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## Michael H.R. Tolkien (1920-84): a research travelogue

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## **Michael H.R. Tolkien (1920-84): a research travelogue**

Within the course of various scholarship endeavors related to my interest and research on J.R.R. Tolkien and his mythology, opportunities arose to examine the life of Tolkien's second son, Michael. In the previous decade, a number of books owned by Michael have been appearing at regular intervals on eBay and other online auction houses, and this phenomenon has peaked my curiosity. For one, very little about Michael's personal life is known except for those special instances related to his father's mythology (the Atlantis dream, Tom Bombadil, and the Roverandom story, to name a few).<sup>1</sup> His personal life, his character, even the details related to his military accident in 1940, have not been detailed or explored. Pictures of Michael, both as a child and as an adult, are few and far between.<sup>2</sup> While Christopher's role in his father's estate is well-known, and both John and Priscilla have openly participated in discussions and conferences related to their father's work (Priscilla more than John), Michael has remained something of an enigma. It is obvious in his father's published correspondence that he had a very deep, abiding relationship with Michael, and yet Michael was able to maintain a somewhat private and almost hidden life despite the popularity and success of his father.

This article will attempt to put together a portrait of Michael's life through recent archival and research visits to various locations related to him in the United Kingdom. These visits were conducted during the Spring and Fall of 2015, and the photographs and video footage provide a

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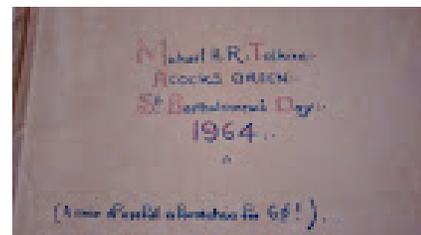
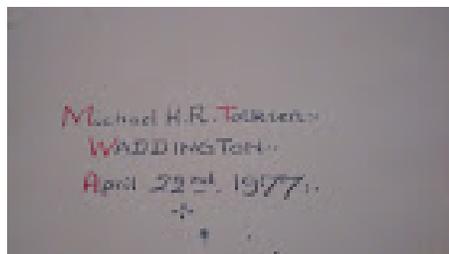
<sup>1</sup> His entry in the *J.R.R. Tolkien encyclopedia: scholarship and critical assessment* (Routledge, 2007)(pp. 668-9) has minimal biographical information, focusing more on his relationship with various characters and stories in his father's mythology. Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond, *The J.R.R. Tolkien companion and guide* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006, 2 v.) records some aspects of Michael's life and locations in more detail, but again only in relation to his father's work.

<sup>2</sup> The only pictures I am aware of are in John and Priscilla Tolkien, *The Tolkien family album* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1992).

unique portrait of Michael H.R. Tolkien never before known. The presentation of the information as it was uncovered is given chronologically, because the volume of research began as an avalanche that affected subsequent tangents and visits, and also because the reader will appreciate the unraveling of the documentation in this manner (almost like a detective story).

## Background

My interest in Michael H.R. Tolkien began with the purchase of a few books from his library via eBay approximately fifteen years ago. Michael was very meticulous in recording his name (usually in two colors: red and black); his location at that time; the date (usually fully written out: ex. July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1950); and on many occasions the event (ex. Christmas, St. Athanasius). Sometimes a nameplate contains this information, sometimes not; if the book was a gift, this is recorded as well.



The craftsmanship of the owner's information in each book, along with the notes that many of them contain, reveal a depth of intensity and an insight into the mind of the owner of the books that is indeed rare. As a result, I have been slowly obtaining books from Michael's library as they become available (more on this below), such that eighty-eight known books have been identified thus far, and preliminary research on their background and notes is being shared.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Papers have been presented at the 2015 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) conference ("Preliminary thoughts on the library of Michael H.R. Tolkien") and the 2015 International PCA/ACA

While it is known that Michael taught Classics and various languages at a number of schools in the United Kingdom, the exact dates of his tenure at those schools has been difficult to determine in the past. Examination of the dates and locations indicated within the books in his library has helped to focus my research and begin to piece together Michael's life journey on a much more intimate level.

Details on Michael's life, as they are known, are provided below:<sup>4</sup>

Tolkien kept notebook on Michael's pronunciation and use of words as a child (same with John)

Summer 1920: Edith and spiders in cottage during pregnancy

1921: Smut on Michael from Leed's air

1922: catches measles

1923: flying kites with Hilary

Jan. 1924: appendicitis, but miraculously recovers the night before surgery

Christmas 1924: gets train

September 1925: Roverandum incident

Jan. 1926: Michael and Christopher have ringworm

1926-30: Icelandic au pair girls in house

Summer 1926: Picnic on banks of Cherwell, Michael trips on willow roots and falls into river, Tolkien jumps in to get him

1928: Maddo and Owlamoo, drawn to exorcise bogeys imagined by Michael

1934: Vacation at Sidmouth, Michael and Christopher/John? bike there from Oxford

1934-39: Student at The Oratory

1936: Michael writes a fresh typescript of *The Hobbit*

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conference ("Continued analyses and thoughts on the library of Michael H.R. Tolkien"). Another paper will be presented at the 2016 PCA/ACA conference in March 2016 ("The enigma of Michael H.R. Tolkien (1920-1984): his life and character").

<sup>4</sup> All of this information has been taken from Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien companion and guide* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006, 2 v.).

Sept. 1939: volunteers for Army service, told to spend 1 year in university

June 1940: Michael becomes aircraft gunner

July 10-October 31, 1940: Battle of Britain, Michael awarded George Award “for his actions as an anti-aircraft gunner, defending aerodromes during the battle”

Dec. 7, 1940: Michael wounded in accident with Army vehicle (suffered a back injury), staying in Worcester Royal Infirmary, visit from family

Jan. 1941: Michael leaves infirmary to convalesce

March 6-8, 1941: Tolkien’s long letter to Michael on marriage, visit from family on March 15 (*Letters* #43)

June 1941: Michael becomes an officer cadet at Royal Military College, Sandhurst; appointed to coastal defence of Sidmouth

Nov. 11, 1941: Michael marries Joan Griffiths, Tolkien not in attendance

End 1941: Michael transfers to Royal Air Force and trains to become a rear-gunner in bomber aircraft. Sees action over France and Germany

Jan. 11, 1943: Tolkien’s 1<sup>st</sup> grandchild, Michael George Reuel, born

1944: Michael judged medically unfit for further military service, returns to studies at Trinity College, Oxford

Dec. 9, 1944: Joanna born

July 21, 1946: Tolkien trying to find job for Michael (*Letters* #105?)

Sept. 1947-1956: become master at Oratory School, Woodcote in southern Oxfordshire

August 14-September 14, 1948: Tolkien stays at Michael’s home while his family is on vacation; completes draft of LotR there

June 21, 1952: Judith born

Aug. 30-Sept. 10, 1952: Tolkien stays at Michael’s home while his family is on vacation

Late June 1953: Tolkien visits Michael @ Oratory School, on occasion of their prize day

Aug. 17, 1954: Tolkien inscribes FR copy to Michael

Dec. 7, 1954: Tolkien inscribes TT copy to Michael

Oct. 22, 1955: Tolkien inscribes FR copy to Michael (birthday)

Dec. 6, 1955: incident at Oratory School that no LotR copy is in library by Michael

1956: Tolkien writes "Cat" for Joanna

1956: move to Solihull School, taught Classics and coached the 1<sup>st</sup> XV

1958-1964: move to Ampleforth

1964: short stint at Rossall School

Late Oct. 1963: Michael writes that he is depressed, not well, and in sagging faith (*Letters* #250). Tolkien writes back to him. Nov. 1 letter, recommends Blessed Sacrament twice

Nov. 1963: comments on C.S. Lewis's death, buying Michael George a cello

1965-1976: move to Stonyhurst

Aug. 22, 1967: Tolkien's 1<sup>st</sup> great-grandchild, Mandy, born

Aug. 25, 1967: long letter to Michael about Tolkien's early trip to Switzerland, never sent (see p. 734)

Aug. 30, 1973: Michael in Switzerland when Tolkien becomes ill, Christopher in France

### **Stonyhurst College**

A unique opportunity arose in the Summer of 2015 to directly research Michael's life while I was presenting scholarship on a different topic at a conference in York, UK. In anticipation of this trip and because of the northern location, I contacted Stonyhurst College through their website, asking if it was possible to visit the school and to meet with someone knowledgeable about Michael's tenure there (1965-75). Luckily, David Knight, current archivist at Stonyhurst and a colleague of Michael's (Mr. Knight joined the faculty in 1967), contacted me and indicated that he would be happy to assist. The visit with Mr. Knight occurred on Monday, July 27, 2015, after a two-hour drive from York. Mr. Knight was quite generous with his time, providing me with a tour of the college and surrounding environs, along with his extensive knowledge of the history of the college and what he knew of Michael personally. It should be

noted that Mr. Knight was not in the best medical condition, having told me that he had woken that morning to find that he could not move, and that he became completely disoriented if he closed his eyes (he mentioned that his condition might be related to Guillain-Barre syndrome, and that he was working with a physician). Despite this, I gleaned an extensive amount of information from Mr. Knight in the short time that I spent with him:

- On Michael's death, his library was sold to Halewoods in Preston
- Michael was very meticulous (ex. When writing report slips on students to parents, Michael would make an exact second copy for himself)
- He was quiet and reserved, and always immaculately dressed
- He lived in Woodfields, the last house on the hill. His father stayed with him there on a number of occasions. Three to four trees were planted in the backyard on his father's suggestion
- Michael's wife Joan was very nice, a typical housewife and fan of Julie Andrews; maintained a kind of shrine to her in the house
- From 1940-46, Michael's brother John and the English College of Rome stayed in St. Mary's Hall at Stonyhurst (Jesuit retreat on site, now a boy's school). His father visited John there and stayed at New Lodge and signed the visitor's book.<sup>5</sup>
- Stonyhurst is currently renovating its library, which is being renamed the "Tolkien Library," even though no monies from the Tolkien's were donated to it

After this interview, Mr. Knight provided me with a tour of the college, including trips to New Lodge, St. Mary's Lodge, and Michael's home in Woodfields (view attached videos below).



Entrance to Stonyhurst College.mpg



Entrance to Stonyhurst College 2.mpg



Stonyhurst College.mpg



Mr. David Knight, archivist.mpg



New Lodge, Stonyhurst.mpg

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<sup>5</sup> Most of this is recorded in other sources. Mr. Knight provided me with a number of articles published in the *Stonyhurst record* and the local papers; two of these "The venerable English College at St. Mary's Hall" (date unknown) and "Tolkien and Stonyhurst" (*Stonyhurst record*, 2002?) were very informative, although the latter article contains quite a bit of misinformation, some of which is discussed in the early pages of "In Tolkien's genuine footsteps" at <http://www.tolkiensociety.org/blog/2014/08/in-tolkiens-genuine-footsteps/>



Michael Tolkien's home at Stonyhurst.mpg



Michael Tolkien's home at Stonyhurst 2.mpg



Michael Tolkien's home at Stonyhurst 3.mpg



St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst.mpg



New Tolkien library at Stonyhurst.mpg

When I returned to York, I sent an email to Halewood & Sons ABA ILAB through the AbeBooks website. This message, and the subsequent response received two days later, are provided below:

Subject: AbeBooks Customer Inquiry:Michael Tolkien's book collection

A contact at Stonyhurst College indicated that your company purchased the library of Michael H.R. Tolkien sometime in the mid to late 1970s. I am wondering 1) do you have any of these books left, and 2) can you tell me a little bit of the history behind your purchase of this library. If possible, I would like to know how many books you purchased from Michael, as I am trying to reconstruct his library. If you know of anyone who may still have these books available, I would like to know that as well. Thanks so much. Brad

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Hello Brad, I have very happy memories of accompanying my late Father to the then recently deceased, Michael Tolkien's home in Waddington, near Clitheroe, in the late 1970's [sic 1984]. I was amazed at the library of family copies in all languages of his Father's books, each beautifully inscribed by Michael and other Family members (including some by JRRT himself) in a beautiful hand! Other works included a full set of the Loeb Classics (each vol. carefully inscribed!) as well as aviation and military history books. In the end we drove away an estate car full of his collection and I wish I still had them today! They would have been appreciated much more! Sadly they have been sold over the years and now only a few remain. The two items you have ordered via ABE plus a few others that I will dig out and describe upon my return from holiday from 10th August. Best regards, Michael Halewood

In the five months since making contact with Mr. Halewood, he has located approximately thirty-four books from Michael's library in his warehouse inventory from that trip over thirty-five years ago, which I have been able to purchase, and these books have been a rich source of research and scholarship on Michael's reading habits, locations, and opinions (see footnote 3).

## **Ampleforth College**

Another location which Michael was associated with by employment was Ampleforth College in north Yorkshire. Again, given that I was in the area, a quick one-hour drive north of York to Ampleforth was made on Wednesday, July 29, 2015. Upon arrival the current archivist, Brother Anselm Cramer, met informally with me in the lobby. Although I was not allowed to examine college records or work in the archives, the short interview with the elderly Brother Anselm again produced some interesting and positive information on Michael and other members of the Tolkien family:

- Brother Anselm has been associated with Ampleforth College in various capacities since 1949; a picture in the lobby featured him participating in the church consecration ceremony in 1961
- Michael worked at Ampleforth from 1958-1964, was at Rossall School in Lancastershire previous to his employment; Brother Anselm remembered that both Michael and his son Michael George played cello
- Brother Anselm had Christopher Tolkien as a tutor at Oxford, and attended J.R.R.'s Inaugural Address/retirement event in 1959. Brother Anselm said that the event was a horrible occasion; he couldn't understand a word of what J.R.R. was saying (mentioned that he thought it was because he was gassed in WWI and that it affected his speech, and that he understood that condition because his father had the same challenge). Brother Anselm mentioned that one of his friends also had Christopher as a tutor at Oxford, but immediately left him because he was always pushing the Old Norse/philology route to students
- Brother Anselm also mentioned that Michael was very meticulous, quite the opposite of his father and his brother Christopher (a confirmation of what Mr. Knight said at Stonyhurst)

While I was not able to examine primary materials during this visit, more exact dates for Michael's employment history was obtained, and was corroborated with the information in the books from Michael's library.

## **Clitheroe/Waddington**

As indicated by Mr. Halewood in his email, it is apparent that Michael retired to Waddington/Clitheroe near Stonyhurst, and spent his remaining years there. On Saturday, August 8, 2015, I drove back to this town near Stonyhurst College, in order to see if I could find out more information about Michael's final years. The Saturday market was in full swing, and I was able to track down the unofficial Clitheroe historian, who also happened to be the official town crier. Ronald Hailwood detailed for me, in the middle of the town square, that his father owned Kady's Book Shop up until the 1980s, and that he remembered Michael visiting on occasions to see what was available. Mr. Hailwood did not know that Michael lived in Waddington, however, and he sent me to the Clitheroe Public Library to talk with Sue Holden. The librarian there told me that Ms. Holden was retired, but that Ms. Holden did know the history of the region quite well, having written a number of books on the topic. I then took some pictures of the only Roman Catholic church in Clitheroe, thinking that this was probably the parish church that Michael attended, then drove to the suburb of Waddington. I couldn't find anyone who remembered Michael or where he lived.

## **Michael Tolkien's gravesite and his association with The Oratory in Woodcote, UK**

Upon returning to the United States, I immediately sent an email to the monsignor at the Catholic Church in Clitheroe, inquiring whether he knew Michael and could assist me in my research. A return email indicated that no, this was not the Catholic Church that Michael attended, but that he attended St. Hubert's Roman Catholic Church on Trough Road at Dunsop Bridge (<http://www.sthubertsdunsopbridge.org.uk/>). An email to St. Hubert's produced this information:

Dear Brad,

Thank you for your e-mail. I have just retired as parish priest at St. Hubert's in June this year, having been here since 1993. I came here too late to know Michael but early on I learned that he had taught at Stonyhurst and lived at Pinder Close in Waddington. I also learned from a former colleague at Stonyhurst who was present at his funeral that Michael is buried at the Franciscan cemetery at Pantasaph, Holywell, Flintshire (St. David's Franciscan Friary).

Regrettably, I have no other information about Michael or his life and character. I hope the little information I have given helps.

With my best wishes,  
Sincerely,  
(Mgr) John Chaloner  
St. Hubert's  
Trough Road  
Dunsop Bridge  
BB7 3BG

An invitation to speak at a conference at Oxford University in December of 2015 provided me the opportunity to visit Michael's gravesite. In addition, given the closeness of The Oratory in Woodcote near Oxford (approximately 30 minutes), which is where Michael went to school from 1934-39 (when it was located in Caversham Park near Reading) and where he also taught from 1947-56, I was able to make time for more extensive research and hopefully find out more personal information both on Michael's childhood as well as his early teaching career. On Monday, December 7, 2015, I took the day to drive the three-and-a-half hours from Oxford to northern Wales and St. David's Franciscan Friary in Pantasaph, Holywell. The successful trip is recorded below (I apologize for the poor reproduction of the photos, taken with a cell phone).



The gravestone reads as follows:

Who shall find a valiant woman  
Far and from the uttermost coasts  
Is the price of her. The heart of her husband  
Trusteth in her... She will render him good  
And not evil all the days of her life

**JOAN AUDREY TOLKIEN**  
August 17<sup>th</sup> 1916    December 4<sup>th</sup> 1982  
**MICHAEL HILARY REUEL**  
**TOLKIEN**

October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1920    February 27<sup>th</sup> 1984

Died as he lived A brave and gentle man  
Requiem aeternam  
Dona eis domine  
Et lux perpetua  
Lucent eis

On Tuesday, December 8, I drove to The Oratory School in Woodcote, UK and a prearranged visit with Ms. Dora Nash, the archivist there. To say that this trip was a goldmine of information is an understatement! Michael was a student at The Oratory School from 1934-39, and examination of *The Oratory Magazine* from that time period produced pictures of Michael on the Colts rugby team and in a theater production, a poem and a report written by him as a student, along with various other references from his days as a student. *The Oratory Magazine*

also provided extensive information on Michael during his tenure as Classics instructor from 1947-56.

The wealth of research retrieved from this visit was immense. Michael's obituary in *The Oratory Magazine* 1984 details much of his life previously unknown, including his activities at The Oratory both as a student and as a teacher (see Appendix I). Some of this new information is detailed below:

- Michael played rugby for the Colts, for Norris House, and regularly for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV
- From 1937-39 he was on the swimming team
- From 1938-39 he participated in the Shooting VIII
- For four years he was a member of Norris House's Cricket XI
- He took part in the O.S. Dramatic Society productions (as did John as part of the tech teams)
- In 1937 he was appointed a House Prefect
- In 1939 (his final year) he was Captain of Norris
- He entered Trinity College, Oxford in 1939 at the top of the non-award entry; spent one year reading History before war service from 1940-43, and returned to earn his degree in 1945
- Michael was commissioned at Sandhurst in 1941 with the rank of captain, and was attached to R.A.F. Aircrew (R.A. Intelligence) Combined Operations. Served in the ranks with the Battle of Britain Light Anti-Aircraft at first, awarded the George Medal with nine companions for their defense during the Battle of Britain of Bomber Command H.Q. at Uxbridge; after the Dieppe Raid he was invalided out of the War in 1943; he continued to play rugby during his military service
- Taught two years at the Dragon School in Oxford (1945-47) until his employment by The Oratory, where he taught English, History, and Latin to O-level; History and Group II Latin to A-level; and also was a rugby coach throughout his time there
- From 1954-56, Michael served the Oratory Society as secretary, and assisted in publishing v. 124 and 126 of the Universal Roll-Call 1859-1929. He also compiled a list of Head Boys from 1859 for the Honours Boards

Ms. Nash also shared with me a copy of a 1995 address by Michael's brother John (who also attend The Oratory, as did Christopher) as part of the Patrick Hobson Memorial Lecture series (given annually to the senior boys), which details the long association of the Tolkien family with the school, including dates of attendance, relationships set up by Father Francis

Morgan for the family (who also attended The Oratory), and reminiscences of J.R.R.'s visits staying in Michael's home (called the Oratory Chapel Cottage) on two occasions to finish writing *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>6</sup>

Ms. Nash then provided me with a tour of the school, resulting in a number of photographs and videos of The Black Room (the library where J.R.R. worked on *The Lord of the Rings*), the Oratory Chapel Cottage where J.R.R. stayed while Michael was on holiday, and the current chapel whose pipe organ was donated by John.



Junior Colts rugby XV (*The Oratory magazine*, July 1936). Michael is farthest on the right, in the back row. Description of Michael's style in *The Oratory magazine*, December 1935: TOLKIEN, M. He is good in the loose and line-outs, and is a reliable front row forward in the tight. He is still hindered by an injury to his hand. He tackles, but needs to improve in this.



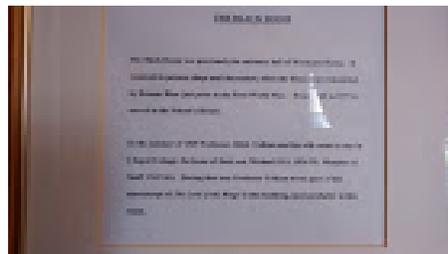
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<sup>6</sup> The Tolkien Trust has not allowed the author to publish or quote from this lecture.



“Journey’s End” A Play in Three Acts (*The Oratory magazine*, March 1939). Michael is on the far left, as L/Corporal Broughton.

Below are photographs of the various plaques throughout the Oratory related to the Tolkiens and their association with the school (transcriptions provided immediately below).

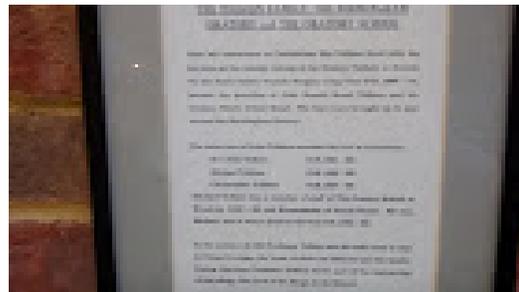


### THE BLACK ROOM

The Black Room was previously the entrance hall of Woodcote House. It received its present shape and decoration, when the House was remodeled by Detmar Blow prior to the First World War. From 1942 to 1977 it served as the School’s library.

In the summer of 1949 Professor J.R.R. Tolkien and his wife came to stay in Chapel Cottage, the home of their son, Michael (O.S. 1934-39, Member of Staff (1947-56). During that stay Professor Tolkien wrote part of the manuscript of *The Lord of the Rings* in this building, most probably in this room.

Here is a picture of The Black Room, as it would have appeared during Tolkien’s stay there:



## THE TOLKIEN FAMILY, THE BIRMINGHAM ORATORY, and THE ORATORY SCHOOL

After her conversion to Catholicism Mrs Tolkien lived with her two sons at the country estate of the Oratory Fathers at Rednal. On her death Father Francis Morgan, Cong Orat (O.S. 1868-74) became the guardian of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and his brother, Hilary Arthur Reuel. The boys were brought up in and around the Birmingham Oratory.

The three sons of John Tolkien attended the O.S. in Caversham:

Rev. John Tolkien	(O.S. 1931-36)
Michael Tolkien	(O.S. 1934-39)
Christopher Tolkien	(O.S. 1937-38)

Michael Tolkien was a member of staff of The Oratory School at Woodcote (1947-56) and Housemaster of Norris House. His son, Michael, was in turn a pupil at the O.S. (O.S. 1955-56).

In the summer of 1949 Professor Tolkien and his wife came to stay in Chapel Cottage, the home of their son Michael and his family. During that stay Professor Tolkien wrote part of the manuscript of his trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, in the School.



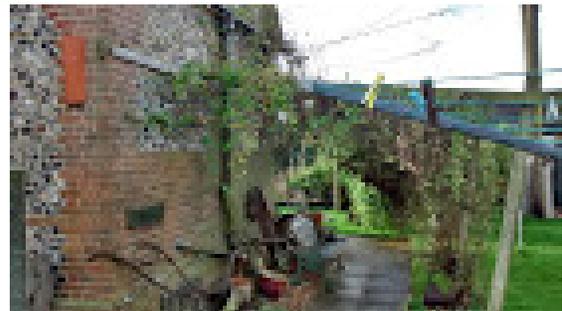
This organ was funded generously by  
Father John Tolkien  
to commemorate his family's  
long association with the  
Fathers of the Birmingham Oratory  
and with The Oratory School  
in all its three homes

Pictures of The Oratory Chapel Cottage (where Michael lived, and his father stayed to write parts of *The Lord of the Rings* August 14-September 14, 1948 and August 30-September 10, 1952).<sup>7</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> The 1948 dates are mentioned in Scull & Hammond (2006), while the 1949 dates are the ones recorded by The Oratory. I am not sure which one is correct, but am assuming the Scull & Hammond 1948 dates are correct.





In the two hours that I spent perusing *The Oratory Magazine* between the dates 1934-39 and 1947-56, the following information on Michael was uncovered (I did not have time to copy mentions of John's and Christopher's tenure there, but there were plenty of those as well):

- Mention of Michael's entrance into the school (December 1934)
- Mention of Michael as stage staff in the Dramatic Society production of Noel Coward's "Hay Fever" on December 12-13, 1936 (July 1937)
- The following paper read by Michael in the Scientific Society (July 1938):

M.R. Tolkein (sic) on "The History of Trains." In a very limited time for such a broad subject he gave us a comprehensive description of the achievements and limitations of all the famous trains from the "Rocket" to the "Coronation Scot," and told us how to differentiate one class from another. He explained the difficulties overcome and those to be overcome in construction.

- Poem by Michael "The Dawn" (December 1938 supplement)(See Appendix II)
- A historical report by Michael called Old Inns – "The Travellers' Rest." (March 1939)(see Appendix III)
- Mention of Michael in the First XV Fixtures, 1938-39, House Matches, Squash Rackets Handicap Prize Competition (March 1939)
- Pictures of Michael in "Journey's End" (see above)(March 1939)
- Mention of Michael graduating from the school in the Summer Term, with House Prefect after his name, along with mention of his receiving the Higher Certificate (December 1939)

Moving to Michael's days as a Master at the school (1947-56):

- Mention of Michael as Chairman of the Upper School Debating Society (December 1952)
- Mention of Michael under Library Notes of "a very welcome and generous presentation of books has been made by Mr. Tolkien..." and "They would like finally, to thank Mr. Tolkien for presiding over and aiding their work" (December 1952)

- More books given by Michael to the library, and mentioned under Library Notes (May 1953)
- An extensive obituary, written by Michael, on the tragic death of Andrew Hill (May 1955):

M.H.R. Tolkien (1934-39) writes:

‘Andrew Hills whose sudden and tragic death occurred at Oxford on 4<sup>th</sup> February, was a pupil of mine for four years at the O.S. I first met him in his second term, in the Upper Fourth, where, as an engaging and obstreperous youth, in the best traditions of O.S. Fourth Form History, he provided many valuable contributions to our classes, relevant and irrelevant. On the serious side his interest in History was obvious from the beginning, while in English his literary ability was outstanding. Though never a consistently hard-worker, much of his written work was of the highest order, whether original compositions, appreciations of English, or History essays. In the Sixth Form his History essays and contributions to oral discussions were of an exceptionally high standard.

Outside the classroom he was always mischievous but unfailingly pleasant, and took an active part in every form of school life, not least in rugby football, which he affected to dislike heartily, though performed most creditably, playing for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV on more than one occasion and representing Faber House for two successive years. He took part in School plays and variety shows, and thus began the interest in dramatics that played so large a part in his later life at Oxford. He was, moreover, an outstanding speaker in the Senior Debating Society between 1949 and 1951.

His school life gave me every reason to believe that he had marked out for him an extremely promising future, and I for one have felt a great sense of a loss at his untimely passing. Beneath his apparently flippant exterior lay a strong personal piety, which I understand developed after he left school. May he receive his reward and rest in peace.’<sup>8</sup>

- The following message (Summer 1955):

All information as to marriages, births, appointments, service promotions, movements and adventures for inclusion in future numbers of the O.S. Magazine should be addressed as follows:

M.H. Tolkien  
Hon. Sec., Oratory School Society  
Chapel Cottage  
The Oratory School  
Nr Reading,  
Berks.

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<sup>8</sup> A book on the life of Andrew Hills, recently written by a good friend of his at Balliol College, Oxford, is *Scholar gypsy: an Oxford friendship. A memoir of Sir Andrew Hills, Baronet, 1933-1955, and of an Anglo-Australian friendship and of Balliol College, Oxford, 1953-1955* by Michael Collins Persse (Melbourne: Cliffe Books, 2012). A number of remembrances of Andrew from *The Oratory magazine* (May 1955) are recorded on pp. 143-46, including Michael Tolkien’s.

- A listing of Michael being present at the Annual Old Boy's Dinner on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1955
- The following message (May 1956):

We wish Michael Tolkien and family every success at Solihull Grammar School, Birmingham. Mr and Mrs Tolkien will be especially remembered by those boys who lived in St. Joseph's.

- The following message under Old Boys' News (May 1956):

Michael Tolkien (1934-39) is now Classics Master at Solihull School, Birmingham

In addition, there were a number of instances where Michael's father is mentioned in *The Oratory Magazine* during Michael's tenure at the school as a student:

- In the Sixth Form Lectures section (June 1935):

"Our first debt is to Professor J.R.R. Tolkien who has extended his practical interest in the School by twice lecturing on Anglo-Saxon poetry. He pushed back our horizon by some hundreds of years' distance and revealed the growth and flowering of poetry in this country long before *Beowulf*; and his sonorous quotations conveyed to minds ignorant of the language in which he spoke, a vivid sense of the richness and power of our earliest writers."

- In the Sixth Form Lectures section (December 1935):

"We are again indebted to Professor Tolkien. On November 20<sup>th</sup> he gave us a brilliant survey of the debt of Europe to Anglo-Saxon England. Once more he stretched our horizon until we felt amazement of "Stout Cortes and his men," as he took us by his great erudition through "the dark backward and abysm of time"!"

- The listing "Professor and Mrs Tolkien" as present at John's graduation (July 1936)

- The listing "Professor and Mrs Tolkien" as Sports Day visitors (July 1937)

- In the Sixth Form Lectures section (December 1937):

"Professor Tolkien gave us two talks on the "Dawn and Development of Poetry in this country," and that entailed an excursion into a rich period of European history that is scarcely touched on in most school text-books. He brought out of the past poets known and anonymous, to whom we owe much in our literary heritage and tradition, and as they came before us they were not museum specimens but men of flesh and blood like later poets with whom we are familiar. He told us stories about them and read extracts from their works – sonorous songs, bold in thought and craftsmanship. And not least among

the pleasures that Professor Tolkien gave us was the sight upon two extensive blackboards of the exquisite script in which he wrote Anglo-Saxon excerpts.”

- The listing “Professor and Mrs Tolkien” as Prize Day attendances (December 1938)

## Solihull School

Finally, I received an email from Ms. Nash regarding Michael’s tenure at Solihull School from 1956-57 on January 13, 2016:

Dear Brad:

I was chatting over Christmas to the husband of an old friend who, in the course of conversation about my job, mentioned that he had been taught at Solihull School in the 1950s by Michael Tolkien. He later wrote in an email:

Teacher of Classics Solihull School 1956-7 (and later). Astonishing neat and delicate handwriting. Used some deliberately eccentric devices and phrases eg had a paper herring (for irrelevance), which he took out from his pocket whenever a boy tried to lead him away from a topic. Referred to key short guidelines/rules as ‘potted pith.’ Handsome with dark hair and a melodious deep voice. Autumn 1956: said to class that if we wanted an interesting read for Christmas we could request a book his father had written [*Lord of the Rings*].

## Conclusion

Without doubt, I could not have imagined that the purchase of a few books from the library of Michael H.R. Tolkien in the early 2000s would have led to such an adventure (which is still ongoing), and the wealth of information on his life and character that was discovered. I hope to write a book that provides an in-depth examination of the library of Michael H.R. Tolkien, given his meticulous and detailed notes written in his books.<sup>9</sup> They provide a fascinating case study of an individual and a time period that no longer exists, one in which reading and recording in one’s book collection both thoughts and comments was standard

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<sup>9</sup> The scholarship/wish to share this knowledge has been stopped by the Tolkien Trust and the existing heirs.

practice. Michael's neat and legible handwriting make this analysis possible. In the end, this research travelogue is provided as both an homage to Michael as well as new research for Tolkien scholars to consider and assimilate into their own scholarship.

**Postscript:** I would like to acknowledge that this type of research presentation with mixed media (text, images, and video) would not be possible without an open access, peer-reviewed, electronic journal such as the *Journal of Tolkien Research*.