

# Radio

EDITED BY JANE ANDERSON

## WE DON'T NEED NO EDUCATION

**Classrooms to Power** Sun 10.45pm/Wed 8.45pm **Radio 4**

**Michael Dobbs** describes Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher's school days, while **Gerald Scarfe** visualises them exclusively for *RT*



He'd learnt a bawdy song from the stable lads at Blenheim Palace and reciting it wasn't the sort of conduct likely to find favour

with a new headmaster, particularly one renowned for his severity. But Winston Churchill never paid much heed to rules, even at the age of eight, so he jumped onto a table and began singing in an effort to impress his classmates. It was to be the first of many schoolboy escapades that would bring the future prime minister to the edge of disaster.

A different table played its part in the schooling of another future prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. While the Luftwaffe blitzed her hometown of Grantham, she took shelter under the kitchen table. Yet she didn't cower, she got on with her homework. She was determined to get out of Grantham and education would be her escape route.

I've written novels about Churchill and worked for years with Margaret Thatcher as chief of staff of the Conservative

"We're not talking a sound thrashing but blood, plenty of it, and scars"

Party, yet I was shocked at what I discovered in making this programme when I visited their schools. Churchill's story was particularly harrowing. Sent away from home aged eight, he encountered a regime of cruelty that was designed to break him not simply physically but emotionally, too. His was a school built around the flogging block, and even by the rough standards of late Victorian England it was brutal.

boy to within an inch of his senses, and then a step beyond, to break his resistance and make him pliable, like all the rest. If that had succeeded, had young Winston been broken, I'm convinced that it would have changed the course of our history. Quite simply, we would've lost the Second World War. Adolf Hitler would've won.

Thatcher's school years were equally challenging but for different reasons. It was wartime, Grantham was one of the

When young Winston stole a pocketful of sugar, his punishment was a violent thrashing. We're not talking a sound thrashing but blood, plenty of it, and scars. The purpose was to drive the

most bombed boroughs in Britain and Margaret was in the middle of it. I think it taught her many lessons, not least that women were second-class citizens. While the boys went to war, the girls were left behind to serve tea at mobile canteens. She resented that. Deeply. If she were to make her mark, she knew she would have to grow tougher than any man.

And she would have to find a way out of her hometown. Her girls' school was one for the middle classes with middling ambitions, but Margaret wanted more, and by sheer hard work rather than intellectual brilliance she forced her way upwards. At the top, like Winston, she ran headlong into confrontation. Her headmistress evidently thought less of Margaret's abilities than she did, and wasn't

convinced that she should try for Oxford. "You're thwarting my ambition!" the young Margaret stormed. And, not for the first time, she was to surprise others.

Despite the distractions of war, Margaret, the daughter of a grocer and the granddaughter of a railway cloakroom attendant, crammed in extra Latin, worked away under the kitchen table and gained that

place at Oxford. Not much later, it would be Westminster.

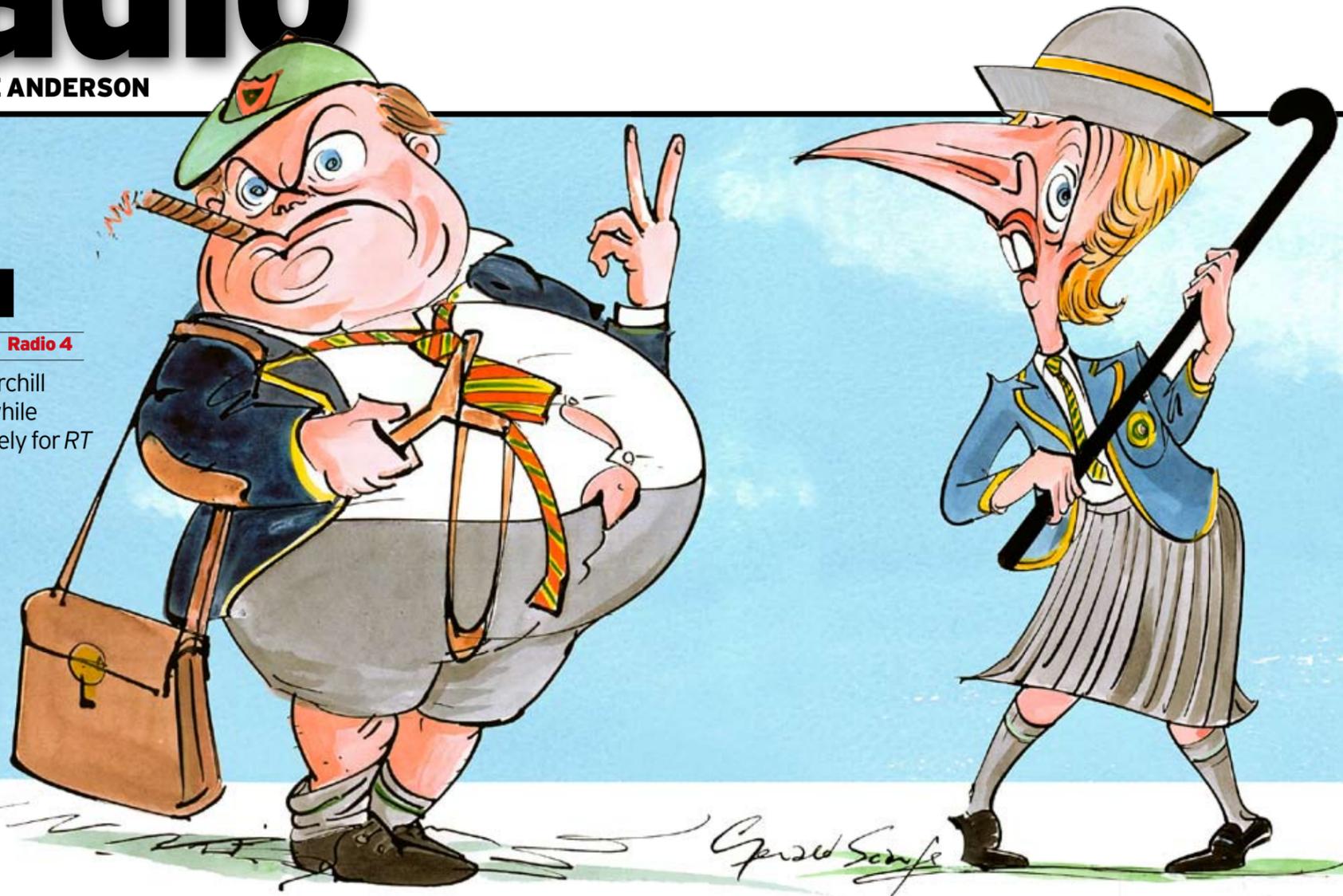
It's not necessary to be a classroom rebel in order to become a ferocious prime minister, but in the case of Churchill and Thatcher it certainly

wouldn't have been recognisable as the greatest of wartime leaders if his headmaster had succeeded in cutting him down to size.

Yet, despite his headmaster's efforts, Churchill wasn't broken. Imagine how you might have reacted after such a beating. Keep your head down, like me, I suspect. But as soon as he had recovered from his bloody thrashing, Winston bounced back. At the first opportunity, he broke into the headmaster's study and stole away with his prized straw boater. He took it down to the woods and, for one glorious afternoon, he kicked the hell out of it. Not bad for an eight-year-old boy. Winston Churchill wasn't going to surrender, not then, not ever.

**Michael Dobbs** *The Edge of Madness*, the latest novel by **Michael Dobbs**

**FRESH-FACED AND INNOCENT** **Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher** when they were at school



## BBC Electric Proms

Your guide to every radio broadcast this season and the concert highlights that must not be missed

**WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER**  
**Africa Express**

**10.00pm-4.00am, Radio 1**

After dazzling Glastonbury last year, Damon Albarn's Afro-Brit alliance reaches London. Line-up is tbc but hopefully Mali's peerless Baaba Maal and Scots guitarists Franz Ferdinand will be among the performers.

**Goldfrapp**

**from 10.00pm, BBC 6 Music**

Live highlights from Cecil Sharp House, home of England's Folk Dance and Song Society. Alison Goldfrapp will underscore the hazy psych-folk leanings of her *Seventh Tree* album with strings and choir.

**THURSDAY 23 OCTOBER**  
**The Streets**

**9.00-10.00pm, Radio 1**

Mike Skinner promises that his next album will be the last under the Streets banner, so catch his UK garage-influenced rap while you can - with the added bonus of orchestra and gospel choir.

**FRIDAY 24 OCTOBER**

**The Last Shadow Puppets/ Nitin Sawhney**

**7.00-9.00pm, BBC 6 Music**

Strings are so this year's thing, as Miles Kane and Arctic Monkey Alex Turner's 60s-influenced orch-pop collaboration makes its Merseyside debut, followed by a London show from world music sound-scaper Sawhney with the London Underground Orchestra.

**Burt Bacharach**

**7.30-9.15pm, Radio 2**

The most successful songwriter of the pop age opened this year's BBC Electric Proms (on Wednesday), joined by the BBC Concert Orchestra and guest



**MAGIC MOMENTS**  
**Burt Bacharach: an evening of hits**

vocalists Adele, Beth Rowley and Jamie Cullum, adding their own spin to Bacharach classics.

**SATURDAY 25 OCTOBER**  
**Saturday Night Fever**

**7.30-9.00pm, Radio 2**

Thirty years ago, the Bee Gees' legendary disco soundtrack topped the UK charts. In anniversary mood are Bee Gee Robin Gibb and guests including Sharleen Spiteri and Ronan Keating, with band and orchestra.

**Coldcut via Radiophonic Workshop**

**9.00-11.00pm, BBC 6 Music**

Dance veterans Matt Black and Jonathan More celebrate 50 years of those original electronic pioneers, the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, with a panel discussion of the Workshop's brilliance followed by a live Coldcut DJ mix incorporating RW classics such as the *Doctor Who* theme.

**SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER**  
**Oasis**

**9.00-10.30pm, Radio 1**

After 15 years at the top, the Mancunian rockers are a natural choice for a live finale, oscillating between their heavily Beatles-influenced new album *Dig Your Own Soul* and Oasis classics, backed by the Crouch End Festival Chorus.

**WEDNESDAY 29 OCTOBER**  
**Maddy Prior and Friends**

**7.00-8.00pm, Radio 2**

Another folk classic recorded at London's Cecil Sharp House, this time of a more trad folk hue with Maddy Prior joined by her band and guest vocalists such as her Steeleye Span foil Tim Hart and her Silly Sisters partner June Tabor. **Martin Aston**



**PSYCH-FOLK**  
**Alison Goldfrapp** shows off her voice and her costumes