

HEADLINERS

Talkback: Griff Rhys Jones

The actor and director thinks back to his school days

Age: 42

School: Brentwood School, Essex

Occupation: Actor, director writer, producer

If I had to rate my school days out of 10 I'd give them about eight. I had a lot of good friends, and when you have a good time at school it's entirely down to your friends. What ever happens, I'll never have to sit through double Latin again.

My father was a doctor, so when I was little He was the only teacher who didn't treat us as children but treated us as equals. I tended to move around from school to school. The second move, while I was at primary school, upset me the most because it was quite a jolt to move from Midhurst in Sussex up to Harlow in Essex. You have to say goodbye to all your friends and start all over again. It took me a while to settle in at Harlow and then we moved again. You feel a bit lonely and separate.

When I was about 11, I went to Brentwood School, in Essex, where I felt fairly settled. I was part of a group of people called The Clique by the headmaster. He once said in assembly that there was nothing more odious than the sound of cliquish laughter. I think he was talking about us. What we did was generally hang around in the group and make each other laugh. That was the thing that we enjoyed doing most of all, and I'm afraid I have just carried on doing that for the rest of my life.

I enjoyed history at school I liked the debate. Roger Perrin taught us medieval history in the sixth form. When he first arrived he hadn't been a teacher for very long. He was just about the only teacher who didn't treat us as children but treated us as equals. He was good-natured, he was actually somebody who enjoyed a good laugh.

History lessons taught by Mr Perrin meant that we generally tended to make things up; not make up the facts, but make up big theories about why things happened. It was very imaginative and we had a lot of fun.

Then I went to university and read history and I found it very dull because they got back to the facts. They wanted everything to be serious. That struck me as a bit of a disappointment really. If you have good teachers they can make a subject fun. Otherwise it would have been difficult.

Roger Perrin taught at Brentwood School for nine years, leaving in 1978. He is now headteacher of St Bede's School in East Sussex.

I was surprised that Griff chose me as his favourite teacher because I only taught him for two years. He worked very hard and seems to enjoy his work.

He was an extremely good writer and there was a degree of good humour in his writing. You need more imagination to do medieval history than modern history and he's a particularly imaginative person. He liked the people from these distant centuries.

He wasn't a very keen games player. I remember him playing cricket in a house match. He didn't think much of it and organised for the team to spend the whole time in the field dancing. He called it dancing cricket. The fielders pirouette and go around doing ballet steps and other forms of dancing.

He had masses of ideas and could see the amusing side of things. I didn't know he was going to become a comedian, but he'd always had a very good sense of humour and could make people laugh.

Interviews by editors: Erica Rutherford, 14, and Clency Lebrasse, 15, and reporters Mehrak Golestan, 12, Natasha Asare, 13, Gillian Antwi-Bosiako, 9, and Abeyna Jones, 12. This article was published in [The Guardian](#).

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