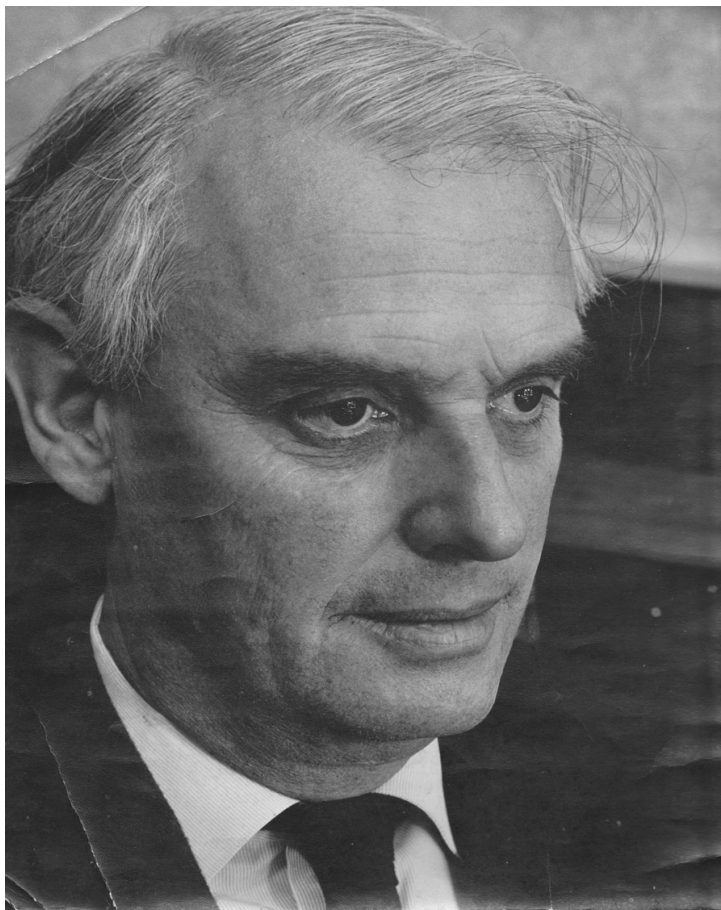




Unveiling of a Blue Plaque for Alec Peterson

33 St Andrew's Road, Old Headington at 3pm

Welcome

Professor Robert Evans, Chair Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board

Speakers

Dr Amelia Peterson, granddaughter

Ruth Rawling, Vice Chair of the Board of Governors, Atlantic College

Marco Dondi, Deputy Director General, International Baccalaureate

Reception after the unveiling

All welcome for refreshments at Old Headington Village Hall

Peterson family life at St Andrew's Road

Our family moved from Dover to Old Headington in January 1958. Life in Dover had been at School House, Dover College, where Alec was headmaster. Persuaded by my mother (for whom Oxford meant nostalgia for her years at Oxford High School and as an undergraduate at Somerville in the 1940s) Alec applied for the role of Director of the Department of Education.

School House at Dover College had been a large grey flint building with pupils separated from the family home by a green baize door. An institutional building with a very large dining room and drawing room. The description below of the family's arrival in Old Headington is from Alec's family memoir. Our mother's delight at being back in Oxford was tempered by what she felt was a smaller house in which some much loved furniture would not fit.

"That Summer (1957) we spent mainly at the cottage [in Ryall, Dorset] driving over to Oxford occasionally to look at houses. North Oxford seemed the obvious place and we did look at one there, but my memories of the Oxford climate made me prefer one of the surrounding hills and by great good luck we tried Old Headington, the 'village in a city'. At first we were attracted by a romantic cottage called Waldencote, partly by the fact that Elizabeth Bowen had lived in it, but we missed it and bought instead 33 St. Andrew's Road. We paid £5,900 for it, half from my share of father's estate, which had been £6,000, and half on a mortgage.

Finding schools for us three children was the next task. William was ruled out by the Dragon School as being above the usual entry age and remained as a boarder at his prep school in Hastings. Henry (aged 7) was accepted at the junior part of the Dragon, and Cassie at nearby Greycotes in the Banbury Road.

The proximity of these latter two schools to the Education Department in Norham Gardens meant that Alec could make a neighbourly contribution in the form of the morning school run. A group of nearby Dragon boys would assemble on the front lawn of No.33 to pile into an Austin Cambridge (a small car by current standards) for the trip down the Northern bypass.

This journey took 10-14 minutes in those days, compared with Oxford's now heavily congested ring road. Mike Richards (the son of Dr Donald Richards at 27 St Andrew's Road) was one of this group of small boys and is attending the unveiling on the 26th .

At the end of the school day, another parent would do the return run (our mother did not learn to drive until later in life). Sometimes this would be Aline Berlin (wife of Sir Isaiah) who drove a gleaming black Mini when these first appeared in 1959. More of a squash, but an exciting ride home.

Looking from the small lawn in front of No.33, the downstairs room at the lefthand end was referred to as 'the breakfast room'. The same gang of Dragon friends (and their sisters) congregated there each Saturday afternoon to watch Gary Halliday, a BBC series about a pilot/airman. On the righthand side of the front door was the 'drawing room' and the adult preserve in the house.

Alec had no separate study (at any stage of life after a headmaster's study in Dover) and no desk at home at which to work. Much of his time was spent sitting in a high backed armchair writing on a pad in longhand. This remained how he worked during the United World College and International Baccalaureate years, during and after his and our mother's move to London. His prodigious output took the form of books, articles, alongside letters to a range of colleagues and institutions across the globe. These included fund-raising efforts in the early days of UWC and the IB office in Geneva.

It was sitting in the same armchair that Alec wrote his last book *Schools Across Frontiers*. Published in 1987 (a year before he died) this account of the founding of the United World College movement and the origins of the International Baccalaureate is detailed. It must have been written largely from memory. There was no Google to rely on, and he was not someone who stored documents for later referral. The book remains in print in an updated edition.

The house was always full, including lodgers. Amongst them were Winniffrith relatives during their years at Oxford and subsequently a series of girls doing their A' levels at Beech Lawn tutorial college, where our mother tutored for many years.

Alec was always glad to have conversations at supper involving others aside from his teenage offspring. The Old Headington book club was also an important feature of life. Sadly the membership were not good at keeping records of what books were read. Our collective memory is that members included John and Vi Hughes, John and Patience Bayley, Edward and Sarah McCabe, and the Clennells.

33 St Andrew's Road became the vicarage for St Andrews Church in 1977. The Peterson family are very grateful to Mthr Emma Hopegood Jones for agreeing that the plaque can be installed, and to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaque Board for accepting the family's application last year.

Alec was never one for grandeur in any form, and the sight of a Blue Plaque on what is a modest house would have pleased his Scots sense of puritanism and affirmed a life of Good Work.

William, Henry and Cassie Nash (nee Peterson)

