

School



My mother's primary. She is in the front, second right, with a ribbon in her hair

We went to primary school about 6 miles away at Keston, not the local school which my father did not like. We were not allowed to mix with many locals as they were considered lower class. I started school at five years old, having first gone to a pre-school where we used chalk and wrote on small blackboards, and mostly raced snails.

The school was very friendly, mostly due to a very understanding headmaster. We stayed for school dinners, and after dinner he would bring in his little dog, which would do tricks for biscuits. He also had a daughter about my age, and one day we were caught kissing through the railings which separated their garden from the school. This caused much teasing!

There were two ponds about half a mile from the school, which had been well known in the past as watering places for stagecoaches. In the winter we were allowed to slide on them when they were frozen, but only after the park keeper had tested the thickness of the ice.

The Walls ice cream tricycle, 'STOP ME AND BUY ONE' used to park outside the school to tempt the pupils as they emerged. Water ices were 1d, others 2d. These were kept cold by dry ice.

I was caned only twice. The first time was for a stupid mistake. Our teacher, Miss Pavie, was telling us other names which could be used for every-day items. One of these was 'visage' for 'face'. She asked me what was another word for face. I couldn't think what it was, and then the boy next to me nudged me and said 'fizzog' which I repeated to the teacher. She thought I was being funny, I suppose, and sent me to the headmaster to be caned. It didn't hurt anyway. The next time was for fighting during dinner break.

We were made to parade in the playground on national days like Trafalgar Day or Empire day and saluted the flag.

One day there was a snake coiled up on the road and one of the boys picked it up and let it go again, frightening the other children. It was probably a harmless grass snake anyway.

The boys' lavatories were quite crude, mostly consisting of a high concrete wall with a gully under. It was ideal for seeing who could pee the highest, a normal boy's pastime. It was amazing how high you could get!

We were allowed to play conkers, and I kept them for a whole year so they got really hard. One day I hit my opponent's conker so hard it went right through the window. Not much was said about it but we were not allowed to play conkers in that area again. One day at home we were playing with conkers which were still in their cases and very prickly. We were having fights with these in the stockyard. One hit Rod on the chin and he had a very sore face for several days and several puncture marks.



Dressed for school

One day my sister Marjorie boarded the bus at a bus stop further from the school and she had my fare as well as hers. I thought I wouldn't be allowed on without the money so decided to walk home. I was met by my father when I had gone about 5 miles, not bad for an eight-year-old.

On another occasion I was not well and my brother was told to take me home. In those days they were open top buses. We went upstairs and my cap blew off. We stopped the bus and Rod raced back to get it, which was way back round the corner by the time the bus had stopped. After a minute or two the driver said he could not wait any longer.

Wholesale panic! I was jumping up and down saying he must wait. In the nick of time Rod came running round the corner and got on, all puffed out.

After leaving Keston school I went to Oxted secondary. This was a state-aided school, so part of the fees were paid by the government. I had previously tried for a scholarship at Bromley but failed the oral examination. It was probably better to go to Oxted as the rest of the family went there, but I found this new school quite a shock as the pupils were called by their surnames, and it seemed very unfriendly after Keston. It took me some time to settle in. Most of the teachers seemed reasonable



At secondary school, centre back

enough, although both Mr Callard (Biology) and Mr Lerrigo (Art) would tap you on the head with keys if you were not good, or sometimes if you were!



Miss Morris, centre

Our French mistress Miss Booth, was quite young and most of the boys were more interested in her bodily attributes than learning French.

Later Miss Morris took over and work progressed much better. Miss Morris was an older woman and very strict, although I got on well with her and learnt a lot. One day she came into our form room when I

was fighting another boy with rulers, and all she said was 'Start work!' We were not allowed to run in the corridors, but one day I was running and went round the corner smack into Miss Morris. I didn't get told off for that either. I don't think that I was a favourite or a teacher's pet, but I was really trying to learn and can only think this was appreciated. I got my school leaving certificate, but not matriculation. I had credits in Art and Mathematics, and passes in English, Geography and French.

I felt the school only rewarded pupils in games if they were already good. As I was slightly tubby at that time cross-country running was an effort, and when entered in the inter-house competition I came next to last. Rugby was more enjoyable, especially fetching people down in the muddiest parts of the pitch which were green and stagnant.

When I was at Oxted county school one of my main friends was James Greenlees. James lived on a farm at Westerham. His father came from Scotland and had one of the tidiest farms for miles around. On Saturdays the men turned out with brooms and swept all through. It was mainly a fruit farm, but cows were kept for the manure which was carefully stacked in neat piles in the field, and turned over twice until it was well rotted. Hurdles were placed

underneath so that all the manure had to be moved to expose the hurdle. James helped on the farm but had looked a bit pale for some time before becoming ill. He unfortunately died at 22 years of age. My friend Nigel Dawson started his farming career on this farm and obviously learnt a lot.

I was also friends with Tom Okey, who was later to become my best man, and Edward Boyes, who lived at Moorhouse farm. One day we all went to the river at Tunbridge and hired a boat. When we had rowed for some way, Edward, who was also known as Tubby for obvious reasons, decided to change places. The boat rocked alarmingly. We managed to stop him doing this as we were in danger of capsizing. None of us could swim and the water was quite deep.

I somehow managed to break several windows while growing up. I broke one at Keston school with a conker. The first one at Norheads was when I lost my temper and threw a slipper at my sister Ruth which missed and went through a window. I broke a window by the kitchen when playing football with Charlie Millen, one of the roundsmen, and two at Oxted school. One of these was when we were standing in line waiting to go into our classroom. An older boy called Clutterback came past. He was a bit of a joker and pretended to hit me, whereupon I ducked back and cracked the window. On another occasion Tom Okey who, although he was strong, was not allowed to play games because of his health, swung me round in the playground, and my foot hit the glass.

Another time on the No. 410 bus coming home I tried to close the front window with my foot and it broke. On this occasion there was a prefect on the bus who had to report it to the headmaster, Mr Taff Davies. The prefect said "Stone broke a window, Sir" to which Mr Davies said "Stone? Who threw it?" "No sir, Stone". For some reason I didn't get into trouble for this. It was put down as an accident and paid for by London transport.

Discipline at the school was fairly strict on the whole. At the end of one term some boys (not me) were seen climbing the rugby posts by the headmaster. For this slight misdemeanour the whole school

was kept in for an extra half-day, which I thought was totally unjustified.

Once a year the boys played the girls at hockey. This was an opportunity to see girls at their most vicious, with clouts on shins, and hockey sticks well above shoulder height. The only thing I was ever good at in sports was throwing the cricket ball, having had practice at home with slippers!

When we had our school photo taken we were told to bring our ties to school. As it was summer time we had been allowed to leave them off. Of course I forgot mine and had to buy another. That seemed a bit hard for about an hour's work, and especially as money was extremely short. The photo is below. As of 2021, only two of the people in the photo are still alive.

