



Newsletter Autumn 2019/Spring 2020.

I had good intentions to write a newsletter over the Christmas period but somehow it didn't happen and then I was into organising this year's schedule. With the benefit of hindsight, I should have done the newsletter. The virus has put paid to all Medusa operations up to the end of May and probably beyond that. At present we have been asked to stay away from the marina; the staff there are keeping an eye on things and two of our team who are within walking distance are checking up on her weekly. We have still had to pay berthing, insurance, certification, life raft and lifejacket maintenance and a host of other things but with no prospect of any income. Ever since the refit in 2010 we have broken even or showed a small surplus on operations but, unless something changes, we will make a loss of about £10K this year. We are better off than many charities, even large ones, in that we have a cash reserve, but this year will deplete it significantly.

As I write this, we should have been lifting out of the water at Saxon Wharf for our annual maintenance visit. April weather can be fickle but today, and the week, are warm and sunny. It would have been perfect!

The good news is that, on the last ring round, the Medusa team are all safe and well. I hope it stays that way, but we have a long way to go yet before we are over this thing.

The newsletters usually follow the chronology of what we have done since the last one; this time, for a change, I will look at the various aspects of what we do and illustrate them with a few examples. Medusa demands a lot of our time and attention to maintain and operate her but there are many other things going on that can sometimes pass unnoticed.

Research.

It would be easy to believe that after 75 years we would know all there is to know about Medusa's history, however new information keeps on appearing. A lead from D-Day 75 took me to a database in the US called Fold3. Surprisingly this holds a lot of admiralty documents that can't be found on this side of the Atlantic and this has yielded some new material. In the National Archive at Kew there are a series of books, published weekly through the war, called the Red Books; these cover minor war vessels while the Pink Books cover major ones. Medusa is listed in each edition but often it just says which command she is under. Nevertheless, it gives a timeline upon which to hang the various stories we have. Sadly, her logbooks up to 1960 were destroyed; those from 1960-65 are in Kew.

Medusa, movements 1944/5

Information extracted from "Red books" held in ADM208/22 onwards.

2 Jan 44- 30 Jan 44	Poole
30 Jan 44	Portsmouth
6 Feb 44	"
13 Feb 44	Ardrishaig
20 Feb 44	On passage to Falmouth
27 Feb 44- 17 April 44	Falmouth fitting out
20 Apr 44	On passage Portsmouth
30 Apr 44	Left Portsmouth 27 Apr for Plymouth
14 May 44	Plymouth with 1383, administered by SO Force O. Part of 11 th ML flotilla (118, 153, 163, 187, 189, 193, 194, 214, 230, 304, 448, 907, 1383, 1387)
21 May 44	"
28 May 44	Left Plymouth 27 May
18 June 44	Portsmouth Command 149 ML Flotilla
25 June 44	as above (MLs 1295, 1309, 1383, 1387, 1389, 1391, 1392, 1407, 1409, 1415, 1416, 1421, 1422.
2 July 44	Falmouth with 1383
9 July 44 – 17 Sept 44	Portsmouth
24 Sep 44	flotilla dispersed along S Coast, several in repairs, Poole, Dover and Southend.
1 Oct 44	Detached duty Granton (Edinburgh)
12 Nov 44	M/S Aux Group 185 (1387, St Olive and Windward Ho)
19 Nov 44	Group 185, Granton
3 Dec 44	On passage to Sheerness
10 Dec 44	Sheerness
24 Dec 44- 4 Feb 45	Queenborough
11 Feb 45	Operating from Sheerness
8 Apr 45	In Gillingham for repairs to complete 16 Apr
15 Apr-24 June 45	Operating Sheerness

We have a recording from her wartime captain which describes Operation Fabius on 3 May 1944, her D-Day role, minesweeping in Scotland and her passage to Holland in the closing days of the war. In Fold3 she gets several mentions in war diaries which place her as sailing from Falmouth to Plymouth on 16th May 1944 and then departing 27 May for Portland.

Her D-Day orders required her to be at the point on the edge of the minefield early evening of the 4th June from which we can infer that she left Portland in the early hours of the 4th. She was then recalled as D-Day was postponed and sheltered in Weymouth Bay before setting off again in the early hours of the 5th.

Her orders then required her to return to Portsmouth on the 7th. We have a number of harrowing stories of her being close in on Omaha beach and one of her being in collision with a US vessel off Omaha but, until now, no primary source written evidence that she was there. Fold3 provided the log of the vessel that she was in collision with.

The vessel in question was SC-1354, a subchaser much like a Fairmile B (110 feet long). Her log on 10 June 1944 records that at 1717 "HMS ML1387 drifted into our bow. No damage resulted". The position was 49 degrees 25 minutes North, 000 Degrees 41 Minutes West which is just off Omaha beach. This is a tremendous find as it means we can prove that Medusa was off Omaha beach on D+4 and that the stories we have can be pinned to a piece of documentary evidence.

Similarly, there are mentions in the war diaries of Medusa at Ijmuiden, specifically taking part in Operation Fireball and then sailing for Sheerness on 6 June 1945.

There is a book to be written but it needs another year of lockdown.

Website.

The website www.hmsmedusa.org.uk combines a record of Medusa's present activity, her history and a database with the history of all 464 HDMLs that were completed. The database element came from Brian Holmes, our sadly departed cox'n. Brian would provide an annual update to the database and this was used to update the online version. After Brian's sudden death, I recovered a hard drive from his flat before the house clearance people moved in. The trouble was, it needed a line by line comparison with the on-line version to determine if it was earlier, the same, or later than the on line one. This arduous task has now been done so that we now have a new master copy. I have been through nearly five years e mails (some 100,000) to pick out any new information and add that to the database. This is virtually complete and will soon be ready to replace the present on-line version.

With a little bit of time on my hands, the home page and the Medusa history sections of the website have been rewritten and brought up to date. The Medusa history is now in the form of a narrative rather than a series of facts.

The website is regarded as the definitive history of HDMLs and has resulted in contact from several film companies wishing to use Medusa. Hardly a week goes by without a query or new information from families of former HDML crew.

Filming.

With a bit of spare time, I shall watch the Dunkirk film again and spot our 30 seconds of glory. Since then, though, we have appeared in several TV programmes. Woodcut Media produced "Ships that saved D-Day" and Medusa formed half of one episode. Channel 4 produced "Dunkirk: the forgotten heroes" about the 51st Highland Division. Some amazing CGI showed Medusa coming through shell fire with shells landing all around her.



This spring we had another day filming with Woodcut for a series to be shown later this year "WW2 secret histories". Once the present crisis is over, the National Museum of the Royal Navy want to do sound recording on board to form the soundscape to be used on their Tank Landing Craft LCT7074 which is to be exhibited at the D-Day museum at Southsea. Filming work is quite demanding on ship and crew but is often good for the coffers.

Maintenance and projects.

Over the winter a great deal has been done to Medusa both inside and out. A major project was to strip the paint from the chartroom exterior to bare wood and then to treat it with cloth and resin. We had found that the effect of sun and cold on the timber caused cracking in the paint and, consequently, water ingress. No amount of sanding filling and repainting seemed to work so this was the radical solution. The work was started by our shipwright, Steve, but, unfortunately, he had a fall at work and shattered his heel bone. Mercifully he is on the mend now after surgery, but it meant that the work had to be completed by Medusa volunteers who have done a brilliant job. Virtually all the exterior has been painted to a high standard over the winter and there won't be a great deal to do before we are smart and operational.



Port side of the chartroom, cloth and resin covered.



Front and starboard side, all complete.



Bridge wing compass with azimuth ring.

Mike Dingle has turned his spare bedroom into a workshop and has done all sorts of fiddly jobs to a high standard. All the Kent Clearviews work properly and he has stripped and rebuilt the bridge wing compasses. This last job was a real labour of love.



Any colour you like as long as its grey

The new dinghy is now resplendent in grey with a smart new canvas cover and sitting on new chocks. One day we will see if it floats. The old was beyond restoration and now resides above the bar in Trinity's at Haslar restaurant.

Inside, the decks have been painted and a new hatch formed outside of the forward heads to access a part of the bilge we could not get to. The PO's mess has a new bookcase and cupboard unit and a small table remade. The radio room is coming along but there is still plenty to do in there.



Cabinet in PO's mess

A February task each year is to go through the list of items that must be serviced in order to get our MCA operating certificate. The lifejackets go ashore to be serviced, similarly the liferaft and a huge checklist of items gone through pre survey. We usually pass survey without comment but that is all

down to the preparation we put in. This is now complete, and we have our operating certificate for the year.

Usually in April we lift out for a week at Saxon Wharf but this year the yard is closed due to the virus. It might be that we lift out later in the year or, possibly, just use divers to replace the anodes. The long period of inactivity has allowed loads of seaweed to grow around the waterline so, whatever happens, we have some gardening to do before we can move.



2019 lift out.

We have leased a container at Gosport Marina nearby and are collecting all the Medusa bits that are scattered around sheds and garages. Soon there will be shelving in the container and we can start to sort things out. In the longer term we hope to get some storage from the Royal Navy Museum to whom we are affiliated but this at least gets the ball rolling.

Outreach

For as long as I have been involved with Medusa, we have pondered how to get young people interested and part of the team. Most people joining the team are retired with time and skills to offer. Younger people have many demands on their time, school, university, work family etc so can't really make a commitment. The last two years we have turned things around by going to them and have formed a relationship with Warsash and Gosport Sea Cadets, several CCF sections and Portsmouth University. We have given talks on Medusa at their locations as well as having groups on board for training and sea days. A grant from BAE systems last year helped with the cost of this and we are waiting to hear if the grant will be renewed this year.

Three years ago, a group of students from Portsmouth University built a box that takes in GPS signals and converts them to Decca such that our 1960s Decca Navigator works again, and we can navigate with it. As the real Decca transmitters closed down in 1993, that makes Medusa the only vessel in the world with that capability. This year another group is investigating the ultrasonic beacon that

Medusa used for positioning on D-Day and plan to build and test one at sea. We shall be able to assess how hard it is to maintain position by listening to the beacon.



Mk IV Decca and the magic box.

Events

The highpoint of last year has to be D-Day 75. We started out with two days alongside the new pontoons meeting veterans and hosted a table at a lunch for them.



Hearing a veteran's story first-hand

From there we went to Ouistreham and were alongside for an event hosted by the Mayor. On the evening of the 5th June we went up the canal and spent the 6th moored immediately below Pegasus bridge within a stone's throw of where the gliders landed in the early hours of the 6th. There was a lack of bollards to make fast to, in the end two 'no parking' signs sufficed. We were kept busy as the ship was very popular; we totalled 480 visitors that day alone.



Medusa at Pegasus bridge 6th June 2019

An early morning passage, still dark, took us back to Ouistreham and then on to Grandcamp Maisy. The entrance is over a drying rock plateau, so timing is everything. Once in the tiny fishing harbour coming alongside is a delicate operation. We berth on a hammerhead which is fragile and only 18 inches wide. Its awkward at the best of times but, on this occasion, the local mayor, civic dignitaries and two bagpipers were arranged along the hammerhead pontoon. One gentle tap and the whole lot would have gone in the harbour. All went well except that the noise of the pipes made bridge to deck communication impossible.



French school children aboard at Grandcamp Maisy.

From Grandcamp Maisy, we made passage to Cherbourg and had a little bit of down time before heading for St Peter Port. Passing through the Alderney race was lumpy with a very confused sea causing Medusa to leap around a bit. At St Peter Port we had visits from the local Sea Cadet Unit

and the Combined Cadet Force. We took the CCF group to Sark and back. Outbound, we went north up the Big Russel and the cadets experienced some wind over tide lumpiness; buckets were needed. We came south about on the way back and had a calm passage.



Medusa at Sark



CCF cadets at St Peter Port

The reception we had in the Channel Islands was magnificent and we are all looking forward to a return visit. Sadly, it won't be in 2020 as planned for the liberation 75th but hopefully in 2021. After fuelling at St Sampson, we headed back across the channel to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight. Conditions were not ideal for the crossing with a quartering sea which set up a corkscrewing motion and made helming a challenge.

Notable in our year was our participation in SQUADEX where we joined the First Patrol Boat Squadron and manoeuvre in formation with 16 other vessels. The weather was not kind and it was a real challenge to keep station but we did not embarrass ourselves. This year, for the first time, a diamond pattern formation was formed. Medusa was centre of the diamond with the other vessels formed around her and taking position from her. I am sure this is the first time she has flown G flag (flown by the guide vessel) since coming out of naval service and maybe even ever. It was a proud moment, and I am personally grateful for the trust placed in us by the Royal Navy.



In formation, Medusa in the centre.



First Patrol Boat Squadron and FOST visiting Medusa.

Our final event of the year is the Remembrance service at Hornet. The weather was kind this year and Medusa had plenty of visitors.

Crew training.

An important aspect of what we do is keeping up our skills in operating the vessel in a safe and professional manner. This year we went to the Hamble and berthed on the harbour master's pier. The plan was to use the mid river pontoon to practise alongsides, however the weather had other ideas and gave us 40+ knots of wind "wind off". After two tries which might have worked had we had a shore party, we headed for the Itchen and a more sheltered spot. This allowed Robin, Mark and John several alongsides each plus some manoeuvring. This is all part of broadening the experience of handling Medusa.

The other aspect we practised was working through scenarios such as loss of steering, man overboard, anchoring and medical emergency. These weekends are an annual event and there is a new list of scenarios for this year.

The social scene

The team put in an enormous amount of effort each year and it's important to recognise and celebrate that. We have two events of a social nature each year (paid for by the individuals, no Trust donations are used for this); a BBQ mid-year and a Trafalgar Night dinner. Trafalgar night falls close to Medusa's anniversary of her launch on 20 October 1943 so both are celebrated together. It's also an opportunity to invite some guests who have supported us through the year.

The BBQ is on the lightship at Haslar and is intended for families as well as crew members and includes trips round the harbour which are always popular.



Trafalgar Night dinner.



A pre-Christmas beer; Steve, Barry, Ed and Sam.

And finally..

I had intended doing a roundup of the remaining HDMLs but an e mail from a former pupil of Medusa's wartime captain, Arthur Maurice Liddiard (known as Maurice) altered my plan and below is his story. The first part is my research and the second the story from his pupil; it paints an interesting picture of the man. I have found there is a Liddiard family history group and through them, I hope to make contact with his children. The HDML roundup will be in the next newsletter.



Medusa photo on her commissioning December 1943, Maurice, front row left.

Arthur Maurice Liddiard. 1913-1994

Arthur Maurice Liddiard (known as Maurice) was born on 5 December 1913 at Romford In Essex to parents Arthur Liddiard and Emily Eleanor Liddiard (nee Twydell). Arthur was a Master Stationer, and Maurice initially followed him into this trade being listed as a "Law stationer typing" in 1939.

The family lived in Ilford Essex.

Little is known about his early life but it can be inferred he had an interest in boats and the sea in that he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. His initial service was as a rating and he trained as a telegraphist.

In January 1940 he married Maud D Bailey at Ilford in Essex. They had a daughter, Frances, in October 1944 and a son, Stephen J, in October 1946.

At some point early in WW2 Maurice was called up and was at sea on Fairmile B vessels as a telegraphist. He was selected for officer training and went to HMS King Alfred (Brighton) to train. This was a hard regime, and many failed for not displaying Officer Like Qualities (OLQs). Maurice was well educated and well-spoken so fitted the mould.

Maurice is first listed in the Navy List in April 1943 as a Temporary Acting Sub Lieutenant with a seniority (promotion date) of 22 January 1943. In August 1943 he is listed as being on ML1140, an HDMU like Medusa, as first officer. HDMUs carried two officers, two petty officers and eight ratings. The captain is listed as Temporary Lieutenant S F Kendall RNVR. Maurice is listed on ML1140 in the October and December lists.

The February 1944 lists show Maurice in command of ML1387 (later named HMS Medusa) with Temp Act Sub Lt F R P Cox as his second in command. Maurice remained with Medusa through the war and was promoted Lt on 1 Feb 1945.

The remaining crew members from then have all spoken warmly of their captain. He was a good seaman and was highly regarded both professionally and as a person. It contrasted with their view of Peter Cox who was not well liked and suffered from sea sickness. There are numerous stories about him, mainly involving alcohol, but one is telling in that Medusa had to move berth while up in Scotland. Maurice was on leave and Peter Cox contacted him as he was not confident to do it.

Through the war, the history of Medusa and Maurice's story are one and the same.

Medusa went up to Scotland to work up at HMS St Christopher and then to Falmouth for fitting of special equipment for D-Day. She was present at the second exercise at Slapton Sands, exercise Fabius, in May 1944. This was terminated early due to adverse weather and Medusa went into Dartmouth to berth alongside a Fairmile B. This turned out to be the very vessel that Maurice had served on as a telegraphist. One can only imagine what it meant to him to board his old vessel and be greeted as a commanding officer when he had left it as a rating.

Medusa left Portland on the 4th June to take up position on the edge of the minefield of the French coast. She turned back and sheltered in Weymouth bay when D-Day was postponed by a day before proceeding and finding her station early evening of the 5th June.

This exercise called for precise navigation in very poor weather. Medusa had nearly a double crew on board. In response to a question where they all slept, Maurice answered that he had no idea as he did not leave the bridge.

The task Medusa had was to mark a precise spot and act as a homing beacon for the minesweepers to go forward and clear a swept channel and then stay on that spot for the invasion fleet to home. The consequences of getting it wrong would have been enormous with the invasion fleet sailing into a minefield rather than the cleared channel. To help with the task the ship carried the latest electronic navigation equipment (Outfit QM, later called Decca Navigator).

Post D-Day Medusa escorted convoys back and forth across the channel. A few days after D-Day a massive storm swept through the channel; Medusa took shelter off Juno beach but struck an underwater object and damaged the ASDIC dome. The forward part of the vessel flooded and she was in danger of sinking. The easy option would have been to beach her but that would have been the end of her.

Medusa made her way back across the channel to Portsmouth with the fore section flooded and pumping continuously to keep her afloat. In Portsmouth she was repaired and went back into service. It says a lot of the character of Maurice in that he did everything he could to save his ship and not take the easy option. It may be coincidence but an ASDIC dome like Medusa's with damage consistent with hers, was dredged up during the dredging of the harbour for the new carrier, Queen Elizabeth. The dome has been preserved and is now in the Museum of the Royal Navy.

Post D-Day, Medusa went to Rosyth and acted as escort to a minesweeping squadron. It was during this period that Maurice had some leave and the date ties in with the birth of his first child, Frances.

Maurice was promoted to Lieutenant on 1st February 1945 and received a Mention in Despatches for the D-Day role (Gazetted 19/12/1944)

Medusa was posted to Chatham early 1945 and in May 1945 was tasked with going across to the Dutch port of Ijmuiden to assess the condition of the port facilities. Medusa arrived and found the port still in German hands. The date is probably 6 May 1945 as the surrender of Holland was signed

the following day. The port garrison surrendered to Medusa and she held the port until the Canadians turned up two days later.

The final wartime task for Medusa was to go to William Osborne's yard in October 1945 to be refitted for a new role with the Royal Navy Reserve. Maurice left her at this point and shortly after returned to civilian life.

He trained as a teacher and taught in his home area of Essex at Loxford County Secondary School. Some recollections by a former pupil are below and say much about the person. Maurice published a book of school plays "Captain Key and other plays", MacMillan 1958.

For many years Maurice had no idea that his old command was still afloat but the then skipper, Mike Boyce, traced him and he came back aboard in the year of the 50th anniversary of D-Day, 1994.

Maurice told his story which was broadcast on TVS (Television South, the ITV channel) as well as a taped interview. The story is told in precise, factual, unassuming terms. Maurice comes through as a quietly spoken, very competent but modest man.

By the time he came aboard, Maurice was very ill with terminal cancer. He died in October 1994 in Eastbourne, Sussex.



Maurice aboard his old command 1994

From a former pupil:



*Maurice at
Loxford 1961*

Following his significant role in the Royal Navy during the Second World War, as commander of the Medusa, Arthur Maurice Liddiard took on a highly effective teaching role in a local state school.

Loxford County Secondary School was a Council school for boys aged eleven to sixteen. It was housed in an impressive and typical Victorian/Edwardian building of two storeys, surrounded on all sides by hard-surface playgrounds. A large Sports Hall plus 2-storey Science and Arts block (with a cinema in its basement), and a smaller but long single-storey craft block containing separate workshops for woodwork and metalwork, occupied sites within the school perimeter on either side of the main building. The school had the traditional railings all round.

The front of the school faced onto Eton Road, the back onto Staines Road, and on one side, behind the Art & Science block was Oxford Road, and at the back of the workshops was Woodlands Primary School and beyond that Harrow Road. This was in the Loxford Ward of Ilford, which was initially part of Essex County (now subsumed within the Greater London expansion). The school was situated in a very densely populated urban area, with the Loxford ward of south Ilford being one of the poorest in the borough.

Loxford Park was close by, only a matter of yards down Oxford Road, and the open space there was used for sport, athletics and tennis in the park courts.

It was generally considered a poorly rated school. The Mount School for Girls, further west towards Barking, was the sister school to the boys' Loxford. Despite its reputation, it managed to attract some 'interesting' and able teachers. Maurice Liddiard stood out amongst their company, though George Little (music), Mr Hutchins (Woodwork and Technical Drawing), and Ted Blake (Gymnastics: he was an important trampoline pioneer) were also noteworthy. The majority of pupils left at age fifteen, though the school managed to maintain a small but healthy Form 4S and a Fifth Form for those wanting to stay on for A-level exams. I think Liddiard and Hutchins shared form teacher responsibility for the 4S and Fifth classes. (I had Mr Hutchins.) The Head, for the time that I was there, was the excellent Eric Lower.

I started at Loxford mid-1949, leaving, I suppose, in 1954. Maurice Liddiard took English and Drama. It was obvious to everyone that he was in a class way above all the other teachers. He himself had 'class'. His bearing and presentation revealed a man easy to call a gentleman. Softly spoken, very much at ease with himself and everyone around him (staff and pupils), erudite, highly intelligent, witty, engaging, passionate about learning and about literature, but never pompous or over-bearing, never 'putting on airs', hard-working, diligent, and charming. One old pupil, I notice in the mock-up school website, said that the thing most evident about Mr Liddiard was that he shouldn't have been there.

I don't remember him wearing a bow tie (someone else on the site recalls it) but it would certainly have suited him. He was, in my memory, always in a (slightly shabby) navy blue, striped suit, always wore a tie (everyone did then), and (can this be true) always in a floppy woollen vee-neck jumper. He was scrupulously fair. Had no evident favourites (even though I was convinced that, happening to be good at English language and interested in literature and drama, I was really his favourite), and scolded no one for not understanding what he was teaching.

His wit was part of his charm. He was not a laugh-out-loud purveyor of jokes, but he made no secret of his intense amusement at certain happenings. One episode I recall very clearly. We, the class, were at our desks, waiting for Mr Liddiard to arrive. Someone in the class (almost undoubtedly Dave North; Maurice Liddiard found him everlastingly amusing) had picked up a cigarette dog-end,

and placed it dead centre on Liddiard's chair behind his desk. He strode into the classroom, called out a 'Good morning, boys', and proceeded to his desk. He stopped, looked with interest at the dog-end, picked it up with over-acted disdain, held it aloft and asked, 'This belong to anyone?' Since no one answered, he simply muttered an, 'Oh well,' and flicked it, with an accuracy which probably surprised himself, into the wastepaper bin.

Since I came from a (relatively) bookish family, I was occasionally asking him whether certain authors were worth reading. He always knew the authors' work and was always able to offer positive response, but never spoke against a writer, for example, who was my father's choice and woefully out of date. On a few occasions he offered us suggested reading lists. Unfortunately, I don't have any of them now and the only one that I remember from the list was George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. I do recall that as a class we waded through *Eothen* by Alexander Kinglake, with every single one of us finding it tedious – though we never held that against Mr Liddiard (it may not have been his choice).

Another episode that stands out for me, since it relates specifically to me, and reveals the simple decency of the man, was when I was unexpectedly called out to the front while everyone else was working. I had presented a piece of homework of which I was quite pleased. It was a review of a biography of Rudyard Kipling, and I had been really engrossed in it and produced a very lengthy write-up. It sat on his desk and he pointed to it. 'This is yours, yes?' he said. I agreed. He then asked, 'Who wrote it?' I said that I had. 'Oh, good,' he said, and let me get back to my seat. I had said it was mine, and on that declaration, he accepted my word. It was a response which has affected me enormously, and I have tried to act as nobly myself in similar circumstances (with my children, for example). Here was a man for whom honour was important.

I had often wondered if he was a Christian. As part of a drama exercise, pairs of us were to create a dramatic scene and act it out for him. My pal Allan Price (still a close friend) proposed the scenario of the two queens, Elizabeth and Mary, meeting, and the separate outcomes for each of them. It was Allan's idea, so he was Elizabeth; I was Mary, Queen of Scots. At the end of our little piece, I (Mary), at Liddiard's prompting, fell to intense prayer. He seemed to understand this as more than a mere fiction. It seemed perhaps, prayer, to be a part of him.

In addition to English and Drama, he took a stint at teaching us tennis. To be honest, I mean, *trying* to teach us to play tennis. We were a ramshackle lot at games, some brilliant, most (like me) useless. So, we started, and opened with serving the ball. One boy (and it may have been North yet again) was flaying about with his racquet. Maurice Liddiard called out in pain, 'What are you doing with that thing? Your using like it's a chopper. Give it here.' He took it from the boy, attempted to flourish it, and handed it back with the remark, 'Good God, it *is* a chopper!'

Maurice also created a number of school plays for us (some, I know, are published). One he did, concerned the plight of Simon Stylites, sitting atop his column and ruminating on life. That (so far as I can remember) was a serious one. Others were fun, and parts were written with certain boys in mind to bring out their character. The bit I remember distinctly was a sort-of East End gang piece with Gordon ('Flash') Skinner as 'Dumpling' in the main part (that was his shape). The highlight of the play was that Dumpling got shot, and had to stagger across the stage, shouting out, as he ran, 'Oh...shot...in...the.....heart,' as he clutched at his behind. It brought the house down.

Another nice couple of memories also relate solely to me. We were each encouraged to try writing a short essay for the school magazine. My attempt gave wise advice on the various methods for opening a bottle of milk, each with their own distinctive title. Mr Liddiard picked mine and ran

through it with me, offering small suggestions on how I might improve it. It was then published in the school magazine, my sole contribution across five years.

A year or two after I left, my friend Malcolm Holiday and I went back to Loxford for some function, to be greeted by Mr Liddiard jointly as, ‘Ah, Holiday-Spinks. How nice to see you.’

A wonderful phrase which dropped from his lips, and which I have sparingly myself used, when appropriate: we were in class, and Maurice Liddiard threw a general question at us, something he clearly thought we should know. No one had an answer, to which his riposte was, ‘Well, well; we reach new depths of ignorance each day,’ but uttered with dignity and wry amusement, at himself as well as at us.

I can’t think how it can have happened, but there was a time when he and I were talking privately, and personally, and he acknowledged that he had made the social and intellectual choice to teach in a secondary modern school rather than apply for grammar school positions. ‘I see no reasons for not offering the best to youngsters who happen to have found themselves in the lower stream of education. Everyone deserves opportunities for the best.’

Sometime, again, after we had left school, my friend Allan Price met Mr Liddiard at a local football match and told him the news that I had just had a poem published in *The Observer*. I suppose I’d have been pleased if he’d come back with a message of congratulation. Instead, in perfect teacher-style, he remarked that, more often than not, he didn’t understand the poems published in *The Observer*. It was more trenchant and more memorable as a reply. More Liddiard.

Sometime early in the 1990s, the whole school plot was demolished and a new housing development built there. The Sports, Art and Science block were retained and leased to the local Muslim association. This meant that I re-entered the buildings regularly since, as part of my role in the borough’s Council for Voluntary Services, I got to know the leader of the Muslim group (he became a friend) and attended the annual Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Jews Christmas celebrations there.

In that same role I also gave a lecture at the new Loxford School, quite unrelated to the fact of my having been a student at the original site.

The newly built Loxford School is a mixed junior and senior school, ages 3-19, with its own sixth form, on a highly-fashioned plot of land not so far away, on Loxford Lane, which, in my day, had been not much more than a country cart track the other side of Loxford Park. At their last Ofsted report they achieved top marks in all departments.

I’m guessing that it was a couple of years after leaving school that I sent a letter to Maurice Liddiard, thanking him for his input into my life, and for all the encouragement of those memorable lessons. I had a reply back, thanking me, and noting that many pupils think of writing such a letter, perhaps, but very few actually do.

Maurice Liddiard stood out for me as an exceptional teacher and, quite possibly, an exceptional man. Rumours got round about his involvement in the war, but I never heard him talk about it, and it would not have been his personality to boast anyway. He had a way of making everyone feel at ease in his company, and I can see that he would have gathered loyalty with ease. In class, he never raised his voice and never needed to discipline. He was what a teacher should be: intelligent, loving his subject, and keen to stimulate his charges. He was stylish, despite the clothes. (Perhaps he wore them as an actor wears a character.) There was something debonair and deadly serious about him.

We were fortunate to have such a person at our school. Even those students who had no interest in English or drama loved him and enjoyed being in his lessons.

On one occasion, he realised that he had not brought his case with him to the class and asked one of the boys if he might go up to his room, ‘and see if it was there’. The boy returned and delivered the report that he had seen the bag, and it was there. Both master and boy acted the whole thing out in straight mock-face sincerity. ‘Oh good,’ Maurice replied. ‘Now I wonder if you might go back again and fetch it for me. If you wouldn’t mind.’ ‘Not at all, Sir.’ ‘Thank you. You’re very kind.’