**Project- "Schooldays In Art Life"**

**John Welson, painter**

Born 1953

Educated at school:-

1958-1960 Saint Mary's (private school)

1960- 1965 Saint Michaels (private preparatory school)

1965- 1969 Lucton (private school),

Coming from a country/farming background I was always aware of light, sunsets, colour, hills lakes, dramatic landscapes and seasonal changes to both plants and the environment; the "things" one may consider to be the back-bone of inspiration for a budding/potential artist. I was aware of all these elements and have no doubt I absorbed them from a tender age.

However at the age of eight because of "my voice" I went to a choir school and received training for my voice and the playing of numerous musical instruments as well as composition. We attended church some three times a day and made records and appeared on the television as well as frequent appearances on "Even Song" broadcasts on radio. My art report for this school simply read "He will never draw a straight line".

At the age of twelve I went to my senior school and here I found a book on Surrealist Painting and due to the fact that Art was a timetabled subject, it became something I had to study. This fitted in with the philosophy of the art teacher who had studied at the Slade School of art in London and was a master of drawing and painting. His words "Art is one per cent inspiration and ninety nine per cent perspiration" echo in my head to this day. Additionally, his view that "Surrealists only produce that rubbish because they can not paint properly" was of course a "red flag to a bull". My silent response was "I will show him". I drew and painted everything and when ever I could get away from the routine and regulation of this oppressive institution, it would be to the Art-Room.

All I wanted to do was paint and draw perfectly; perhaps one could say that it overrode everything I did at the school, but this would not be correct , for I excelled at practically all sports (see photographs) and also participated in every school dramatic production (see photographs). However, this "involvement" and engagement with the school was merely a means of being left alone to paint and draw without interruption from the prying eyes of the school establishment. I was photographed for the school prospectus (see photograph) at the tender age of 15/16 years. And so to all intents and purposes I was the model student that the school was using to advertise its credentials and obtain new boys at the start of the following academic year. What should be noted about the photograph is that I was making a DADA Collage, hardly the thing the school would advocate.

But whilst the school was there I felt that the Art aspect of it was something separate, true it was a part of the institution, true it was a very disciplined part of the school timetable and it involved a structured means of learning a skill, but above all it offered a key to personal expression.

I suppose I learnt a selection of skills whilst learning the "tools of Art" from my talented and provocative not to say opinionated art master. Firstly, learn all you can from those who you respect for their knowledge and ability and secondly, learn what the rules of the game are, with the hope that if "you play the game" you may be left alone to get on with that which you want to do.

My art master died a few years after I had left school. I never contacted him to tell him that I was already in books with Dali and Magritte. I guess the school had done its bit, I never felt the need to "go back" and tell them what I had done, mainly because there is always so much more to do, to see, to learn, to paint.

JOHN WELSON

2011 October