

R – It's been a long year, and at last
Commem is here.

J - It's time to cast
sun-dazzled eyes upon the past...

next line to alternate, depending on weather, between

R - Is it "rain-dappled eyes"?

J - Oh blast...

Or - J- since we've been spared a stormy blast –

R - Yes, here we stand, beneath the sun
With boys and parents gathered here

J - and staff and governors, we fear –

R makes correction with pen

R - no, staff and governors we fear –

J - no, staff and gov'nors we *revere* –

R - so we can summarise the year
With cheesy rhyme and pun.

J - But how far backwards can we look?

R - We asked the archivist, who took
A peep inside an ancient book
That weighed a flipping ton
To see if anybody knew
How Heads of School used to review
The past year.

J – [to Robert] Yes, if that were you
Then what would you have done?

J - We checked. A hundred years ago
There was the line-up we still know,
And at the merry organ's blow
Commem would have begun
with ladies sat in silk and satin,
the 1st XI at their battin'
and Heads of School declaiming Latin –
in verse.

R - That sounds like fun.

J - We could go back in time.

R - No worries –

I can recite an ode by Horace.

J - Please don't. You'd only sound like Boris.

R - Our time-machine can run
back to about ten months ago
and then back fifty years or so,
and then a century, to know
just what we would have done.

- J* – This year we had results to please
selective universities
and more, fulfil the fantasies
of senior management
who'll make us be such busy bees
that soon our rates of As and Bs
will surely rapidly increase
to 80 + %.
- R* - Good luck with that. And good luck, too,
to next year's budding Rugby crew:
may the results improve for you.
- J* - No matter how much losing hurts,
our 1st XV stayed really fit,
our internationals showed grit,
and what is more, had smashing kit.
- R* - I love those shirts.
- R* - Our rivalries are fiercely fought,
but where are clashes really fraught?
- J* - Hockey v football?
- R* - No. House sport.
For all its downs and ups,
who cares if School or Wallace came
top of the league – it's all the same,
and it's the housemasters I blame.
- J* - They never give back cups.
- R* - But who controls the toughest crowd?
Who keeps the chanting sweet but loud?
Who makes the warring factions proud
whoever's lost or won?
- J* - Roy Hodgson? Mr Falder?
- R* - No.
- J* - Dave Muckalt?
- R* - Have another go.
Who keeps the chariot swinging low?
- J* - Oh – Mr Henderson.
- R* - Although the choir seems so sedate,
their ranks and egos are so great
that Jamie stands upon a crate
just to be seen.
- J* - We're proud to say, the Earl of Cool,
Hugh Bonneville, opened Drama School,
and films shot in these courts will spool
and beam onto the screen.

R – The plays were great: Ed Sprague got shot;
J - In *Pravda*, journos swore a lot
R - And Mr Reade as Faustus got
to sell his soul;
J - and one fine thesp was such a grafter –
R - he gave us tears, he gave us laughter –
J - we had to name a theatre after
him –
Both - Josh Powell.

J - No – fifty years ago, the Head
was Robert Powell, and we have read
a census of the boys, who said:

R - “Traditions still prevail;
Two fifths of us would emigrate;
Half think Macmillan isn’t great.”

J - And what newspapers did they rate?

R - The Telegraph, The Mail.

J - This year we surveyed boys again.
Three quarters said, Scotland, remain!
Three fifths think same-sex marriage sane.

R - Traditions still prevail.

J - Half of you think that God exists;
most clutch a smartphone in their fists,
and what newspapers top the lists?

R - Telegraph, Times, The Mail.

R - It makes us think, do people change?
Or do times simply rearrange
similar folks, so nothing’s strange
and there are few surprises?

J - To answer that, we need to go
back to a hundred years ago,
when gifted young men left that row
to claim their prizes.

R - Some spoke in Latin. Eight days passed.
Europe’s allegiances were cast
into aggression by the blast
of an assassin’s gun.

J - A hundred years ago today
old worlds began to pass away.
And is it hard for us to say
what we would have done?

R - It's pretty clear. We would have fought –
driven by duty, maybe caught
by the idea that all was sport –
a chance to bash the Hun.

J - Then, Sherborne had upon its rolls
two hundred and fifty-seven souls.
It added to the war dead's tolls
two hundred and twenty-one.

R - We read their names upon the wall
of Chapel's stairs, and our school hall,
the BSR, stands to recall
their memory;

J - *Vivat Shirburnia's* pages tell
how they grew up as boys, and fell
as men, and from what kind of hell
they left their legacy:

R - From France's trenches; from the sea;
from Syria; from Gallipoli;

J - from the poor bloody infantry
of Passchendaele, the Somme, Verdun.

R - And later on, from Normandy,
and onwards. Fewer now will see
what they have seen; less chance that we
will do as they have done.

J – So were Shirburnians braver then?

R - Perhaps. And were they braver men?

J - That's up to us, at moments when
we need to help the young, sick, old
or when we have to think about
that moment of most modern doubt –
about what's better – speaking out
or doing as we're told.

R - I thought that this was meant to be
the bit they don't take seriously –
aren't we supposed to make time flee
between the preacher and the speeches?

J - And to send off those bright young things
who leave, with hope beneath their wings
to face whate'er the future brings:

I mean, the teachers.

R - It's true – they came with hopes and fears,
and tolerated us for years.

J - That's how we helped with their careers –

R - but some of them defect,
to TV, cooking their children –

J - Mate,
you have to learn to punctuate.

R - Oh – TV cooking, their children –

J - Great.

At least *they've* all been checked.

R - Yes, we could have a multi-stanza
departing-staff extravaganza

including Josephine Berganza, who raised the level of debate,

J - and Isabella Franco goes to front food television shows.

R - No taste of Mr Brimelow's

Has passed its sell-by date.

T. Pats. was a boy here.

J - Did he behave?

R - I doubt it, but Sherborne forgave.

J - They didn't even make him shave.

R - Few people know, so let me say –
Matt Woods learnt in these very courts:
before he taught here, and ran sports,
he was a third-former in shorts.

J - No, he just looked that way.

R - He served us with his hockey vest on,
as did the geographer J. Preston,
who found our climate far too western:

J - Goodbye Mrs O’Gorman,
who makes herself officially free
to feed and fend for family;
and Berkhamsted picks up the fee
for Falder, football’s foreman.

R - *in a Clarkson voice?* Yes, Mr F is off. *Not in a Clarkson voice.* And what to make of Kenny Primrose – Scot or Brit?

J - He knows and sees a lot,
and through his insights, Sherborne got
a citizen of the global village.

- R* - And Mr Evans goes – his liking
is for th'outdoors, and motorbiking,
and sailing.
- J* - He's ... Eric the Viking,
with pastures new to pillage.
- R* - We leave leavers, but briefly turn
to those from whom we all can learn –
such men as Messrs Smith, and Burn,
and the Reverend Mitchell-Innes.
- J* - They gave their sense of right and wrong
to all of us throughout their long
teaching careers, and gave a strong
example to beginners.
- R* - If they grow old, then so shall we –
at least, if this duff poetry
delays the prizes, lunch, and tea,
and then the Ball.
- J* - Think on the real lessons you took
from school; before that one last look
buy Mr Francis's fine book.
Goodbye. We'll miss you all.