

## OBITUARY FOR DON WOODMAN [KGS 1922-1929 and Staff]

From the publication Jabberwock, October 1987

Donald W J Woodman, BEM, MBE, was born in July 1911. He was a pupil at Kilburn Grammar School from 1922 to 1929. He graduated from Kings College, London, with a first class honours degree in Classics in 1932.

He taught at the King Edward VI School at Bury St Edmunds from 1933 until 1936 and then returned to KGS as a master.

At the start of the war he was in charge of two sections of the school when part of it was evacuated to Northampton. He taught Latin and Religious Education.

In 1942 he joined the Navy and served on HMS Liverpool from 1942 to 1943 at which time he was awarded the MBE. He then served on HMS Tracker for the next two years at which time he was awarded the BEM. On demobilisation he returned to Kilburn and was later appointed Headmaster of Portadown College in Co Armagh, where he remained until his retirement in 1973.

During his period as Headmaster this co-educational Grammar School with under 200 pupils grew to an eventual size of 800-1000 pupils.

Sadly he passed away on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

*[Editor: This article is an extract which is reproduced here with permission from The Society of Friends of the Fleet Arm Museum.]*

## APPRECIATIONS OF DON WOODMAN

By **E W Rhodes** [KGS Staff 1928-1959]

From *Kilburnian* 120, Autumn 1946

Don left us at the end of last summer term to become Head of Portadown College in Northern Ireland. It is right that boys of our school and their parents should know the very grievous loss we have sustained.

I first met him in 1928 when I came to KGS. He was then Head Boy and Captain of Ratcliff House. He would enter a form-room and say to those assembled, "*All out – at once!*", and lo! the exit was quickly and discreetly made! From the first, he was the embodiment of keenness and threw himself wholeheartedly into every activity of school life. He may not have been the most skilful player in the game of cricket or football, but his spirit and his will-power trebled his worth to the side. Twice a week in summer he called forth his "Ratcliff runners". When **Mr Ware** was about to leave, and the boys comforted him with the gift of an easy chair, it was DWJW who "orated" with much wit and affection, much fluency and fervour. In his speaking of Othello's lines, too, there was a fire and a fluency foreshadowing his future style as prophet and teacher.

After a period at the University, where he gained a First in Classics, and a sojourn at the boarding school of Bury St Edmunds, he returned to his old school. **Mr McLeish** had died and **Dr Anthony** was in charge.

Mr Woodman's services (the reader will have gleaned that he was a man of abounding energy) were a priceless acquisition to the school. It is undeniable that Christianity and the Christian Ethic live and thrive and propagate only through direct and dynamic example. Such is Mr Woodman's contribution. His is the faith which permeates every minute of the working day.



He is worldly wise too. He realises that the rubber slipper makes an important contribution to the militant aspect of Christianity. Above all, he realises the great importance of games; that the unflinching battle of chivalrous teams, the stern give-and-take of the games-field are the very essence of life.

Indeed, his conception of a leader's functions is not so much that he shall direct and cheer from the touch-line, nor that, participating, he shall form the spear-head of the attack, but rather that he should get down in the second row of the scrum – and shove.

His impact on the social side of the school was nowhere more manifest than his work with the Junior Dramatic Society. His production of one-act plays was brilliant. The contagion and enthusiasm of the Middle School was colossal, as evidenced both in the many huge audiences and in the inspired cast as well as in those who “wagged one end of the thunder” and “rattled the rain” in the wings.

He and I fell out over that subject of dogma. I am not sure how I stand with him and his conscience, even now, cleaving as I do to the tenet that Intelligence is the end-point of Evolution and not the beginning. But I am sure that his tolerance would rehabilitate many of his heretics who, after all, agree with him on the other 99 points.

Then came the war and the exodus of KGS to a town in the Midlands. Mr Woodman, who had always wished to be a missionary, found in the new situation at Northampton an opportunity to sustain the spirit of the school by his gifts and his eloquence, first at the town and County School, then in a Church Hall at Abington, and finally in the ten-roomed house opposite the Barratt factory, later named Youth House.

Here I may be permitted to touch on the curious fact that boys, generally, did not know his first name and, guessing, called him “Doug”. In the dedication ceremony at Youth House he was referred to first as Mr Woodward and later as Mr Wooderson. My whispered correction must have gone astray, for the speaker wound up by saying, “I am sure we all wish Mr Woodchuck every success in his venture.

In Youth House were housed the School Library and much of the school furniture; at the Empire Hall close by was a piano and the gymnasium apparatus. It became a club for boys and girls. Innumerable society meetings, dances and socials were held, the central core being supplied by the divine service.

Mr Woodman had many staunch friends who realised that only a man of independent spirit can do anything worthwhile. Others took different views. The success which attends a good educator or a progressive school breeds suspicion. The small-minded do not understand and, for that reason, they fear. The ungenerous in spirit hold aloof and feign contempt. A successful leader has popularity and power, a two-fold cause of jealousy. Carried to extremes, this negativism will destroy, as does the Evil Spirit in Faust who says, “*Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint*”.

I doubt whether, outside the small circle who understand Youth House and what it meant, and who appreciate the devotion of Mr Woodman, dedicating as he did every fibre of his being, yes, much of his worldly goods, to its continuance – whether the Club was ever wholly appreciated. To many members, of course, it was the unique experience of their lives.

When Mr Woodman joined the Navy as Wireless Telephonist, it was a foregone conclusion that many were destined to benefit physically, mentally and spiritually through his work, as, indeed, they did. Wherever he is, his work will go from strength to strength.

To conclude. When young Don came to KGS, he respected it for what it was – the product of generations of genuine devotion to education. He not only appreciated the discipline it gave, the keenness, the loyalty and spirit of co-operation it showed, but he deepened all these through his own efforts, whose influence now forms an abiding corner-stone of the edifice.

[Editor: The above article is slightly abridged. The full version can be found in the archives. Go to the Members Only page, then select OBA Memorabilia, then Obituaries and Appreciations.]

**Further appreciation by Gunter Helft [KGS 1935-1941]**

Reprinted from *Kilburnian* 102, Spring 1940

Mr Woodman had a scheme for the welfare of secondary school evacuees from Kilburn Grammar School. He planned to run a Youth House where boys and girls could work, play and meet friends in after-school hours. He explained that the advantages of such a centre, to the evacuees and the foster-parents would be obvious. The children would no longer be exposed to the boredom in the billets or mischief in the streets.

Suitable premises were acquired at Kingsthorpe and it had manifold activities. There were games, physical training, socials, study and special services on Sundays. The scheme was backed by the Middlesex County Council and Mr Woodman had to appeal for furniture and games equipment for the house. This appeal was successful and the scheme has become a wonderful reality.

Youth House has become the second home of Kilburnians. They are able to play and work and all of the promised activities can be carried out to the fullest extent.

No professional journalist could have praised Mr Woodman as much as he deserves. Before the realisation of Youth House, he had earned an immense popularity for his tremendous enthusiasm and energy. Now that the scheme is up and running, he shows sincere interest in the problems of each individual boy, in the difficult circumstances of being away from home. Youth House has infinitely increased his popularity with everyone.

Kilburnians will never be able to thank Mr Woodman enough for what he has done for us. Meanwhile, we can show our appreciation by treating Youth House, Mr Woodman's home, with the respect it deserves.