

## An Old Boy of St Mary's Hall

I am always surprised to come across boys' names when reading through our archived items. Most recently I was reading some information about the 1949 Prize-giving (which we have added to our website Items of Interest) and saw one Simon Standage mentioned.

**Heather Johnson (Heald, 1948-57)** was also looking at this and commented that *"Simon Standage got two prizes. He was in my form with Miss Foster as our teacher. He went on to become a well-known violinist, particularly of baroque music. I often hear him playing on Classic FM. My memory of him was that he was always playing the violin. Also he came to my birthday parties, my claim to fame!"*

As you may imagine this piqued my interest and that of our web-editor, Lis Eastham (Ferguson, 1969-76) who tracked down an email address for Simon and made contact with him. The end result of this is that we have enrolled our first Old Boy into the Association. Simon was very pleased to hear from us and we have put him in touch with a couple of his contemporaries who may be able to remember more about the time they shared at school before he left (boys were only at SMH in the 'preparatory' years).

We are very fortunate that his mother has kept Simon's 'Progress Book' which he kindly shared with us with the observations: "I can see in the photographs that I am wearing a school tie on both my sixth and seventh birthdays. In the photograph of me on my 7th birthday (November 8th 1948) I am holding a quarter-size violin on which I had started having lessons (from Miss Ivy Palmer) that year. In 1949 I took my first exams in the Easter term and came top of the form. I also took part in the Brighton Musical Festival. I left St Mary's that year to go to Belmont school in Hassocks.

I do have vague recollections of birthday parties, of a painting of a moorhen on the classroom wall and of a feeling of injustice when, in a spelling test, I spelt "often" as "offen" because that is how the teacher pronounced it.

We were able to find this extract from 1949's newsletter which shows how Miss Palmer's teaching had inspired not only Simon but other children.

The Violin Classes, started by Miss Ivy Palmer last year have proved very successful and most of the pupils have now reached the stage when solo lessons are necessary. We hope before long to have some concerted work which will lead eventually to the formation of a School Orchestra. I have never been able to understand why more parents do not encourage their children to study a stringed instrument. The playing of the piano has become so universal that to many parents the study of music means merely "playing the piano."

The study of a stringed instrument opens up a much wider range of musical literature. Further, it is such excellent musical training; one cannot play a stringed instrument without listening, and this habit of listening is going to make the student more intelligent towards, and appreciative of, the music she hears in future years. String-players, too, soon have the joy of making music together, a joy that cannot be found in mere solo work. And when school is over, there is more encouragement to keep up the playing of a violin, viola, or a 'cello, because of the possibility, even in small centres, of joining amateur orchestras, or groups of chamber music enthusiasts, where another stringed instrument is always welcome. We shall need more stringed instruments for our orchestra, but it is not for that reason chiefly that I am stressing the importance of strings. I stress it because it is such good musical training. We should advise such training only for girls who have a good ear for music, and we have a large proportion of such girls in this School. It does seem a pity, and very short-sighted of parents, that more of these musical children are not given an opportunity to take part in this wider musical life.

I found, and sent Simon, the extract from his entry in the school register and established that boys named Richard Gibbs, John Ormerod, Sidney Scammell, and Richard Coppack are in the same register and within a year of him in age. Listed near to Simon was Janet Jones (Summerscale, 1947-53) who I have also put in touch with Simon.

Those who wish to know more about **Simon Standage (1947-49)** can find this on the website of the Royal Academy of Music <https://www.ram.ac.uk/about-us/staff/simon-standage> .