

Prior to the end of World War II the school was a private fee paying school and you got to go if you were a Catholic (there were some but few exceptions) and if your parents could afford the fees. I remember they were five pounds and five shillings per term (in those days that was called five guineas, a guinea being one pound and one shilling). That was quite a lot of money in those days and I remember my parents delight when the new post war Labour Government lead by Mr Attlee passed an education bill that virtually abolished fee paying grammar schools and to my parents great delights they got their five guineas refunded. This then started the "Eleven Plus" entrance exam system of admission. If in your junior school you passed the exam then you could be admitted to the grammar school and entrance was not dependant on your ability to pay but your brains.

I clearly recall my first days in September 1943 and my impressions at the age of nine coming from Manor House Convent where all the desks matched and the floors were polished and no one had carved their initials into the desk. What a shock it was to be assigned to Upper Prep class in a room in Feckenham House. It was dirty and not one desk matched another and the floors had not seen a coat of polish in years. Winters could be very cold as the heating system either didn't work or there was no fuel for the boiler (it was war time). If you came from a girls convent to the boys school you certainly had to learn quickly. Nuns do not play football or cricket but you learnt very quickly.

I have early memories of a Mrs Hawkins. She looked like a witch and we were all scared of her and so was "Pop" Parsons. She taught elocution and drama and I remember one boy being so scared he climbed into the big chimney and spent the whole lesson out of her sight.

You got to go into the main school after Upper Prep. Form One was the first one next to the side entrance to Bourne House. There were three classrooms in that block divided by a moveable partition. Up the stairs and to the right were the remaining classes but they were in separate rooms. About 1946 or 1947 two additional classes were added and I am sure there was no heating as we froze to near death in winter.

Play time was great. The huge playground was the scene of hundreds of boys in uniform playing football (always with a tennis ball) or cricket and the wicket was one of the big trees this side of the railway lines. We used to hop over the then next to nothing fence and cross the lines to retrieve our ball. How we never got electrocuted I do not know. There was a morning break at which time the Government gave every pupil a one third of a pint of milk every day. Margaret Thatcher stopped that and got to be known as "Thatcher the baby snatcher".

Lunch, a hot lunch cost six pence and those who participated sat on nice wooden tables and benches in what we call the refectory, it's the room with all the names of prize winners in gold leaf. There was a hatch and one boy from each table would go to the hatch and Mrs Piper with a cigarette dangling from her lips would give two plates of lunch (meat, vegetables and potatoes, the latter being reconstructed from dried potatoes) to each boy who would bring it to his table until everyone was served. The process was repeated for the sweet which could be pastry with some jam and watery custard. The skill was to convince Mrs Piper there were more boys at your table than there really were so you could get two more portions of desert. Dear Mrs Piper could not be more "cockney" had she been trained years later to star in Coronation Street. She always wore a scarf tied around her head as was the fashion for working women in war time.

As the war went on we, like all Londoners, developed a don't care attitude towards the Nazis and we stopped going to the shelters and just sometimes crawled under our desks.

There was a kindly caretaker called Chris. Every now and then he would sweep out the classrooms and halls. I remember the dust was so bad he used to spray the floors with some form of carbolic antiseptic. I don't think the windows were ever washed. You took your football boots to Chris to have the nails flatten when you put in new studs.

On afternoon per week was sports afternoon. Football in the winter and cricket in the summer but by about 1946 or 1947 athletics – track and field, became popular and the school competed against other schools. Of course the annual sports day was a very big event as individuals competed for prizes and to score points for their house. The great prize was the Victor Ludorum awarded to the athlete who scored the most points in track and field. Three points for first, two for second and one for third. The annual cross country race was included in the results and to my chagrin in my final year I lost by one point to A. Adair, so it's his name in the gold leaf on the board for the year 1950. I did however also win the long jump with a school record of twenty feet two inches.

In my time only teachers and those in the Sixth Form were allowed to use the front entrance of the White House. All others had to use a small and narrow entrance on the side. Everyone had to wear the school cap and you had to raise your cap if you met a teacher. All teachers were addressed as "Sir" and the few lady teachers as "Madame". You were never addressed by a teacher by your first name, always your surname and very often you call the other boys by their last name unless you were very close chums. Boys in classes senior to you never spoke to you and some Prefects could be very cruel to the small guys of the school. One was so cruel and sadistic to me that my mother had to come to the school and raise holy hell with Pop Parsons.

Writing of cruelty and sadism the "Tolly" was very painful and you received from Pop Parsons or Mr Metcalfe the assistant headmaster either two strokes on each hand or up to six on each hand depending on what you had done to get your teacher annoyed.

The teacher would give you a note briefly stating what you had done and you had to bring it back with the initials "CHP" (Clement Henry Parsons) to show you had been punished. One day I got caught playing truant and for my sins I was called out of class by Pop Parsons and told to follow him (I did go through the front door).