening me up, I will always remember you as a good man to have by your side when you are in a tight corner.

G M Thompson (43-52)
The following obituaries of Simon Rowarth and Peter Harding are published with kind permission by Hexham Courant.

Peter Harding (56-63)
Born 1944, died 11 February 2012, aged 67.

One of Tynedale’s best-known business personalities has died suddenly after a short illness. Peter Harding, mine host at the County Hotel in Hexham for 12 years, and a key figure in the regional tourism world, was only 67.

Although he was born in Newcastle, he had an early introduction to the licensed trade, as he spent much of his youth at the Angel Inn in Corbridge, which was owned by his grandfather George Harding.

Peter attended the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle, before going on to hotel college in Westminster for three years. He was despatched to central France, without speaking a word of the language, and worked there for a number of years – eventually becoming a fluent French speaker.

He then joined the National Health Service, and became area catering manager for the Sunderland Hospital group, responsible for providing meals at 13 hospitals. While there, he met and married his wife Dianne, and they would have been married for 42 years later this year.

He eventually decided to go into business on his own account, leaving the health service in 1981 to open the brand new Gisbies Arms at Whickham. The pub was owned by the Federation Brewery, and part of Peter’s duties included running the Fed's massive functions operation at the Lancastrian Suite, next to the brewery at Dunston. Catering for 1,200 people at a time was quite a challenge, but Peter was up to it!

Two years later, he came to Tynedale as owner of the historic Otterburn Tower Hotel. He had a somewhat inauspicious welcome to the Rede Valley – just a couple of weeks after he moved in, the terrible winter of 1983 saw the hotel roof ripped off in a storm! However, over the next 13 years, he turned the Tower into one of Tynedale’s most prestigious hotels.

Eventually though, it was time to move on, and in 1996, he took over the Newcastle Arms at Felton, which he ran for the next four years. By Millennium year, he was ready for a new challenge, and took over the County Hotel in Hexham’s Priestpopple, which had been empty for two years.

Son David recalled: “It was in a terrible state, with the famous Virginia creeper which used to grow on the outside of the hotel threatening to take over the inside. “The carpets were so decrepit they had to be shovelled up, rather than rolled up.” The previous owners had left in something of a hurry, and eerily, the pans were on the cooking range and the dining room was set for a wedding that had to be cancelled the day before it was due to happen. However, Peter and Dianne succeeded in turning the hotel round and restoring it to its former glory, so that it became home to the Rotary Club of Tynedale, as well as a popular hotel and restaurant in its own right.

Ironically, the couple had decided to close the hotel for three months from the end of February before Peter’s illness was diagnosed. Peter and Dianne had bought the Crown Inn at Humshaugh, where they intended to retire before fate so cruelly intervened.

Peter worked hard to promote Northumberland as a tourism destination, and was a former chairman of the Northumberland Tourist Board. He was also a board member of the British Hoteliers Association, as well as chairman of the Longhirst Hall training and enterprise operation near Morpeth. And he lectured in tourism at New College in Durham. Peter was also deeply involved in the Tynedale business community as a member of the Tynedale Chamber of Trade and its successor, the Tynedale Business Forum.

Away from the hurly-burly of business, Peter was a keen Newcastle United supporter, and was at one time a season ticket holder. He was also into classic cars and driving, and like his wife and son, was a member of the Institute of Advanced Motorists.

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Chris Dickie
(60-69) born 1951, died December 2011, aged 60.

Brian Shaw Earnshaw
(35-42) born 1926, died 17 March 2012, aged 86.

Cyril Pattison

Raymond D Peacock
(38-45) born 1927, died 15 March 2012, aged 85.

Gavin Stuart Jackson
(70-77) born 1958, died 2 February 2012, aged 53.

John Porritt
(RGS staff 1979-1994) died April 2012.
Simon Charles Rowarth (77-82)

A respected Tynedale land agent has died at the age of 48, just weeks after being diagnosed with cancer.

Well-known partner at Young’s Chartered Surveyors, Simon Rowarth was a familiar face at the Hexham office of the business which specialises in rural and agricultural estate management.

But the father of three began suffering from stomach pain and a scan in November revealed cancer of the oesophagus had spread to his liver. Just seven weeks later, he died at his family home near Warden with his loved ones around him.

Those who knew him best expressed their shock at his sudden death as well as paying tribute to a man who was regarded as an expert in his field. Simon’s wife, Kim, said: “I’ve been taken aback by all the lovely letters and cards we have had from people who say they will remember him as a strong and sensible man who had a brilliant sense of humour.”

A Cambridge University graduate, Simon began his career with J. M. Clark & Partners in Haltwhistle and was working for Smith’s Gore in Darlington when he married Kim in 1989. That same year, he joined the forerunner of Young’s, Arthur Young Chartered Surveyors, before becoming a partner some 11 years later. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in 2001.

His partners and colleagues at Young’s said in a joint tribute: “Simon was regarded by all professions as a wise, fair, no-nonsense adviser with a massive work ethic and one that could easily give a pragmatic approach and calming influence to any client’s concerns.

“It was a mark of his tenacity that he was prepared to further his education and training by taking the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers exams in 2009, relatively late in his professional life.

“He was awarded the Alastair Turnbull Prize for being the highest achieving candidate in the Northumbria and Cumbria branch. He was junior vice-chairman of the branch and would have progressed to become chairman.” Simon was a friend as much as a business partner, always full of humour and humility. “We cannot put into words how much he will be missed.”

A talented baritone singer, much of his spare time was dedicated to singing in the choir at Hexham Abbey, as well as with the Suspirans chamber choir under the directorship of Abbey organist Alex Woodrow. Simon also served as chairman of the Hexham Abbey festival organising committee.

Canon Graham Usher said: “Simon was not only a friend with whom I enjoyed undertaking a number of long distance walks, but he was an outstanding member of the Hexham Abbey choir and a previous chairman of the Hexham Abbey festival. “Throughout his service to the Abbey he maintained a gentle care, a thoughtful reflection and a dry sense of humour.”

Simon leaves widow Kim and sons Ben (19), Tom (17) and Edward (15).

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Colin Dixon (1934-2012)
RGS Staff 1989–1998

Colin’s over-riding passion in life was mathematics and his appointments included Head of Mathematics at South Shields Grammar School, a period in Norway with Nordata developing a timetabling package for schools and head of mathematics at Whitley Bay High School. He joined the RGS on a part-time basis and thoroughly enjoyed the high academic demands and the stimulation of being with like-minded colleagues.

After he retired in 1998 he continued his work for the Senior Maths Challenge and the AQA examination board as chief examiner (while despairing of declining standards) but, quite early in his retirement, he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. This was the first of a number of serious medical problems which caused his subsequent steady decline.

He moved to Wylam in order to downsize and to be near his son Chris and his family. This was an extremely successful move: for a while he was able to continue his interests in walking and fishing, he was very proud of his grandsons and he thoroughly enjoyed village life. He gave a supporting hand to Chris in his business, was actively involved with the Quaker Church and also supported the Northumberland Red Squirrel Group by trapping greys in the Wylam area.

His health steadily deteriorated and he spent most of the final three years of his life in either hospital or a nursing home. Colin died on 3 February. Despite the long struggle, he remained remarkably positive for much of the time and his gentle sense of humour was still evident even just before his death.

His life was celebrated with a Quaker Service at Mountsett Crematorium. It was the sort of day that Colin, when fit, would have enjoyed: cold, clear and with red kites circling overhead. It was attended by several of his former colleagues. Our condolences go to Chris and the rest of Colin’s family and, while we mourn the loss of a very dear friend, it is a relief that his struggles have come to an end.

Jim Lawrence (Retired RGS Staff)
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