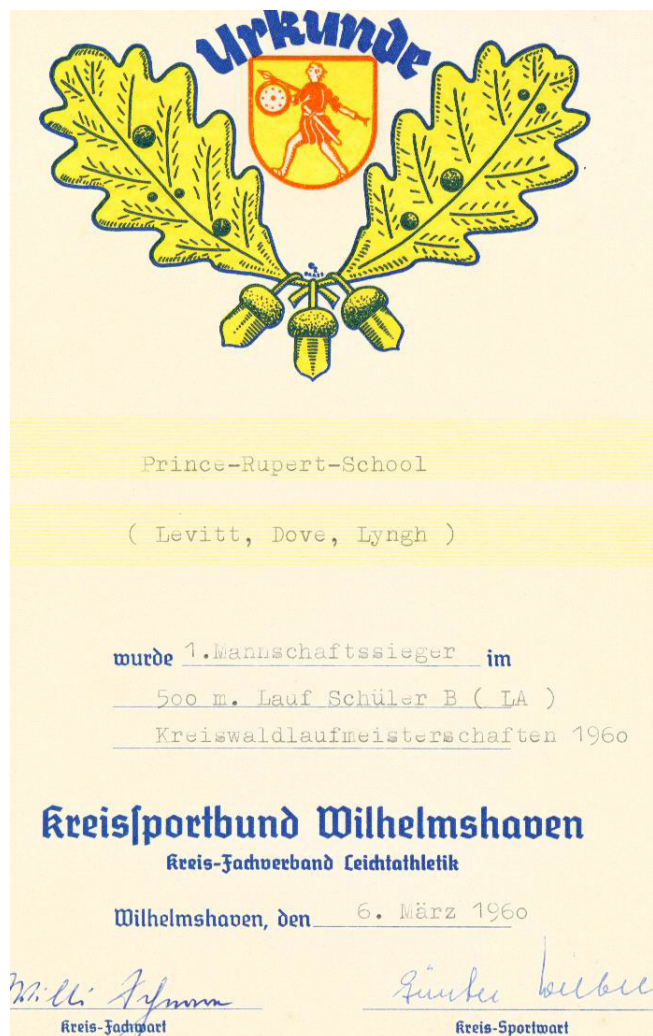


Clueless in Wilhelmshaven - Paul Levitt

You never know what's around the corner. In the first of my three terms at PRS, I and two other PRS first-formers were entered for what was believed to be an inter-school cross-country race. We limbered up in brilliant sunshine together with what seemed like a hundred other schoolboys, our phoenix emblems proudly displayed on our vests. The starters gun rang out and an army of clattering plimsols set off through the February mud. We had no tactics and no idea of how far we had to run, but my vague plan was to try and keep sight of the leaders until the final stages of the race and then give it some welly in the home straight. This tactic had brought me some success in inter-house races. However, in no time at all, there was a sharp bend in the course and the crowd of expectant on-lookers began to grow denser. We weren't even fully warmed up when it suddenly dawned on us that the finish was very close. Absurdly close. And there were still dozens of runners in front. Having miscalculated by a mile (well, six miles actually) untapped reserves kicked in. The finish came into view and I saw a jubilant German schoolboy throw his arms in the air a yard or two ahead of me. A small band of older PRS runners gathered around as we stood with clueless expressions on our faces. The distance had only been 500 metres, an unheard of distance for a cross-country race. Nevertheless, PRS had taken 2nd and 3rd places, high enough to actually win the team race. My first big lessons had been learnt: if in doubt, ask and be prepared - the boy scouts motto.



This was just one of many useful things I learnt at PRS and I was naturally disappointed to have to leave the school at the end of the autumn term when my dad took early retirement from the Army. We went to live in Hornsea (E. Yorks), but moved to Kingston-Upon-Hull one year later. After leaving school, I studied engineering in Hull and joined Hawker Siddeley Aviation (now part of British Aerospace), where I trained to be a technical author. In 1973, I moved to Hamburg to work for Philips and married Norma Jean (no, not the famous one), whom I had met at a party in Hull. Our two children were born in Hamburg and had just started school there when we returned to the UK, living on a farm just outside Melton Mowbray. However, the company I had joined in Leicester called in the receiver just one year later, so I rejoined Philips, this time in at company HQ in Holland. Not really content at Philips Research, and always having had more than just a vague notion that I was more cut out for doing my own thing, I left Philips (at the age of 49) and registered my own communications company. Six years of rapid growth (and very hard work) followed, and then the recession struck. Although things will probably never be what they used to be (in my working lifetime at any rate), I fulfill the odd assignment as a writer and was even asked to translate a novel, recently. With a self-supporting family (our kids now work in Munich and Holland respectively), semi-retirement is not such a dreadful option at my time of life. As I learnt in Wilhelmshaven 44 years ago, you never know what is around the corner. A 46-year-old friend of mine who has learnt to live with an inoperable brain tumour diagnosed 5 years ago will second that.

Paul Levitt