

## “Whatever Happened to the Lower Thirds?”

So today the Head announced the passing of Third, Fourth and Fifth form etc. to be replaced by Year 9, Year 10 and Year 11 though he somewhat ruined the moment by then referring to the sixth form. Am I alone in regretting their passing? One of the pleasures of joining Taunton School 3 years ago was meeting again those phrases such as exehats, gated, dorms and prep. Is it so difficult to run two systems side by side?

I assume to help students avoid the feeling they were starting again at the bottom we originally labelled these years Lower Thirds, Upper Thirds, Lower Fourths (sometimes called The Remove), Upper Fourths, Fifths and Sixths. Bromsgrove School and no doubt many others still retain the terms. Billy Bunter at Greyfriars was in the Remove and reading about life at a privileged boarding school was immensely popular fiction. Enid Blyton's Famous Five when returning from boarding school would be immediately packed off to Rubadub with mum's retired governess Miss Pepper. Rubabdub was

conveniently located next to a secret submarine base. The parents meanwhile were cruising off to America, I can but assume to fix the latest drug deal to finance that sort of lifestyle. However if you're looking for the more up-to-date equivalent just turn to “Harry Potter”

I teach the Thirds (that's Year 9) to recognise the difference between one two three and first, second third. You get one two and three merits and you have six.

Come first second and third in the triathlon would you expect to be sixth overall? Probably not. The first are termed cardinals because they count, the second ordinals because they order. The top bit of a fraction are cardinals, the bottom bit ordinals<sup>#</sup>. Once you recognise they are “different things” fractions become easy. And yes we do switch between one and the other without really recognising it. Cancelling out an ordinal with a cardinal is actually a bit deep though in practice we never concern ourselves.

Are other modernising changes at Taunton School in the pipeline? – The Guvvy to be renamed Sixth form Common Room (no stop I mean Year 12/13 Common Room), exeats become passouts, the tuck shop “Confectionary Retail Outlet”.

And yes they do have to be explained to every new generation. In Dan Dare a midnight feast gets the Cadets in Dorm 7 gated by Professor Parax. “What does ‘gated’ mean” wails Lemo. “It means we must remain within the walls of Astral College for one earth month” says Samas the Treen. “O Lemo you are a Cryptosian clot” growls Zowie (an Atlantine).

But watch out teachers who may be bent on world domination on the side.

Professor Parax is outwitted by yet another Fiendish Five and in the end was sent for “a spell at the Venus Rehabilitation Centre”. Clearly Frank Hampson was an early woke.

Would our language be improved if we sifted out all the Greek and Latin words when perfectly adequate Anglo-Saxon ones were available. As my old

headmaster, Mr Woodward said - why use one syllable “Lift” when you can use four in “Elevator”.

Could the two terms could still be used in parallel – we use Year 9 10 and 11 when referring to matters of the curriculum, and third fourth fifth when alluding to social sporting and house matters. It would make a final with Bromsgrove School at lot simpler.

Long live the “Sixth Form Social”.

∞ Oct2010 rg.

*# A Maths Professor did subsequently point out to me this is not strictly correct. A fraction is in fact two cardinals standing in proportion.*