

Meet Alumni, Rob Beckwith



Thank you to former student Rob for answering our questions about his time at Hundred of Hoo and his career since.

- **When did you attend the academy?**

1981 - 1986

- **What did you like best about being there?**

My friends, the subjects I was able to study at O and A Level, the teachers I was lucky to have during this time.

- **Any favourite memories?**

Oh! Those cold, muddy, second period Monday morning games sessions playing rugby – not!!

The rugby I did enjoy but was never bulky enough to make a decent second row.

Our 6th Form was quite small at the time (less than 100 students?), and for me the 2 years of Lower and Upper Sixth were the best years at HoH.

- **Any clubs/activities that you participated in?**

I was not particularly sporty, but I was part of the 3rd year Basketball team – I was tall, but pretty useless otherwise!

I used to really enjoy helping with the scene shifting and production of the school's annual play – Sound of Music, Kiss Me Kate were quite memorable.

Although I didn't choose it, I was made Head Boy during the Upper Sixth; owing to industrial disputes at the time, the Head Girl and I did not have to host the key annual event of Prize Giving.

- **Favourite subjects?**

Maths, Physics, Geography, Biology, Computer Studies

- **Any staff you particularly remember?**

Our 6th Form classes were small, only 4 to 8 students, so we bonded well with our teachers. David Budd (Applied Maths), Ben Rehana (Pure Maths), Mr Murrell and Mr Stevens (Physics); but I remember with gratitude Terry Hiscock, my English teacher, whose advice still echoes in my head to this day.

- **Where you went after leaving?**

Brunel University, Uxbridge, then moved to Cheltenham for work, and later to Cambridge, where I've been for the last 20-odd years!

- **What you studied after leaving?**

I studied Electrical and Electronic Engineering (BEng Hons) and since leaving uni in 1990, I have attended classes in French, Spanish and later International Business Studies (at Anglia Ruskin University).

But in a non-academic sense, study continues in whatever situation or circumstance you find yourself – so we are all students of Life, with its many twists and turns, highs and lows...

- **Career journey since**

While at Brunel Uni, I did a thin sandwich course so worked at BAE Systems, Rochester, (formerly GEC Avionics) as summer placements, but I didn't go to them upon graduation. Instead, I went to Smiths Industries, Cheltenham, where I was a design and development hardware engineer for 7½ years, working on head-up and head-down avionic displays for fighter aircraft and helicopters. Later I worked on projects

to replace the CRT elements with flat panel displays. In those days a 15 X 15 cm piece of active matrix glass cost around \$28000, and now we all have them on our smart phones!

During my time at Smiths I got involved in helping out technically with demonstrator systems for events like the Farnborough and Paris air shows. I was lucky to visit and stay the week during these events, and so the seeds of something beyond design engineering were sown.

I left Smiths and moved to Cambridge to join a small company producing computing hardware for use in radar displays, supporting the Sales and Marketing guys as a Systems Consultant, and now responsible for organising our booths at trade shows. I also became a Sales Manager, travelling the world presenting and demonstrating our products and systems.

After a personal health incident, I left to pursue private interests and study; I attended Anglia Ruskin University to study International Business and Spanish. I completed the first year only – with flying colours – but as I met my wife-to-be there, we set about travelling more...

...unfortunately, this also coincided with a major recession globally and finding work again was difficult. For nearly 6 years we drifted from rich jet-setters to near down-and-outs, on benefits, food banks and almost, but not quite, on the streets!

Then in 2016 I contacted an old work colleague and he offered me a junior position, supporting the Sales and Marketing section of a radar producing company. I quickly built up my self-esteem again, organising trade shows and other support tasks in the company. That company has grown from 19 people when I joined to around 34 now. And all my soft skills and past work experience has come full circle to complement the key work I now do as a Marketing and Operations Manager, helping the company grow further. I still maintain my engineering interests, but no longer design electronic stuff – I'm more interested these days in designing processes and strategic planning to meet our stakeholders' requirements.

- **Any advice that you'd give to the 18-year-old you?**

Listen to advice, but don't feel pressurised to follow some suggest path just to please someone else – you have to be happy in yourself with whatever you do.

Wealth isn't just financial wealth or the possession of things.

Be true to yourself, honest with others, grateful for small and big blessings in life; read Baz Luhrmann's "Everyone's free to wear sunscreen"!