

LETTER TO THE OLD RENDCOMBIAN SOCIETY

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Old Rendcombian Society,

I am grateful for the invitation to join your Society, as a temporary member, until I vacate the post of Chairman of Governors in 1985. It is not only the personal sense of privilege which I value but membership also gives me the opportunity to write to you about Rendcomb's future, as well as to seek your advice and help as to how best we can make that future secure.

The very high academic standards, which have always been a feature of Rendcomb, are being maintained and even enhanced, as our most recent results amply demonstrate. This success, as you well know is attributable to the will to work which abounds at Rendcomb and to the ability, patience and integrity of the teaching staff. ' fly own observation and judgement leads me to believe that the balance, sense of values and maturity of those leaving Rendcomb, regardless of th^eir academic achievements, are quite exceptional.

But all life is becoming more complicated. The problem of unemployment is seriously afflicting Western Society. There is a danger too that demagoguery will overthrow rational discussion and that democratic centralism (the doctrine, becoming increasingly prevalent, that 'the common good' as decided by a Party Conference shall take precedence over all private and sectional interests) will destroy independent education altogether, or else render it so expensive that only the very rich, if there are any, will be able to afford it.

To the charge that Rendcomb produces an élite, I would not be ashamed to admit it. To me élites of all kinds are a condition of success for a modern nation, particularly a true democracy. Elitism and democracy are compatible and complementary; elitism and democracy serve each the cause of the other, democracy generating and fostering the different forms of élite, the élites serving and vitalising the democracy by preserving its dynamism.

I have always believed in 'the stone in the pond theory'. Rendcomb sends out into the world some 30-40 young men and women each year. The ripples which they will create, some big, others small, will surely help to wash away some of the mud from the encroaching banks of our increasingly problem strewn society.

I was first taught French by a Rendcomb scholar some 56 years ago and I met Sir David Wills, the son of our Founder, soon after. In the intervening period and especially over the last few years, I have come to define the four principal Rendcomb traditions as follows: -

Freedom from fear

The pursuit of excellence for its own sake and not for reward

A large measure of self-government

A classless community

Whether my analysis is right or wrong however one thing seems to me to stand out. The 'Rendcomb Experience' as I have come to call it, is founded on 'the rule: of conscience' so regrettably, except in places like Rendcomb, a diminishing aspect of today's society.

As I see it you cannot have a ceiling without a floor. The law of the land deals with the minimum standards of human conduct; and the instrument is punishment. Moral law, the rule of conscience,

depends upon teaching, training and exhortation. Our Founder, Noel Wills, put it very succinctly, "In youth, manners and points of view are modified continually and automatically by influences brought to bear upon the most sensitive thing in the world - the child mind". And those words, as I understand them, sum up the charge that Noel Wills laid upon all of us who, in any way, are privileged to be connected with Rendcomb.

Let me then, first, give some account of the Governors' stewardship since I took over as their Chairman.

With the increasing impact of inflation on all expenditure and thus on fees we have implemented the decision in principle, taken some years ago by my predecessor, to install a Bursar, a recently retired Commander of the Supply and Secretariat Branch of the Royal Navy. We have established a Finance and General Purposes Committee whose Chairman and most members reside locally and who therefore are in a position to react quickly to any questions of priority on which the Bursar may require guidance. With steadily rising costs continuous and- detailed study is essential if every penny is to be made to count. Although the fees are amongst the lowest of the H. M. C. Schools and there are only minimal extras they are now over £3,000 p.a.

With 90% of all knowledge in the world acquired in the last 40 years the options and choices within any curriculum continually multiply. We have therefore established: an 'Academic Advisory Panel' drawn from the universities of Oxford, Bath and Bristol under the Chairmanship of Lord Swann FRS, to visit Rendcomb, probably annually, and to advise the Headmaster and Governors on future trends in education. Thus, if these changes seem likely to involve expenditure the Governors may be apprised of what is required and make the necessary provision in good time.

As this letter is being written we are in the process of establishing a Future Policy Working Party with your Acting Chairman (Mr. Wood) as its Secretary. With his help we shall research the problems facing Rendcomb now and in the future and explore possible options which we may recommend to the Governors as desirable or essential in the best interests of the College.

We are considering an arrangement by which we can give 'leavers' experience of being interviewed for jobs. We are also planning (and here I hope I may have the full support of the OR Society when our plans have matured) to establish a register of people interested in Rendcomb who would be prepared to suggest possible openings or otherwise extend a 'lifeline' to those leaving Rendcomb OR ex-Rendcomb people leaving university who, in the increasingly hostile employment situation may have some difficulty in finding a job.

Under Bishop Bardsley's guidance and with the help of the Headmaster and College Chaplain we shall endeavour to fulfil the charge specifically placed upon the Governors by our Founder, to enhance the spiritual life of the College.

With the approval of the Trustees we have enlarged the Governing Body and this now consists of the following: -

Major P. D. Birchall CBE. DL. Chairman emeritus
 Vice Admiral Sir Louis Le Bailly KBE. CB. C. Eng.

Chairman of Governors

The Right Reverend Cuthbert Bardsley CBE
 Richard Clark Esq (5)
 Admiral Sir Richard Clayton GCB
 Charles Douglas-Home Esq
 The Right Hon. the Lord Dulverton CBE (1)
 H. U. G. Elwes Esq
 M. P. Fisher Esq (OR)
 Mrs. P. H. Gibbs
 P. N. H. Gibbs Esq (1) (3)
 Mrs. Michael Hughes-Hallett
 David Jenks Esq
 Torquil Norman Esq
 The Right Hon. the Lord Swann FRS (4)
 A. R. Tenty Esq (OR)
 The Right Hon. the Lord Wigram MC, OP, DL
 Sir David Wills CBE, TD, DL (1) (2)
 Major M. T. N. Wills (1)

- (1) Trustee
- (2) Chairman of Trustees
- (3) Chairman Finance and General Purposes Committee
- (4) Chairman Academic Advisory Panel
- (5) Chief Education Officer, Gloucestershire County Council

But when the chips are down it is more money that we need. Your personal generosity in the past, coupled with that of the first Lord Dulverton, and over the last three decades of the Dulverton Trust, as well as the continuous help from our Founder's Endowment and Sir David Wills has provided Rendcomb with up to date Laboratories, the Sports Hall, the renovated (and now nearly complete) Conservatory which will provide an Assembly Hall and Theatre, the swimming pool, squash and tennis courts as well of course as the numerous free and subsidised places. But we cannot stop there. As this is being written the Trustees are considering how they can extend No. 1. House and the Governors are seeking ways of increasing the classroom accommodation to name but two of the major works contemplated. This winter has wrought damage to the fabric and wear and tear is continuous and heavy. As the Governors have to raise the fees to cope with inflation and salary increases so the financial burden of the scholarships carried by the Trustees of the Endowment mounts. I know it is too early to launch another Appeal; and anyway we are all feeling the pinch.

Soon after I took over as Chairman I was struck by the extraordinary and quite unsolicited generosity of neighbours of the College, parents, Old Boys and others who have faith in the 'Rendcomb Experience' as a steady and stabilising influence in society. Their gifts have ranged from £25 to, in one case, a Covenant of £300 p.a. for seven years, with several more in the hundreds, in between. These have enabled us to purchase a few items which, albeit reluctantly, the Governors were inclined to feel, at the moment, we could not afford such as the replacement of the Film Projector which has served generations of Rendcombians and which has been showing distinct signs of anno domini. (In this connection I have just heard of the gift of (the equally necessary) new Projection Screen by the OR Society for which, on behalf of the Governors and the College may I say how grateful we are).

All this generosity gave me the idea of writing to a number of Banks and Firms who I know set aside money each year for charitable

causes which they feel worthwhile. In doing so I felt that a stark appeal for money would not be enough. I therefore tried to set out, at some length, the particular merits of Rendcomb, including its long tradition of subsidising those whose parents could not otherwise afford to send their children to an independent school. An aspect which was as close to our Founder's heart as it is to the wishes of the present Trustees of his endowment. I am sure that you will agree that such should be a primary, though not necessarily the only charge, on any monies we raise.

All this is a rather slow and laborious business because, although my 'message' is the same in each case, I have rejected the idea of a circular and have tried to 'tailor' each letter to the particular recipient. However, in one way or another, several thousand pounds have been forthcoming and this is sufficient, in my view, to recommend to my Governor colleagues, (who have agreed) the establishment of a 'Friends of Rendcomb Fund' into which all such gifts, solicited or unsolicited, large or small, cash or covenants can be deposited.

The question of the disposal of these assets is one that we shall be discussing. I am sure that Noel Wills' wish would have been to help those who otherwise could not afford Rendcomb: but he also wrote "the few simple embellishments to life, which adults seem to require as a matter of course, (should also) most emphatically be provided for the benefit of the young" and to that aspect too we shall pay attention.

Like painting the Forth Bridge my attempts to build up the 'Friends of Rendcomb Fund' will be a never ending one. However, there will come a moment when I have 'touched' all my friends and all my contacts and I would greatly welcome any suggestions as to further fields which might be tilled in the interests of Rendcomb; and these can be sent to me either through Mr. Glennie or Mr. Wood.

Needless to say, if any Old Rendcombian should be the fortunate winner of a football pool or draw a premium bond or back a winner 'The Friends of Rendcomb Fund' will constitute a bottomless pit into which any contribution however large or small can be cast, and most willingly and gratefully received.

In the other and equally important field of achieving a full high quality annual intake to Rendcomb I hope I may have your ardent support in advertising the merits of the College as widely as you are able. These are hard and difficult times for us all but from what I have seen in the last couple of years the 'Rendcomb Experience' prepares young men and women for the cold world outside; in a way which few schools in the maintained or independent section of our national education system could equal. And I hope you will say so.

For their part the Governors are determined to proceed on the lines I have indicated in this letter but we shall always welcome any advice or suggestions which may help towards the continued security of Rendcomb and the application of our Founder's vision to the difficult problems which face us all.



Chairman of Governors

17th March 1982



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INFORMATION SERVICE

ISIS ASSOCIATION

National Headquarters:

26 Caxton Street, London SW1H 0RG. Tel: 01-222 0065/7353

FREEDOM IS UNDER FIRE

Dear Parent,

I am inviting you to join the ISIS Association for friends and supporters of independent schools. At present it has about 25,000 members and is growing rapidly. However, to be really effective as a pressure group, the Association needs more funds and at least 100,000 members.

Why should you join? A future Labour Government intends to abolish independent education within 10 years. They will also put VAT on school fees. It would be foolish to gamble that they will not win the next election or the one after that.

Supporters of independent education are therefore needed to help the ISIS Association mount an effective public relations campaign to combat these proposals.

As a member of the ISIS Association you will receive termly the ISIS Newsletter which will keep you well informed of the progress of the campaign in support of the schools. It will explain how you can help further, should you wish to do so. When you join, you will receive a booklet setting out the main facts in defence of independent schools and about their value to the nation. Other ISIS leaflets will be sent to you as they are published.

The subscription is only £5 a year - less than 10p a week (£7 for overseas members). It helps greatly if you can join by Bankers' Order and save administration costs. Just fill in the form below and return it to the ISIS Association, If you are already a member, please ignore this letter and continue to support the Association.

Yours sincerely,

Director of National ISIS