

16. 6. 96.

The Headmaster,
Chenies C.P. School,
Chenies,
Near Rickmansworth
Hertfordshire.

Dear Mr. Rivers,

My two brothers (Roger and Howard Fleet) and myself (Jennifer Fleet) attended Chenies School during the 1950s. The teachers at my time were Mrs. Bowers, Mrs. Crickland, Miss Wlatts, Miss Howe and Miss Reditt, although my elder brother was there whilst Mrs. Keefe (The Governess) was headmistress and I believe my younger brother was taught by Mrs. Saddle.

We all have very fond memories of extremely happy times at our primary school where we received an excellent education in a caring atmosphere.

Mrs. Bowers and Mrs. Crickland taught the two infant classes in the room furthest from the school house. The classes were separated from each other by a curtain across the room. Miss Wlatts taught in the middle classroom and Miss Howe took Standard 3 and 4 in the top class. The partition between the two junior classes was opened for assemblies. For at least one year Miss Reditt taught a small class of children in

the room off the front lobby. The two other lobbies contained
rugs for coats and Miss Howe's lobby two wooden boxes of
County Library books.

The toilets were outside across the small yard between
the boys' yard which bordered on to the drive to the church
and main house, and the girls' yard which was adjacent
to Miss Reditt's garden. At first the girls' toilet doors, with
a gap top and bottom and a big latch to close them, opened
straight on to the yard, but towards the end of my
time an extension was added in front to provide wash
basins. The boys' toilets were I believe ever more
primitive, but were similarly extended.

I remember the Janet and John reading books
in Mrs. Crickland's class, and the first time we used
ink in Miss Latté's class. When we returned from
mid-morning play the ink wells had been filled and
there was a small rectangle of pink blotting paper and
a wooden pen holder with a chunky yellow nib on
each of the lower standard's desks. We were taught to
lick the new nibs before you used them for the first
time. It was difficult to learn to get the angle of the
pen right, else it would stick and squirt ink all over
the page. I was not very neat and would get blots
on my work and I also remember being in trouble
for churning the wooden pen holder so much that it
was almost too small to hold. An ink monitor
was appointed to clean out sludge and bits of blotting
paper from the ink wells each week a refill them
from a big jar with a cork.

In Miss Hoare's class we always did composition
(writing a story) after morning (2) playtime on Wednesdays, and

we had a weekly spelling test every Friday. We did arithmetic from A and B Arithmetic books. Halfway through these books was a page like a ~~door~~ which stated that you were making good progress when you started the other side of it. Miss Reditt took us for history (I still remember her enthusiasm for the subject, especially the Tudor Period, and learnt a lot in consequence), Music (we listened to Singing Together with William Appleby and along with thousands of others could vote at the end of term for our favourite songs and vote for the final programme to discuss which had ~~won~~), and art. Painting was not easy as water jars had to be filled from the outside tap and afterwards all brushes a jar taken outside to be washed at the tap. Also it was difficult to avoid knocking the jars of water over as they were balanced on the pencil groove of the desks.

The desks were double with an iron frame and a sloping top. This could be lifted to give access to the shelf underneath where we kept ~~our~~ books together in a piece of elastic with our name written on it. I can still hear the noise made by the back seats of these desks as we all stood and raised them at the end of "the day before singing the hymn, "Now the day is over,"

Almost as important as the teachers were the school cleaners and the dinner ladies. Mrs. Wells our school cleaner was always cheerful and lived in a cottage at Chénies Bottom.

Dinners, before the building of the school hall on part of Miss Reditts fruit and vegetable garden, were cooked and served in the Long Room of the Manor House. The dinner ladies were the Misses North, with grey hair and buns, who lived at the end of the Manor House and Mrs. Laws who lived in the village. They cooked dinner for us on an ordinary household gas stove. I remember the distinctive, damp

musty smell of the room and the wooden benches and beetle tables where we sat. The ladies were helped to clear away the dishes by dinner monitors from the top class who wore red and white checked aprons. The top class ate their dinners up the stone steps in the billiards room and it was a great challenge to try and roll a billiards ball right across the table under the dust sheet unobserved. Dinners I remember as being mainly meat, mashed potato, thick gravy and either cabbage or swede. If you were lucky the ladies would pour the gravy to one side of your potato dam and you could stick your fork through the dam and watch the gravy pour through to the other side. I soon learnt not to ask for only a little secede, which I hated, as the Misses North told you it made you grow and gave you an extra dollar. Puddings were often rice or tapioca (frog spawn) with a spoonful of red jam, spotted dick and eucorand, or if you were lucky the fantastic cake and juice which I think must have been watered down jam poured over sponge pudding. Before we left each day everyone would chant, "Thank you very much ladies, good afternoon."

In winter playtimes the greatest delights were making long slides on the ice in the yards or playing chain or off ground hoo (tick). Summer playtimes were highlighted by being allowed to play in the orchard beside the girls' yard. Here there was an enormous log to climb on and holes in the field at the top. We would also spend a lot of time playing with two balls throwing them at the toilet walls and chanting rhymes, as well as skipping in a long rope turned by two people. In winter the teachers retired into Miss Rediff's kitchen for tea, but in the summer they would sit in the girls' yard on the bench

under the plum tree drained up the wall of the school house.
The top junior girls would also sit out there for sewing lessons in summer with Miss Reddt. The boys did geometry inside with Miss Howe. The girls knitted scarves and gloves in school colours in the winter.

The school year started with Harvest Festival. We would bring bunches of flowers and shoe boxes covered in green crepe paper and filled with fruit and vegetables to school and have a service in the church. Afterwards I seem to remember the fruit and vegetables went to Quersham Hospital but the marrows we had for school dinners as the hospital did not want them! At Christmas we would also go to the church for the Carol Service and Nativity Play. At Christmas we would also have a party of sorts and get a small present. I still have two china ornaments, a duck and a rabbit which I received one Christmas.

In winter the fires in the classrooms would be lit and a coal monitor would fetch in coal and keep the fire stoked up. In very cold weather the milk crates containing 3 pint bottles would be stood on top of the fire (stove) to warm it up before we drank it at morning break. This was especially necessary if it had frozen and the ice had pushed the tops off the bottles. Miss Howe would often stand right in front of the fire against the guard whilst teaching and in consequence got scorch marks on several of her dresses. It was very warm near the fire but quite chilly in the furthest corners of the room.

Every Easter each child in the school received a little chocolate nest of coloured eggs from the previous headmistress, Mrs. Luff. I remember the occasion when

I was one of the children chosen to go to her house in the village to collect her gifts and thank her for them.

The eleven plus was a big event in the school year especially for the older children. First came the Prelim.

If you passed that you went on to sit on English and Arithmetic exam. Only the scholarship children attended school on that day. We were allowed to choose what the ladies cooked for our dinner and after dinner, we were allowed out of school for a walk to relax under the big beech tree on the footpath down to Chories Bottom, before returning for the afternoon's exam. Later in the summer, on the day of the results the people who had passed were allowed to toll the school bell once each, so people would listen, including my mother in little Chalfont, to find out how many had passed.

Summer brought nature walks and games. On our nature walks we usually went down to the Water Splash. On the way we were taught the names of the wild flowers and trees we saw, and would bring back specimens to put in fish paste pots on the nature table. We would walk up to the cricket field for games on fine afternoons. The girls would play rounders with Miss Reditt, whilst the boys had football with Miss Howe.

The annual Sports Day was also held up on the cricket field. As well as the usual running, skipping and egg and spoon races, the top class did a dress the dummy race where a girl ran up and down collecting a dress, hat, umbrella etc which the boy had to put on, and then they both had to run down to the finish.

Once a year the older children would go to compete

in the School's Music Festival in the Baptist Church, Chesham. I don't remember much about the actual singing and recorder competitions, but I do remember the highlight of the day was having a picnic lunch in the park and being allowed on the swings, slides and roundabout and feeding the ducks on the pond. My younger brother, who was unable to sing in tune, was allowed on this trip provided he only mouthed the words when the class stood up to sing. Another musical memory is the day the piano in Miss Howe's room refused to function properly and a mouse's nest was found in the back.

Altogether days at Chesham School in the 1950's were really carefree and happy, although it was a time of big changes in the village when the estate of the Duke of Bedford was sold to pay death duties. The farms, manor house and many houses in the village were sold and presumably some parents lost their jobs on the estate. The only forms of disciplining I remember were Miss Reditt's telling off's and Miss Howe's shouting. The latter could be heard all over the school and made younger children fearful of going up to her class, although, when you got there everybody liked her as she was very fair. Corporal punishment was not often used, but Miss Howe could administer a fair wack across the hand with a wooden ruler and if this happened you knew you had justly deserved it. On leaving at eleven to go on to a variety of secondary schools in Amersham or Chesham each child was given a book. I still have mine, a History of Everyday Things in England - The Tudors, inscribed with Miss Reditt's *italic handwriting*.

I am really sorry that I am unable