

Schooldays at Jolesfield

I was a big boy now, it was 1943, I was five years old and I was starting school. No play-school in those days — it was straight in at the deep end.

My first teacher was Mrs. Jones, who was the infants teacher, then you moved up to Mrs. Luxford followed by Miss Rhodes and then the top class with Mr. Gumbrell who was the headmaster. There were a few other teachers over the years, Mrs. Herbert Mitchell the butcher's wife, and also there was a Mr. Green, he was held in awe because he had been in the RAF.

The school was a late Victorian building which to me as a small boy seemed to be enormous. As I grew bigger the school got smaller and I was then aware that it wasn't so big after all. I suppose when you are only five years old everything is very overpowering and starting school very traumatic, it was certainly for me. Mrs. Jones was very nice to her new charges doing her best to put them at ease and to help them settle down to this new chapter in their lives.

The school was by today's standards very basic: separate playgrounds for boys and girls, with a brick wall around them and between them. Boys and girls had to be kept apart in those days. It was several years before I found out the reason for this. The toilets were at the bottom of the playgrounds. They left a lot to be desired, no main drains in those days so it was buckets and a sawdust trough for the urinal. I won't go into details but will leave it to your imagination. Looking back it was quite disgusting and it seemed that hands did not need to be washed in those days — hygiene had not been invented.

There were quite a lot of children at school, the infant boys had to play in the girls' playground because the big boys were too rough for them. I thought the big girls were a bit rough too, but I was lucky I had my big sister to look after me — after all she was nearly eighteen months older than me, so quite an old hand at school.

We were still living at Hatterells Cottages when I started going to school so we had quite a long walk across the fields to get to school. Sometimes there would be several great big carts horses in the field by the river, they would come galloping over to see us, all very friendly I'm sure. My sister and I were terrified and our Mother wasn't keen either.

I remember creeping up to the gate to see where the horses were, as this was a very long field — sometimes we would be lucky and they would take no notice of us, much to our relief. This was a nice walk in the summer but not so nice in the winter and of course we had to wear our wellies a lot of the time.

We moved to number one Lloytscroft cottage soon after I had been at school for about eighteen months. This made quite a difference to our lives as it was a much easier walk to get to school and mostly on a pavement.

Some of the children came from West Grinstead and Shermanbury, they had to be transported — no posh coaches in those days — in Burdfields lorry. They were the local builders and the same lorry was used to carry all sorts of things in conjunction with their work as builders. They were the local undertakers as well, they just put wooden benches in the back of the lorry and there was your school bus, it was to be a few years before they went up market and had a proper coach.

I thought I was very clever when I started school, as I could do joined up writing — Mrs. Jones didn't believe in teaching children to print their names. So I was the star pupil in my first few weeks, this wouldn't last of course and later in life my writing was I admit mostly illegible, looking like a doctor's prescription. I was soon able to read and indeed always enjoyed reading.

I was very good at arithmetic; maths hadn't been invented then, that came much later. We were taught to learn our tables. This was often done by the whole class chanting our way

through — what a noise this was. The classes were big in those days, the main reason being that the school had only three classrooms and to make three, the biggest room was divided with a partition, all very distracting as one could hear the next-door class.

The education at Jolesfield was by today's standards very basic, we did have to sit the eleven plus, this was called a scholarship. If you passed you would then go onto High School and become one of the elite, I was not to become one of these. I did get short listed and interviewed twice but I couldn't sell myself well enough. I often look back and think would my life have been any different had I passed the eleven plus and gone to the high school.

To be continued
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