

## **Keswick Hall College of Education: Musings from Sid Kipper**

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### **MUSINGS FROM SID KIPPER**

How can I explain why someone who trained at Keswick Hall as a teacher of infants became a writer, performer and broadcaster, with highly dubious alter-ego called Sid Kipper?

I could argue that it was inevitable. After all, I was one of only two men who started on that course in 1971, and we've both gone on to remarkably similar careers. But the truth is that it was the result of a series of accidents and incidents.

To start with, I only chose Keswick because I had a girlfriend there. Of course, by the time I arrived, she wasn't my girlfriend any longer. The College was going through a period of change. For instance, when I arrived hostels were strictly segregated, male or female. When I left they were completely mixed. When I arrived we were all studying for a Certificate. When I left everyone was taking a B.Ed. It wasn't all my doing, however.

Mind you, I did stay for longer than most. After my first year I took a year out of study to serve as the president of the Student's Union, by then a sabbatical post. And then I failed my final teaching practice (not all my fault), so I had to take out another year to do it again, this time with the help of the Junior department. Then I only had to take my B.Ed. year, and I thought I'd finally left Keswick Hall.

I applied for a few jobs, but, being determined to stay in or around Norwich, the school year started without me. But before I could decide what to do next one of those incidents occurred. I received a phone call from a Keswick friend. Would I like to



teach Social Sciences (that being my 'main subject') at Lowestoft college of Further Education? And that was it. Oh, there was an interview of sorts, but the key question seemed to be 'Can you start on Monday?' I managed to guess the right answer, and I was in.

For two years I taught O and A levels to mainly adult classes. I taught full-time hours, but was employed as a part-timer. That suited me fine. It paid a little less, but gave me much more flexibility. In the second year I managed to arrange things so that I only went in four days a week, which was a very useful concession, as I was commuting three hours a day.

All was going well, until the next incident. My trade union decided that people in my situation were being exploited and a regulation was brought in that no-one should teach more than half full-time hours. Oh, I was protected. I would have to be given a full-time position. But that, of course, would have done away with my flexibility. So while I considered my options I applied for a few other positions.

What made me think that the Centre for Applied Research in Education at UEA would consider me as a PhD student I don't know. I suppose I simply thought there was nothing to lose in applying. But consider me they did, and, given support, I think, from some Keswick Hall staff, I was accepted.

So I began my research into teacher training in a little office in what was known as the University Village, that being a group of largely temporary buildings put up when the University first started. My chief memory is of a system of night storage heaters with automatic fans. This meant that in the winter, when all the heat had gone by lunch time, the fans thereafter blew icy cold air at you.

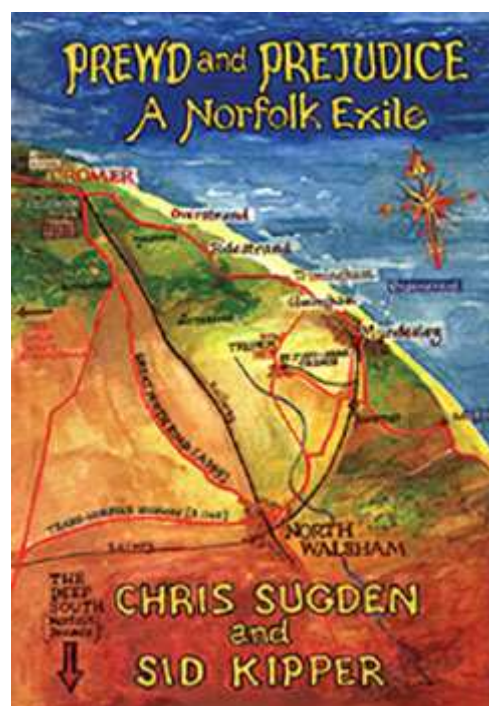
After a year there, the announcement came that we were moving somewhere more comfortable. The place in question was Keswick Hall. The East Wing, to be precise, and now I had an office which had previously been the living room of the Residence Officer. It was almost as if I'd gone full circle.

But I was about to fly off at a tangent. During the two years there I didn't only do my research. I was also working on material for a duo I had formed with a friend, called The Kipper Family. They were a fictional father and son from Trunch, in deepest Norfolk, who sang some very dubious old folk songs and told strange stories of country life. We'd managed to get ourselves 'discovered' at one of the major folk festivals, and were increasingly being asked to perform around the country.

So, when my research time was over, I took up performing full time. I'd continued to teach one day a week at Lowestoft throughout, which I did for a while longer, but soon got too busy to continue that. So, apart from the occasional workshop I now give, the last formal teaching I did was in 1984. I've been working solo since 1992, and have constantly toured, broadcast and recorded (10 albums so far).

But the Keswick connection continues. In 1993 I met one of my lecturers from Keswick Hall. What was he doing now, I enquired. He replied that one of the things he was doing was some publishing. Well, I've got a book for you, I said, and that was that. We are currently preparing our fourth book, 'Cod Pieces', for the printers. Recently he ran into Bill Etherington, who suggested I write this piece. In many ways what I do now is very like what I was trained for all those years ago. I still do my lesson preparation. I still stand up in front of a group of people, aiming to get and keep their attention, and put something across. My voice is still the prime tool of my trade.

And who knows? Maybe the wheel will turn again. In due course they may turn Keswick Hall into a retirement home. I may still go back yet.



The website manager is a fan of Sid Kipper having seen him a number of times during his North Devon tours. He has now retired. To get a taste of these performances:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddZcW0aSfb4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLHDpNFz5Bs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7dWSgtmss0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSnKztWTAUk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvxM6B4QuzY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L04kEUiMOMQ>