

Ronnie Barker

Mike Chew, 29 September 2012

My claim to fame is that I lived in the thirties, forties and fifties in this road at no 59, which as yet does not sport a blue plaque on the wall, and went to the same primary school as Ronnie, Donnington School in Cornwallis Road opposite the air raid shelters, and to the same grammar school, the City of Oxford High School in George Street, opposite the Ritz cinema, and I used to catch the no 3 bus with him to go to school. Being a couple of years older he was probably totally oblivious of me, and I didn't take much notice of him – well I didn't know he was going to be famous, did I? Tuppence ha'penny busfare to Cornmarket Street, but if you went to Iffley Turn to get on the bus it was only three ha'pence.

Today, as Chairman, I am representing the City of Oxford School Association, which has donated the plaque. I am pleased to see a number of the committee here and indeed some ordinary members of the Association, who might be classed as plebs. Our School was closed in 1966 and we became part of Oxford School along with Southfield School in Glanville Road. Oxford School no longer exists as such, and we reformed our Old Boys Association some seven years ago.

It is a great privilege and honour for the Association to participate in this ceremony. Ronnie is still in the hearts of many people who remember not only his comedy series on television, but also his versatile and accomplished acting skills in various dramas. As a blue plaquist, if such a title exists, he follows in the footsteps of another illustrious Old Boy T. E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, whose plaque is at his childhood home in 2 Polstead Road. Indeed, when Wetherspoons opened their pub next to the old school it was a toss-up whether it would be called the Four Candles or the Lawrence of Arabia. Open all Hours beat the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, seven-nil.

This ceremony is a proud moment for the City of Oxford School Association, and we are grateful to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board for inviting us to participate in it.