



Hobby and Oggie

British capital investment helped to transform Uruguay in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lured by the dream of a new life in a country awash with opportunity, people came from all over the British Isles to work on the railways and utilities, the cattle estancias, the meat processing and refrigeration plants, the shipping lines, and the banks and other firms that sprang up to service these new industries. By the turn of the century the large Anglo community was pondering how to give their children a proper British education this far from home. In response to those concerns, The British School was founded in 1908, and remains a thriving institution to this day, having also educated many of the country's political, business, academic, and cultural leaders over the last century.

The school originally “imported” British teachers who came to Montevideo on contract; some of them never left. Two of those who stayed had already become legends by the time I was there, in the 1950s, and left their mark on me and many others. I am talking about the two men affectionately known as Hobby and Oggie.

William Leslie Ogston (M.A., Aberdeen University), arrived in 1930, aged twenty-four. A Scotsman who never lost his burr, he remained at the school for 47 years as a teacher of mathematics and geography, sports coach, and House Master of Jones House. He also served as Acting Headmaster during the war years. A keen sportsman and Scouter, he had been captain of his university's cross-country team and soon breathed new life into the 1st Montevideo Scouts Troop.

Arthur J. Hobson (M.A., Oxford University) arrived in 1937, when the girls' and boys' schools had just been merged, giving rise to the plural (and official) version of the name: The British Schools. His main subjects were history and English and, during his 30-year tenure, he was House Master of Cuff House. A true scholar, he founded the School Library and organized and supported extra-curricular

intellectual life for students. He started the Perficean Society and the chess club, and revived the school magazine, *The Perficean*.

These two men were quite different in temperament, yet their goals were the same. Oggie was reserved and seldom smiled in the classroom. He was strict and I was always a little scared of him. He once sentenced me to detention for misbehaving—or, in his words, for being “young and foolish”—and I had to stand outside his office for an hour at the end of the day. I was mortified by such a humiliating experience and recall the radiator beside me in the corridor emitting welcome waves of comforting heat. But I took his classes far more seriously after that and learned to appreciate his sincere attempts to awaken in me an interest in mathematics and geography.

By contrast, I loved Hobby and was never scared of him. How could I be? He was the gentlest of souls and nurtured my nascent passion for words with constructive criticism and his signature sunny smile. He gladly shared his own passion for language, literature, and history with us; we were fortunate to have such a generous teacher who brought Shakespearean plays and historical events to life with his readings. He thoroughly enjoyed reciting poetry and prose to us, twisting his legs into pretzels in his unabashed enthusiasm for whatever he was declaiming. It is true that, during my early teens, my thoughts frequently strayed in class, but Hobby had a knack for drawing me back to the subject at hand, and I can still quote some of the lines from Macbeth and the works of the poets to whom he introduced us.

Both these teachers were perhaps at their most animated while urging on their House teams during the Tug-of-War on Sports Day. Out on the playing fields, waving their hats and shouting excitedly, they embodied the encouragement they showered on us in their classrooms. After all these years, with profound gratitude, I salute them both.