

Tony Tame Interview 2024 – Full Version

Inspirational path into education

Tony Tame (Eg 60-65)

Tony explains: “Before I start, I’d just like to say that this whole piece is a snapshot into the life of a very average pupil who was very lucky to be given the opportunities that Bloxham was able to offer him and for which he is enormously grateful. I was lucky enough to be a decent sportsman who, to everyone’s surprise, got six O levels as well. I did get two A levels on a correspondence course five years later.”

Tony’s journey from Bloxham School to a career in education and sport spans continents and decades. His passion for teaching and cricket blossomed during his time at Bloxham, where he developed strong leadership skills as House Captain and Sacristan. He excelled in sports: serving as captain of both the 1st XI cricket and fives and featuring in Wisden’s Cricketers’ Almanac (1962-66).

At 18, Tony embarked on a remarkable journey, from volunteering in the Gambia to pursuing academic studies in economics and education. His experience abroad broadened his perspective and fuelled his career ambition to help educate young people, which he found immensely fulfilling. Today, Tony is retired and lives near Liverpool with his wife Donna. They enjoy travelling, especially to New Zealand and Australia to see family. Tony is a proud member of The Egerton Society, the School’s legacy association.

What was Bloxham like when you joined?

Like most new pupils, I came from having responsibilities at my prep school, Overthorpe Hall, to being a very junior new boy at Bloxham. Life was tough, however, sport brought great happiness. Cricket aside, there was Junior Colts rugby, house and school fives and athletics. I got the shotput record in my last year, but it was short-lived because everything went metric not long after I left, and old records were scrapped.

What are your favourite school memories?

Gosh, I could write a book of these. Not in special order. My friends and I would rush to see the team sheets for Wednesdays’ and Saturdays’ matches. CCF camps were always wonderful fun and taught us many useful life skills from map reading to cooking and gave me a love of the great outdoors, although rock climbing scared the living daylights out of me.

Wearing my full colours blazer. Winning the Junior Elocution prize was something I was chuffed about at the time. The Summer Term held special memories for me, mainly for the ‘Boys Own’ experiences I had on the cricket field. How fortunate was I to be given such incredible opportunities.

The sporting achievement of others, including OBs, shine brightly in my memory. For example, watching Nevin Prakash (Wn 59-63) float around the track at 100mph to win a school relay that was all but lost till he took the baton for the final leg, some 25 yards behind. To see Nick Gibbs (Cr 59-63) charging into bowl or throw the discuss record distances.

As an OB, I remember Geoff Ramsey’s (Ry 76-79) brutal century against Wrekin, I think, and Ed Hockey’s (Sy 84-89) incredible marathon 170+ at St Albans. Finally, twice watching Simon Smith (Wf 71-76) bat. Both times he hadn’t played for at least twelve months, yet each time he scored elegant, organised hundreds. How can anyone do that?!

Boxing held one or two lasting memories. I had enormous respect for Richard "Sandy" Dean (Cr 56-60) having to fight his best friend, Andy Marek (Eg 55-60), in the house boxing competition. I can't remember the result, but, to my mind, it was an honourable draw. I also remember the mesmerising hand speed of Nigel Watkinson (Wf 58-63) and the power and speed of Clive Nash (Wf 58-63). Luckily, I was too heavy to ever take part before boxing was finally scrapped, thankfully.

Dave Scott (Cr 56-61) was a fine all-round athlete and hero of mine in my first year. We used to watch the 1st XI from the science lab windows on Wednesday and Saturday mornings wondering if we would ever get the chance to play in all-day matches on that beautiful pitch. Well, the next season Dave thundered in to bowl my first ball in the OB match. It was a fraction short and a little bit wide and without thinking I accidentally crashed it square for four. To the great excitement of those in the pavilion and of course yours truly. Chest inflated (such an easy game...), the next ball came down about 50mph faster and ripped out my off stump. I've always tended to learn lessons the hard way! Thank you, Dave, for bringing me down to earth.

Is there a place at Bloxham that holds special memories?

The Chapel has always been a special place for me, and Donald Dowie (Chaplain 64-69) made me Sacristan. Whatever one's religious persuasion, it continues to serve as a vital moral compass, guiding everyone directly or indirectly along "the path of the just". For all that influence, I'm very grateful. I especially loved the singing, hymn practice and the Te Deum after an exeat, in that serenely beautiful place. I admired Donald Dowie greatly and was deeply saddened to hear of his tragic death in South Africa.

What is a memory that you are most proud of?

One of my proudest memories of Bloxham came long after I left. I was contacted through Friends Reunited (pre-Facebook) by an Egerton OB who had moved to Australia after leaving school. He wrote to thank me for his experience as a new boy in Egerton. He told me that he had enjoyed life in Egerton while I was House Captain. He mentioned that this had not always been the experience of some of his contemporaries in other houses at that time. I would love that OB to get in touch again because my wife and I travel to Australia and New Zealand quite frequently and it would be lovely to meet and share our experiences. I tried to reconnect through Friends Reunited but they had closed and got rid of all records.

I must say that the regime and atmosphere in Egerton was hugely down to Sam Kahn (Staff 39-83) and then, when I was House Captain, Philip Gibbs 'EPG' (Staff 46-81). EPG had a rather stern demeanour, I guess from his days as an officer in the army. However, underneath he had a keen sense of humour and fun. He was super-efficient and a great organiser, who demanded high standards from everyone, prefects and juniors alike. Above all, the House Captain and prefects had to *earn* the respect of everyone. EPG's way was not to command or demand respect and enforce it by sanctions or, worse still, fear. He also taught me that it was okay to make mistakes as long as they were acknowledged and put right in the right way. Also, that mistakes dealt with correctly can actually strengthen relationships and be a valuable source of learning.

Philip Gibbs and I were both lucky to have a nice bunch of older pupils to work with. The likes of Martin Abbott (Eg 60-65), Spencer Williams (Eg 60-64) and Stuart Schofield (Eg 60-63) remain good friends to this day. We have lost touch with Peter Davidson (Eg 60-65), Peter Crowhurst (Eg 60-65), Mike Scott-Cumming (Eg 60-65) and Stephen Bromley (Eg 60-64) sadly. However, they all worked well as a senior group to make life happy for all members of the House.

Tell us about your path after school?

My passion for travel and the world beyond Oxfordshire was ignited when an OB, John Scott (Wf 56-61), came back to school to give a talk about his trip around the world. He really turned my head and opened my mind to the possibilities of travel and working overseas.

My teaching career has taken me from Culham College of Education to Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) at Gambia High School, where I taught PE and English, to a degree in Economics at York University. From then, teaching Economics at Kings College, Auckland for three years, where I also spent a lot of time coaching cricket and rugby. That was wonderful fun.

On returning to the UK, I taught at Weston Favell Upper School for only a year sadly, then onto Economics at the Royal Latin School. After that, an M. Ed at Leicester University for a year, then a complete change of direction into Special Education to work with the most disaffected young people with emotional and behavioural problems in Leicester. I spent three years working with the most disaffected young people from the age of four to seventeen.

I learnt so much about teaching and teamwork from some amazing teachers and care staff. One vital lesson that became etched on my mind was how important it is often to depersonalise criticism - so you are able to say "I like you – you know that don't you? But I don't like what you did."

I decided that my future lay in mainstream school; working with young people with problems before they were excluded and sent to special schools. After a few years at a large comprehensive school in Swindon, I was asked to join the staff of a small primary special school in Swindon. This was another complete change, and I was lucky enough to be made Deputy Head before my mother's ill health took me back home. A short happy spell at Banbury School and then retirement in 2004 after mum died in 2003. So much to thank my parents for. I miss them very much.

Looking back at my teaching career, it's pretty obvious there never was a masterplan. What I can say however, is that it was generally hard work, very time-consuming, incredibly rewarding and wonderful fun. Thank you too to Bloxham and EPG and co. for encouraging me in that direction and setting such incredible examples.

Do any teachers stand out from your time at Bloxham?

I learnt so much from my teachers at Bloxham. Sam Kahn was a wonderful example of the best possible practice, both as a housemaster and a classroom teacher. He was so calm and seemed to know us better than we knew ourselves. He was incredibly well organised and must have spent lots of time preparing his lessons. They were broken down into manageable pieces, so one never got bored or inattentive and remained interested and remembered everything. He had a wonderful manner. When he spoke to you, you knew he was carefully listening, not just hearing, and that you and your issues were important to him, and you could rely on him giving you wise and helpful advice. The only time I saw him become mildly irritated was when a lesson of his was interrupted by a fire drill.

Tony Pickering (Staff 59-67) was an inspirational cricket and rugby coach and history teacher. He was a fine sportsman himself and came to support me at Roehampton during school holidays while scoring runs for the Southern Schools Public Schools XI (1965). Afterwards, Headmaster Dr G Seymour (Staff 65-82) generously wrote thanking me for giving Bloxham good publicity.

Henry Pullinger (Staff 55-65) was an excellent geography teacher and Martin Folliott (Staff 63-84) was another inspirational teacher of history. He clearly carefully read essays and wrote helpful notes making history an interesting subject. Martin and his wife, Penny, remain friends to this day.

Above all, it was Headmaster Stanley Thompson (Staff 52-65) who I have to thank for just about everything. He became a father figure after my dad was killed in a car crash in Libya. He helped my mother to overcome the financial aspects of keeping me at Bloxham. We remained good friends and were in touch until he died.

Do you have a favourite sport?

I love most sports. I love rugby and played three years in the 1st XV but cricket has always been a constant passion in my life. It has taught me valuable life lessons and provided unforgettable global experiences as well as enabling me to meet people who have become some of my closest friends.

Aged 14, I found myself in the 1st XI mixing with school prefects etc. My first few games were a disaster. I scored few runs and ran out poor Ian Johnson (Eg 57-62), who I think was Egerton House Captain at the time. To save me further punishment, I was dropped and my world fell apart. However, Sam Kahn came to the rescue and set about repairing my shattered self-confidence. I have to say that I didn't have much to begin with. Sam, aged over 60, took me to the nets at Park Close and bowled excellent leg spinners at me for over an hour. I can't remember the precise words of encouragement, but I remember his smile and how nice he was to me and how touched I felt for this kindness. His magic worked because in the next Colts match I took nine wickets and scored a century the following week. The third week out of the 1st XI I was back in it! This time I managed to stay in it for four years and contribute, including a historic partnership with my now good friend Dave Catty (Eg 58-62), to beating the MCC for the first time. Also, my mother was approached by Warwickshire CC for me to join their cricket school, as well as Northamptonshire. By the end of my fourth season I had scored over a thousand runs and taken 165 wickets. How lucky can anyone be? Scoring runs at Lord's for HS Altham's Public Schools XI was another highlight in 1964.

While teaching and coaching in the Gambia, I was selected to play for the national team in a test match against Nigeria. We beat Nigeria to the great delight of everyone and I was awarded a match ball and transistor radio for my five wickets and top score of 29. Sadly, my precious radio was taken from my flat whilst I was asleep one night. I was the only overseas player on either side, and I will never forget the kindness and respect shown to me by Gambians and Nigerians alike.

I never quite secured a place in the Oxfordshire team and Northants interest faded; however scoring runs once in the Parks against Oxford University was a great thrill. There's so much more I could say about cricket including playing in New Zealand and while at York.

A lesson I first began to properly appreciate at Bloxham was the importance of teamwork and confidence building. Everyone in the team had an important role to play however good a player they were. For example, fielding. Dave Long (Wf 59-65) was a fine wicket keeper and friend and took many excellent catches and stumpings and made the rest of us look good fielders. Players who didn't bat or bowl every week needed to be reassured how vital their role was. Every run saved was a run scored for us and extra pressure on the opposition. The players who were lucky enough to bat and bowl often also needed to be aware of the role of fellow team members who had to stay alert for the team.

True personal achievement is only possible with the support of your fellow team members and coaches. I've experienced all types of team play from very positive at Bloxham, the Gambia and

latterly Charlton Cricket Club, to negative, even dysfunctional sometimes in county and/or professional changing rooms, where people barely spoke to newcomers, or chose only to bat or bowl when the conditions of the pitch suited their preferences.

I have recently been welcomed into the OB golf fraternity. John Williams (Wf 64-69) of my days, and the likes of Rick Beard (Ry 72-76), Simon Smith, Ian Cooper (Wf 70-75) and Nick and Peter Murray White (Wf 66-71 and Wf 64-69) and Nashs from different generations of OBs.

Does any adventure stand out?

Life has been one great big adventure. In 1973, armed with my degree in Economics with Economic and Social History from York, I set sail for New Zealand on a Russian passenger liner. We sailed from Southampton through the Panama Canal to Tahiti and arrived about ten hours before schedule. My roommate and I decided, rather than stay aboard and explore the next day, to leave the boat, sleep rough and, if possible, circumnavigate the island. So, at 10pm we set off with a sheet each and a bag of nerves.

Papeete [*the capital of French Polynesia*] appeared deserted but we found a garage proprietor who was very friendly when, in my O Level French, I told him we were English. I think the French had conducted nuclear testing in that area so were very unpopular. He gave us a map which led us to a place called Point Venus, where we slept under the stars.

In the morning, we walked to the main road which took the traveller around the island. We passed swaying palm trees and people with flowers in their hair and everywhere the sweet smell of frangipani and other tropical plants. We started to hitchhike. Not much traffic, I hasten to add, but a mother with her mother and daughter gave us a lift. I can't remember where they were going but they changed their plans and took us on a joyful adventure around the whole island. We saw incredible views, encountered giant tortoises and met other beautiful people. We tried to repay their kindness, but instead they draped many seashell necklaces around our necks and hugged and kissed us farewell. It was hard waving goodbye, knowing that we might never see them again. Their kindness and generosity have left an indelible mark in my heart that can never be removed.

What drew you to a career in teaching?

Philip Gibbs felt I might have an aptitude for teaching so suggested I contact the Vocational Guidance Association in London. Looking back, and I'm aware of the dangers of oversimplification, teaching is pretty much about people and relationships. I feel if you don't like people, teaching is not the job for you. You must be able to take a sincere interest in the interest and abilities of all young people in your care. In some senses, for some people, the subject or topic is irrelevant. It helps to be interested in what you're teaching, of course. There has to be a rapport. You also have to have an open mind and be prepared to learn from your pupils no matter what their age. It's worth remembering sometimes that for many of us teachers a significant number of the people we're teaching are far smarter than us - this definitely applied in my case!

So, at the VGA's suggestion and EPG's advice, I applied and was accepted at Culham College of Education on the strength of my O Levels. I guess also that my experience at Bloxham led me to feel I would be more comfortable with a further college kind of experience.

I can only begin to say how grateful I am to Bloxham for the opportunities the School gave me.

I'd just like to add that my friends were also a source of great comfort after my father's death. A very special memory I have involved the Caudwell family. They contacted my mother and suggested that I might enjoy a road trip to Scotland with their son Roger (Eg 57-62) (who was a prefect in Egerton and a friend from prep school days) in his Austin 7. Curiously, Roger and Dave Catty emigrated to New Zealand, so we all reconnected when I went over there. Roger remains one of my dearest lifelong friends.

What does it mean to be a member of the Egerton Society?

I'm proud to be part of the Egerton Society and I cherish the friendships Donna and I have made with fellow OBs before and since leaving Bloxham. I've heard lots of similar stories of how the generosity of the School came to the rescue financially in difficult times and enabled people to stay on. The generosity of the School is only made possible through the generosity of OBs and the unsung friends of Bloxham. Having personally been the recipient of a bursary, I feel, if you are able, it's important to pass on that kindness to someone else.

One of the most important lessons I've learned in life is not to just be a "taker". Never be too proud to accept help if you need it. But always pass the ball down the line and/or pay decency forward when the opportunity arises. You might rightly say there are many organisations that deserve our support. That is true but Bloxham also deserves to go from strength to strength, it is already. The world is a better place with Bloxham in it.

Every time I visit the School it is quite clear that Bloxham is buzzing and in a good place. Paul and his staff are clearly doing a wonderful job. Matt, Sarah, Kate and Rachel, the alumni team, and Simon with the archives, make even the oldest of us OBs feel valued and an important part of the Bloxham extended family. The truth is of course that everyone is important (to a lesser extent, me). I think I am right in saying that the wonderful resources at the disposal of present Bloxhamists could not possibly have been provided by fees alone. As Head of Egerton, I was the only pupil to have a study of my own. I never had a bedroom of my own. It seems to me that fees largely cover running costs, but the bulk of capital expenditure has come from OBs and friends of the School. I knew little of this when I was at school, one takes it rather for granted I'm afraid.

A point worth making is that the amount one gives back in the Egerton Society is less significant than the act of giving. Any amount helps. John Parker (Cr 61-66), a contemporary and friend, has taken on the role of Chairman of the Egerton Society. Other people give back in non-monetary ways of course, like sitting on committees or looking after the many beautiful trees on campus (John Badger Eg 64-60 and Current Staff), many do both. Whether you are an OB or a present pupil, what you're doing at the moment is important, but more important still is to inform and involve the next generation in supporting the School in any way they can. We all need to think and care for each other and our school.

One young man I used to teach gave me a tube of wine gums when he found out I was leaving Banbury School. What a wonderful honour to have won his respect. Another brief anecdote of giving involves my five-year old granddaughter. When asked by her teacher what she was going to do with the money the tooth fairy left her, she replied she was going to find a homeless person to give it to. She is aptly named Grace, bless her.

Donna, my wife, has grown to care very much for people she has met in the Egerton Society. Friends like Ross (Eg 56-60) and Pamela Hand, the Nasons (Wf 56-60), the Hartleys (Wf 45-54), the Badgers (Wn 53-56), Mike Burne (Wn 61-64) and the list goes on.

What is your parting advice?

I'm aware that I've already climbed onto a bit of a soap box. If you're still reading this, I'll sum up a few key points for present pupils especially.

Never stop learning and always do your best in and out of class, and in life beyond school. Remember you will all be OBs very soon. Never be afraid to ask for help or too proud to accept it when offered. Earn the respect of others, command it alone at your peril. Never be afraid to admit defeat gracefully and always be prepared to laugh at yourself. Always laugh with others, never at them. Love your neighbour (like Grace) and a message from my dear mum: "If you can't say something nice about someone, keep your comments to yourself." I failed you on that one, Mum! Pay kindness forward if you can but retrospectively will do.

I worry that there are many people that I haven't mentioned or thanked. I've already lost most of my poor readers.

Thank you, Bloxham, for everyone and everything.

Very best wishes to you all,

Tony (and Donna) Tame