

Memories of Peter Colville



Peter was Housemaster of Fircroft from 1977 to 1988 and Registrar from 1993 to 1998. He was a Cambridge Hockey Blue and ran hockey in the School for many years.

His father, John Colville, was also a member of staff, from 1937 to 1968, and Housemaster of Brooklands from 1948 to 1960.

Alastair Sinclair (F 86)

Joining Fircroft in the September of 1986 I was fortunate to benefit from Peter Colville's skills at the peak of his game as a Housemaster. I remember well that first initial couple of weeks as a new boy and him bringing you into his study, pausing his tape player that always was playing classical music, and spelling out what being a pupil at Uppingham School and of Fircroft was about. Life as an Uppinghamian was not just about the classroom and the sports field, but the extracurricular activities too and leaving Uppingham with a broader outlook on life. "You must participate in all the activities available to you. It's as much about the experience as the taking part. You should play an instrument regardless of your abilities; even if it means you can only play one note on the Triangle, like me [PJC] in the Orchestra."

Fircroft was a well-oiled machine under Peter's rein, he didn't have to be constantly on the Boy's side of the house to guide and nurture you as he cultivated an atmosphere where you knew what was expected of you even when he wasn't physically there. This sense of pride of being part of Fircroft under his guidance spilled out into the wider school, be it house matches or other activities to the point of almost envy amongst peers, such was his ability to get the best out of you. He was a master of his craft and much revered amongst his peers and I feel it is fair to say he was 'The Housemaster' and the gold standard to aspire to.

PJC and his legendary 'spot check' audits of the 'chits' for items ordered at the Buttery meant not much got past him. I remember being called into his study and being asked to explain, whilst raising an eye brow, how I had managed to get 15 Mars bars and 15 cans of Coke signed off by an unsuspecting House Tutor the prior week - with the words - 'Good God Man, no one can consume that many Mars bars and fizzy pop in one go'. Explaining how I was extremely hungry and thirsty that day and yes – I must have been extraordinarily unwell after eating and drinking that much in one go, I was duly reprimanded and told to close the study door on my way out. As the door closed and whilst stifling a chuckle his closing words were – "I hope the rest of the team appreciated it - now get out." Not much got passed him!

An end of an era - but lasting memories and a true influence on all of us.

Justin Nolan (F 82)

I last saw Peter in September. He was frail, leaning heavily on a stick and clearly unwell but in the forty minutes we spent together I was reminded forcibly of the man who had so great an influence on my life and who will, I suspect live on in both the memory – and perhaps the imagination of those who knew him.

Peter Colville was a proper schoolmaster. He had all the virtues of that breed and possibly some of the faults. He was completely dedicated to his pupils and although it took one time as a callow boy to appreciate this, as a man I have come to look back and realise how much I owe him. Of his time before he was a house master I can write little other than what one gathered from visits to his study where photographs of distinguished hockey teams lined the walls – revealing a man whose appearance had changed little since his twenties. As a thirteen-year old it was impossible to imagine

that this august figure had ever had a childhood – surely House Masters sprang up fully formed like Greek hoplites from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus? He ran Fircroft with a style that combined a certain old-fashioned sense of discipline balanced out with a lightness of touch and great good humour. He managed to provoke both feelings of admiration (tinged with slight trepidation) and deep affection too.

I remember his great wisdom, born of great humanity. He asked me once in the Lower Fifth what I thought his greatest moment in the house was hitherto... "winning the house hockey..." I replied smartly. "Ye Gods..." he replied (he had a great fund of such terms), "it was winning the House Shout, because everyone was involved". So, although Fircroft did tend to dominate on the sporting front the house never had a 'jockish' culture because Peter hated boorish behaviour and was a cultured man as well as a true competitor (though he never could resist practicing golf or cricket shots when walking the fields). It was, for its time, a very happy house and having run a boarding house myself I still marvel at the way Peter kept a light hand on the tiller whilst firmly steering the ship in the right direction.

But I principally remember Peter for a handful of conversations during five years. Moments when he sat me down and through some adroit discussion and clear advice set me on the right track as I threatened to go astray. He took me to task in the Fourth Form for the disgusting state of my room and in the Upper Fifth for losing my way academically. In the Sixth Form one noticed and appreciated how one's relationship with him changed and how skilful he was in both building one's confidence and demanding more of one's maturity. As I read my old reports from the Upper Sixth it was very clear that he believed in me more perhaps than my teachers did (actually certainly so) – and I know that his support gave me that precious commodity – self-belief.

So, I am very glad we had some time together in Witney in September. I hope I said 'thank you' in a way he might have appreciated. For all that Peter held his emotions close I think he had a deeply loving heart and his example of selflessness and his endless emphasis on anybody but himself remains a lesson I aspire to, but fear I will never quite attain. So, I say farewell to him as he crosses the bar into the great yonder. I finish with a verse from St Matthew's Gospel – which I hope he will appreciate:

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Mark Lawson (F 81)

I am incredibly grateful to Peter for keeping me on the straight and narrow at such an important time of my life. I think of him and thank him often.

Pilgrim Beart (F 79)

Peter's chuckle and bonhomie never seemed to desert him and he was always interested in others, generously putting-up with my misdemeanours big and small, and understanding that brewing alcohol and making bombs was entirely in the spirit of scientific enquiry rather than anarchy! And even if mowing the rhubarb was perhaps more the latter, well, we all rebel in our own way, and no need to make too much of it.

I met up with Christopher Clark recently and we fell to reminiscing about our time at Fircroft, and of course good old "Chaps" Colville. In my time at Uppingham I was very lucky to have him as my housemaster (I really don't think I'd have made it to the end otherwise!), and he was very lucky to have you with him to the end.

Richard Mayson (F 75)

We were so pleased to welcome Peter Colville (PRC) to Fircroft in 1977. He had taught me Maths to O Level prior to becoming housemaster and I knew that he had a reputation of being 'demanding but fair'. And so it was in the House: you always knew where you stood with PRC.

After I left Uppingham in 1979, Peter and Sheila Colville kept in touch. They attended the blessing of my wedding in 2002 and he would regale me with news either on the phone, through Christmas cards or when we used to meet up after his retirement in Oxfordshire. I spoke to him of the phone recently and, despite his illness, he was the same enthusiastic Peter Colville. I will miss him.

Will Powell (F 86)

Peter was someone I thought very highly of, and he will be greatly missed. I remember how kind and thoughtful he was, and how he had this amazing way of keeping things steady and positive without ever making a fuss. He had a quiet strength and a forward-moving outlook on life that I still think about and draw on today. He was loved and respected by all of us, and he always seemed to know how to get things just right.

After Fircroft, I went on to work with dogs—first training them to find landmines around the world, and now working with conservation dogs. My family and I have been in Tanzania for the past 20 years. I'm sorry I didn't get the chance to reconnect with Peter in recent years, but his influence and the way he approached life have stayed with me all this time.

He truly made a lasting impression on everyone who knew him – he meant so much to so many of us and he'll be remembered fondly.

With love,

Edward Sample (Fgh 95)

Having suffered/benefitted from Dyslexia and been lower tier academically, Mr Colville enthused and encouraged with the patience of a saint. Though he had retired by L/U6 - it was largely down to him in those foundation years that I was able to leave Uppingham being awarded a scholarship to my next place of learning (Royal Ag College). I cannot thank him enough.

Peter was my appointed Tutor, having started Uppingham in 1995 at Farleigh, and remained so until his retirement in 1998. Three years in the scheme of life ain't a longtime, but from the ages of 13-16 a lot seems to happen. Weeknights at Farleigh saw its wonderfully eclectic mix of terrific Tutors, under the exceptional Housemaster, Philip Ward, take their turns in overseeing the Farleighian's evening routine.

The nights that Mr Colville took his turn was his opportunity to go to see his Tutees, during prep hours. Often accompanied by the dumdedum of some cheery tune he visited us one by one, week by week, year by year, in our studies (or bedsits) of questionable decor and comfort (it was the mid 90's so perhaps one up on what he might have been used to the decade prior). The 'spare seat' in one's study was more often than not (in our day in any case) some highly flammable single futon type foam bed resting on Leonardo Centre off cut plywood supported by pillars of beer crates (Special Brew' always a premium). There he would perch and there, as if he had all the time in the world you would talk. Set 5, 2nd XV, 4XI (Hockey), 2nd Band (the fun one he always said), friends, family, things that and gone well (but never be self-congratulatory) and importantly things that hadn't gone so well. The past, the present, and aspiration. As he left in the same cheery manner, dumdedum etc. he'd arrived you were left encouraged, with a thirst to improve and make the most of every possible opportunity the School had to offer, and to ultimately be a better person.

Choices made in those foundation years have such a bearing. Whilst only three years, a miniscule in the fraction of the history he taught and though a non-'PC' thing to say (he was the epitome modesty) his impression has lasted a lifetime. Thank you, Sir.'

Andrew Lewin (F 80)

Peter Colville was my housemaster at Fircroft from 1980 to 1985. Throughout that time, and despite some disappointing moments on my behalf, he never stopped encouraging me to find the best I could be. I remember the gentle, yet forceful, way that he encouraged the highest of standards, never wavering from his commitment to each individual be they in Fircroft and at Uppingham.

It was clear that he had been an excellent sportsman himself. His quiet knowledge and understanding of the ups and downs of sporting fate inspired a loyalty and perspective that few recognised at the time but certainly appreciated later. A hockey player par excellence, he was also an accomplished cricketer and rugby player, and his boarding house would always attract characters and competitors whom he managed calmly but firmly and always quietly and with perspective.

It was only on leaving Fircroft and Uppingham that his positive influence really came to the fore. The 'Colville Effect' was strong and lasting. He proved an excellent reference in the education world. He approached his post-housemaster role as Registrar with equal vigour and enthusiasm, spreading his influence throughout. Uppingham was truly blessed to have such a dedicated servant who could, but never did, boast such an illustrious career.

It is with sadness that the news of his passing comes and our thoughts and prayers are with Sheila and the family at this time.

Charlie Oscroft (F 79)

Fircroft was a very special place and one I am proud to have called home during my time at Uppingham. My love of sport and particularly hockey was developed by Peter and the matches between the 1st XI and the staff were keenly contested particularly when Peter and Nick Gandon got together.

I am sure that you will get many emails and memories from old House members but I truly feel blessed that Peter was my Housemaster and that Peter & Sheila came into my life. They both left a large imprint on me.

Anthony Alderson (F 84)

My father was in Brooklands, Peter's father his housemaster. Dad and Peter were old friends which is why I ended up in Fircroft with him. He was a great housemaster. Not sure I was up to much on the hockey field. He will be very much missed.

Nic Weston (F 73)

I was his first House Captain after Geoff Frowde moved. I didn't know it was happening! I was currently suspended for seven days of school (being my only offence) as I was seen smoking on a Cadet Camp many miles from School. It was a shame as I didn't smoke at school! Peter called me in the Summer holidays and told me that I had been selected as House Captain. I was thrilled and came to School before the date for students to get my all the administration sorted and to move my study.

I didn't know him well and I didn't play Hockey being a left hander except in goal during the interschool hockey competition. I played Fives instead. I didn't study science. But we got to know each other well as it was 3 terms I was House Captain until I left in 1978. After school, we would meet in his study to discuss the house, school, events and future planning. I hope I was setting a good standard for his future years!

I am sure that his positive attitude inspired other students after me. He was a great person and I wish I had spent more time but I moved to Australia in 1979 and spent 30 years there and now live in Malaysia.

Robert Davies (F 63)

I have very fond memories of Peter when he was in charge of the hockey first team in 1968. We didn't lose a match that season, which I am sure was down to his ability to craft a team of individuals into a successful unit. He will be greatly missed, but not forgotten.

Robert Fiske (F 77)

Peter was a thoroughly decent man - straight as a die - and much respected by our era in Fircroft. Lest I forget, I am pretty sure he represented Scotland at hockey too!

Chris Timm (F 78)

Peter was a great housemaster and a very good man. He and Sheila made Fircroft a happy house and I have extremely fond memories of my time there.

Sam Woodcock (F 76)

Peter was such a help to the exceptionally troublesome me during my time at Uppingham and I have nothing but very fond memories of him.

Nick Royle (F 82)

I was in contact with Peter until 2018 and he and Sheila came to my wedding back in 1993. He was a very good housemaster and always supportive.

Peter Watson (F 77)

I have fond memories of Peter Colville, and he had a very positive influence whilst at Uppingham and beyond.

Casey O'Hanrahan (Former staff)

He was an admirable man in so many ways, the very model of an English Schoolmaster.

Gordon Nurse (Fgh 63)

I have nothing but the fondest of good memories of Peter. It was his inspiration that put me onto the track that led not only to the playing of hockey at international level, but also assistance in its administration - including the opportunity to serve on the Hockey Appeal Jury for four Olympic Tournaments, ending in Paris. I owe so much to Peter.

Penny McCarthy (Gee)

I was a friend of Peter's during his last years at Cambridge and early teaching career. He was always a welcome visitor to my parents' house (the Gees) in Ridlington: my father was, like him, a hockey Blue. Peter was such a gentle, non-judgemental person, and very generous. He must have been a marvellous teacher.

Ralph Allwood MBE, DMus (Former staff)

As Peter's House Tutor I was happy to learn from him the art of being a housemaster even though that wasn't my ambition. He was so thorough, so generous-hearted and so understanding. I don't remember him ever raising his voice. Such a lovely, gentle and generous man.

David Mason (F 86)

I had the privilege of being in Fircroft for part of the time when Peter Colville was Housemaster. He retired for perhaps my last two years in Fircroft and was succeeded by Nick Leiper.

He was a big part of why we went to Uppingham as my brother and I were both at St Martins Prep school in Northwood prior to going to Uppingham and our Headmaster at St Martins, Jock Lumsden (and his wife Joan) who had been a teacher at Uppingham prior to taking up that post, recommended to our parents that we should go to Uppingham and in particular to go to Fircroft because Peter and Sheila ran the house and he had such high regard for them.

Both Peter and Sheila were a fabulous couple and I was very lucky to have them when I first started at Uppingham. I could not have wished for a nicer couple to help me settle at school. I have a lot of fond memories of Peter but here are just a few of them.

When I was in the Lower Fifth / 14 years old (think it was 1987) I became very ill at school and spent a number of days in the house sick room before being moved to the school sanatorium, where I spent about 10 days (no one could figure out what was wrong with me) before going to Kettering hospital. Following a major operation, I spent a number of weeks in hospital recovering. Due to all this, I had missed a large part of school (nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ a term) and when Peter came to visit me in hospital very shortly after the operation, possibly the following day, I have this vivid recollection that he brought a carton of apple juice that Sheila had given to him to give to me as that was one of the few things that I was able to drink / enjoy or stomach whilst at the school sanatorium. I did not have the heart to say that as that was pretty much all that I drunk for the previous two to three weeks, I now found it very sickly, but it was the kind thoughts that mattered. He also then presented me with some homework whilst I lay in my hospital bed. For me personally I was flabbergasted as that was the last thing on my mind. But Peter being Peter and a great teacher, had my best interests at heart and calmly explained that as I had missed so much school work, I needed to catch up. Let's just say I was not best pleased!! But you could see genuinely in his face that he was very glad that I was finally on the road to recovery.

Peter had quite a distinctive and warm voice which we the boys in the house all loved and warmed to. We would often mimic him as a form of endearment. One expression that he would often be heard bellowing at someone from his study, if they had done something stupid or irrational was "Myyyy... God Man!" So, we as boys would go round the house impersonating him by bellowing that phrase in the corridors or dorms.

Peter always had our best interests at heart and took a sincere and invested interest in everything we did at School be it in class or on the sports field and it was so reassuring to know that he supported us and had our backs as did Sheila. They were both very kind and caring though I am sure we all stretched their tethers on a daily basis in house life. Their pastoral care was however exceptional!! I know it is a bit of a stereotypical thing to say, but Peter was one of those teachers, that a lot of people will remember when looking back on their school careers and will say had a massive influence and impact on our / their lives, that we **all** would look back fondly on and remember that he had a positive impact on our lives in some way. And if asked in the years to come, what is the name of a teacher that you remember for having such a great impact and impression on you? So many of us would say Peter Colville!!

Simon Griffiths (F 74)

Loud cheering, clapping and table banging is how I recall the whole of Fircroft reacting when Geoff Frowde came in one tea time in the summer term of 1976 to tell us that PRC has been appointed as his successor.

Whilst I wholeheartedly joined in, I was rather nervous of Peter. I was not a strong mathematician or historian and an even worse sportsman. However, I remember a long corridor conversation outside his classroom soon after the announcement where his genuine interest in how I was doing and what I enjoyed became immediately obvious to me.

Peter continued to take this heart felt interest for a further 48 years attending Paula's and my wedding, having occasional phone calls, the last one of which was only a few months ago. He would

always talk so fondly of card games with Sheila and the importance of his growing family now stretching to great grandchildren. More recently, we had met up with Richard Mayson in 'the Morse Pub' near his and Sheila's home. I finally managed to stop calling him 'Sir'.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have known Peter and Sheila. They, along with wonderful matron Dorothy Loxton, worked extraordinarily hard to make Fircroft a home for us all. Cold dormitories were carpeted, Sunday salads made way for roasts, and corridors were freshly painted. I learnt later though that the new house laundry system nearly defeated them as they paired 100s of identical sets of named socks each week.

Peter made a huge difference to mine and all our lives in other ways. When I got unexpected A level grades he got on the 'phone to several universities and got me a place at Durham leading to lifelong friendships and career opportunities which I would never otherwise have had.

Peter always took a huge interest in everyone's non-academic activities on the sports field and off. Ever interested in my musical achievements, only he would have noticed me drop just one beat when conducting the house in the house shout and make a point of telling me he'd noticed afterwards!

He also struck a brilliant balance of firm but fair discipline combined with a great sense of humour. Fortunately, he found it very amusing when a Renault car salesman turned up at the front door of the house with a Renault 5 for 15 year old me to test drive after I'd ticked the wrong box when sending off for a brochure!

I could not have asked for a better teacher, housemaster and friend than PRC. That he remained a friend for nearly 50 years, is a tribute to his passionate interest in all around him and to his and Sheila's utter determination to do the best they could for us all. I consider myself incredibly privileged to have known him.

Richard Piercy (M 64)

Some 57 years ago, as a young seventeen-year-old I came under the bewitching spell of Peter's tutelage and coaching hockey skills, which culminated in an undefeated hockey eleven for that year. My position in that team was centre forward, but I remember as if it was yesterday the incredible team spirit and camaraderie we possessed which carried us through a few games that preserved our undefeated badge. The legacy that Peter created back in 1968 I still recall regularly, with the most fondest of memories, and I feel immensely privileged to have been a part of Peter's journey.

Aivars King (F 74)

I retain very fond memories of my time at Uppingham and Fircroft and shall always be grateful to Peter for his guidance, encouragement and belief in me.

Clive Hambly (Former staff)

I remember Peter to have been a warm and engaging master who had time to be interested in how a "newbie" teacher was progressing. He was the first housemaster to invite me to lunch with his house outside of Brooklands, my house as a tutor.

Fiercely proud and caring of his house and all its members, Peter was to my mind the quintessential British Public-School Housemaster. The memory of Peter that still brings a smile to my face was a staff meeting in which "Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones" to quote Mr Gain, were effectively throwing in the towel on the rule that no boy should put his hands in his pockets (hands up all those that have had their pockets sewn shut!). Peter gave an impassioned call for only one hand in a pocket at a time to be allowed as at least that had a certain style!

Those were the days!

Prof. Mark R. Sanderson (SH 69)

Peter was my House Tutor in School House when I started at Uppingham, during my first year. The Headmaster John Royds was then the Housemaster, so due to his heavy commitments the House Tutor took on much of the mantle of that of a Housemaster. Peter was a wonderful House Tutor. Extremely positive and very supportive throughout this year for me. I found the change from being in a small Prep School in Yorkshire of around 60 boys to a school of more than 600 a great transition and Peter helped me make this transition to a school where there was much more discipline than I was used to, with Fags' Tests, punishment runs ...

Also, he found out that I had been in my 1st XI hockey team at Prep School and made sure that I was scouted for a good placement on a team from the start. We shall all greatly miss Peter.

Messages on OU Social Media**Jonathan Bungard (SH 91)**

A lovely lovely man. Was very understanding of my teenage lack of interest in his subject, allowing me to drop it to do extra music practice, but never failed to engage with me about historical facts when he came to lunch. Then marshalled us as tour guides brilliantly later in our career. Always ebullient, fascinating, and passionate. RIP.

Toby Butterfield (F 79)

What an asset he was, a true educator, someone who inspired folks by seeing the best in people. He was my housemaster from '79 – '84 and I am in his debt. Sorry not to be able to say that to him again.

Pratapsingh Gaekwad (WD 85)

Mr Colville was one of my favourite masters while I was at Uppingham. He was tough but always fair. I guess he got that from his sporting background. I enjoyed playing hockey as a new boy under him, and I did get the feeling that he cut me some slack on rare occasions because of the sports that I used to play. I was always motivated to better around him. Heartfelt condolences to his family.

Simon Smith (M 87)

Sad to hear of his passing. He was a good man. Condolences to family and friends. RIP.

Simon Harvey Williams (Fgh 71)

He was such a kind man to me. Happy memories from my Uppingham days. RIP

Keith Childs (SH 92)

Absolutely brilliant history teacher. He taught with passion, gusto and genuine kindness. RIP sir.

Simon Whitaker (WB 71)

Always remember him as a kind man ... even when he was trying to teach me to play hockey .. I failed !! Condolences to his family and friends.

Edward James (Fgh 85)

A great master and one of the very few who seemed to know how to handle my posturing adolescent self.

Michael Latham (H 66)

A kind and good man. He will be greatly missed. May he R.I.P.

Michael Inns (LH 69)

Peter was a kind, generous, giving person - my thoughts are with his family and friends

James Harding (Fgh 94)

He had quite the influence during my time in Farleigh. He was my tutor and encouraged me to take history as an A level, help me organise my first summer job, which subsequently had a major part in my career, he suggested to be in a school play among many other things which I really enjoyed but had never thought I might do. What a great man to have at the school and as a tutor
