

Memories of Westcott School

James Still

Left school to go to Dorking High School – at that time in Dene Street with three Army Huts in the grounds.

At Christmas there was a party in the Hut. The day before we were told to bring an enamel mug to school and after lessons we went to the Hut where a large spread was provided and there was a Christmas tree with candles and Sir George Touche gave everybody an attractively decorated little box of Helm Royal chocolates. This was a traditional present that had started as a thank you to the school for keeping quiet when Lady Touche had been seriously ill.

Mr Hammond took woodwork in the upstairs room (now the staff room) but being left handed I was more often than not left out.

There were swimming lessons at Dorking Baths but whether the water was warm or not depended on the amount of rubbish collected the previous week because the baths were heated by Council incinerator.

At the Empire Day service little aluminium medals were presented to pupils who submitted the best essays.

The school meadow was saucer-shaped and often used to be waterlogged.

I remember a lanternslide lecture given by a medical student with a very posh accent. It was all about a disease that was very contagious and I still remember the warning we were given never to spit, especially near where fish was exposed for sale on a wet slab, or fresh meat was on display outside a butcher's shop. What I could not make out was the name of the disease – but it sounded as if it was something to do with two bikes. I later learned that it was tuberculosis!

One day we had a special treat; we all went to the Playhouse in West Street Dorking (later the Fire Station and currently empty) to see the film "Southward on the Quest" about Scott expedition to the Antarctic. Unfortunately I was too young to go on the school trip to the British Empire Exhibition at the newly opened Wembley Exhibition Centre in 1924.

Miss Port lived some way away (Ewhurst?) and came to school on a motor cycle.

Those children who didn't go home to lunch brought sandwiches and ate them in the lobby of the Infants School. At that time there was no school canteen. The room in the old Infant school now used as a canteen was originally the Girl's Cookery Classroom.

Miss Greathurst was in charge of the Infants – The babies – and had a dunces Cap that children who made mistakes were forced to wear.

More generally- There was a shop in Milton street at the recently restored Peppermint Cottage. It had closed by 1920 but had been run by Dan'l Burgess helped by his niece Miss McIntyre – who went to live in Canterbury.

Christopher Wootton

My uncle, Christopher J Wootton, attended Westcott School from 1919 to 1925. He can remember quite a lot of information about his time there and I have gathered some of his recollections in the notes that follow.

He came to Westcott School in 1919 having previously spent some time at Miss Ruffell's private school in Westcott Street. He cannot recall a great deal about his time there but does

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remember that the school comprised of between eight and ten pupils of varying ages all taught together by Miss Ruffell, who was a likeable and gentle woman. Christopher's eldest sister, Dorothy Violet Wootton spent her whole education there and emerged as 'head girl' by virtue of being the most senior pupil. When Christopher joined Westcott School, it comprised of two parts: the infant school which was housed in a separate building alongside the main building and the senior school itself. The infant school (for 5 to 7 year olds) had two classes, the lower age group being taught by an assistant and the higher by Mrs Gore, wife of the school headmaster. The senior school (for 7 to 14 year olds) had four classes whose teachers were Miss Greathurst, Miss Port, Miss Venis and Mr Gore respective to each age group. Mr Gore taught the senior class. It is apparent that the classes spanned more than a single year age group. Christopher was taught by three teachers but in 1925 left to join Dorking High School before reaching Mr Gore's class.

The teachers taught all subjects with no particular specialities. Mr Gore was known as 'gaffer Gore' by his pupils. He lived in Dorking and both he and his wife travelled to school daily by bicycle. He regularly would walk around the school brandishing a cane, although it is doubtful how much he used it - probably more of a deterrent! He had an interest in gardening which may account for the school garden to the right of the school building. Mr Gore's top class apparently had lessons in gardening.

Miss Venis was known to be very strict and all the pupils were respectful of her. She had complete control of her classes. Apparently, Mr Gore would send his more disruptive pupils to Miss Venis as a means of restoring discipline. It seems Stemp was a regular visitor to Miss Venis. Neither Miss Venis or Miss Greathurst were college trained as teachers but were both good at their job. Miss Ivy Port was trained and left subsequently to become headmistress at Okewood school where she stayed for 25 years, during which time she was awarded an MBE for her services to education. She was regarded as a legend at Okewood for the way she had transformed the school. Miss Port famously had a motorbike and was often to be seen riding around the local lanes. On one occasion she had an accident and ended up in hospital. On returning to school she advised her charges to always wear clean underclothes in case they had an accident!

The three lady teachers all lived in Westcott. Miss Greathurst lived in the road behind the Reading Room with her sister who was also a spinster. Miss Venis lived in a terraced house on the main road to Dorking beyond Balchin's and the pub. Miss Port lodged in various places including the property adjoining 7 Main Road at one point. At another time she lodged with Mr Roberts, the carpentry teacher and his wife, who lived up the road alongside the Bricklayer's Arms. Mr Roberts apparently used to travel to various schools teaching carpentry.

All the classes at Westcott School were mixed (boys and girls). However there were two different playgrounds: one for the boys and one for the girls and infants. In the actual classrooms, the girls and the boys each sat separately.

There were classrooms either side of the school hall where Mr Gore and Miss Greathurst taught, with a further two rooms upstairs for Miss Venis and Miss Port. There were no school dinners so all pupils went home at lunchtime. Each day began with assembly in the school hall.

Getting to school was a different business in 1920. Chris remembers he and his brother Reg walking down the middle of the main road rolling an iron hoop with a hook to steer it. Apparently these toys were popular at the time.

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School trips were rare but there was an organised trip to see the Wembley Exhibition when it opened. Occasionally there would be visits to the school by the vicar Mr Saltzman, who would lecture the classes on the gospels. The vicar was reputedly a mountaineer and keen cricketer who played for the village team and bowled underarm.

Every Christmas, the school was visited by Mrs Brooke's (from The Rookery) matron who would bring a box of King Edward's chocolates for each pupil in the school. This was considered quite a treat - toffee was popular but chocolate was rather special!

Mrs Hester Herby

Hester lived at Waltham Forest but at the time of the blitz, when her father was taken ill and her mother had to work it was arranged that she should stay with Bessie, her stepsister who was the cook to Mrs Fairclough at Woodlands in Westcott. She was 13 / 14 at the time.

Mrs Fairclough lived at the house with her daughter Beatrice (c age 40) and a staff that also included a Housemaid, Parlour maid, Chauffeur and two Gardeners (although these were called up and the garden was looked after by the Chauffeur). There had been 3 Dulwich girls at the House but one had to go home creating a vacancy for Hester.

Although technically an evacuee Hester was admitted to the 'church school' as opposed to joining the Dulwich Class. (If she joined the Dulwich school she would have had to stay on to age 16 and she needed to start work as soon as she could because of her father's illness.) The two schools were not merged but each had their own teachers and they took it in turns to be taught at the school; in the mornings one week, in the afternoons in the following week. Miss Venis is remembered and Mr Earl.

Col Barclay and the Bury Hill estate is remembered more than the Rookery. This is partly because she had a cousin Lizzie whose father worked for the Barclays. His name was Arthur. One of the female Barclays had lost a leg?

Mr Barclay left so many houses to his employees. Her relative moved from his former accommodation to a much more modern semi-detached house. She remembers Mrs Barclay dying, and her son died shortly after.

Chris Dittert

Thank you for your letter last week, the literature and the kind invitation to join in the October celebrations. I may say it came as a complete surprise, and something of a shock to find myself still remembered and wanted.

It would be a wonderful experience to meet again any of the staff, parents and children I used to know, and I will try to be there, though at my age it is unwise to predict too far into the future. Incidentally, the date of 16th October will be my 93rd birthday if! survive that long.

Memory becomes very unreliable at my age, and most of what I could write can be found in the official School Log Book, if you still have it. When I left I gave to the School my personal collection of old photos. I have a few others left which I will lend you when I can find them, but meanwhile you might be interested in the enclosed photocopy of the draft of a talk which I gave in the village. You are welcome to quote from it as you wish.

As for precise memories, I can recall a few. For instance, I was

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appointed to the Headship following the resignation of Mr. Earle after his year of absence due to ill health, and I remember being told by the District Education Officer at the time that I should regard the first year as a learning experience and then move on to another school. In fact I was happy to remain for the next 15 years. I also remember Mr. Earle frequently coming back into the school afterwards to play on his beloved piano,

I remember a succession of sports meetings, football and netball, leavers' parties, Christmas celebrations and school plays such as "Hiawatha", "Once upon a time", Mr. Ling's masterpiece "1588 and all that", etc, but perhaps most of all the voluntary after-school Scottish Country Dance group. The costumes - white dresses for the girls and kilts for the boys - were made by the Headmaster's wife. Several public performances were given, and the younger mothers were so inspired as to ask if they too could have an evening class. which we duly did.

I resigned the Headship in Spring 1973 after the School was reduced to "First" status, feeling that a woman Head was more appropriate for what was now virtually an Infants School. I knew my good friend Miss Joan Barter was available and would be ideal for the job, and the Managers followed my advice. From then on, my own private affairs took over my life, and I have since had very little contact with the School or the village, other than Christmas cards exchanged with Mrs Davies and my clerical assistant -Mrs. Richards.

The local paper reported with tongue in cheek my resignation speech as "the Head who left his mark", but it was on the School, not the children. One such great achievement was the replacement of outside toilets with civilised amenities inside. The ones outside were abandoned, but one day became the scene of much excitement when one of them was chosen by a badger for his daily siesta, and contentedly slept there all day while the children filed past to see him

Mrs Illsley

I remember children settling in school with Mrs Tothill and gradually learning to take responsibility as they gained confidence to read at the Parent Assembly, act in a play, sing a solo or play the recorder in church.

Music was an important part of school life. Mrs Tutt was a skilled musician and children and staff learned a lot in the most enjoyable way. I particularly remembered a musical play about The Three Bears; learning to sing rounds, and the Christmas plays and the excitement of children dressing up.

Mr Weyman, the vicar was always willing to join in school activities, whether bringing his dog to Assembly (when we were thinking about pets); keeping score at the school Olympics, crowning the Rose Queen, explaining church architecture to the children and leading parents and children at church services.

My most vivid memories of Westcott School are of occasions when children, staff, parents and governors worked together to enhance part of the curriculum or to enjoy a special occasion. When the Vikings were the topic in the school, the parents found 'Viking' clothes for the children and even arranged for three marauding 'Vikings' to carry off a 'hostage' while Mrs Bram, the school caterer prepared a Viking Stew. I particularly remember the 'Westcott Olympic Games' organised by Mrs Barkley. There was a procession onto the field with flags, and the parents helped to score the various feats of athletic prowess.

The parents gave their help in so many ways which enabled the staff to organise activities which were valuable to the children but which needed more than one pair of hands. I remember them urging the children on at Dorking Swimming Pool at the

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sponsored swim. I remember them organising fund raising activities to get our first computer, to buy books, to buy medical instruments. Can I ever forget every children having their own recorder and learning to play.

S M Proctor

Mrs Proctor was at school at the beginning of the Second World war and recalls the evacuees arriving from Dulwich when the school premises were shared; one school attending in the morning of one week and in the afternoon the next. When they were not in the school the pupils had to go to the Hut in Furlong Road. Lessons there tended to be more relaxed and she remembers the girls spending time knitting gloves and sea boot socks for the forces, while the boys had to wind the wool. Gardening was also encouraged; the girls looking after the 'upper garden' whilst the boys worked the school 'meadow'. "I also recall collecting blackberries at The Rookery for the WI during which there was a day time air raid, and being given shelter in the basement of the house there, also picking up potatoes in the field near Milton Bridge." At the weekend there was a s bus into Dorking for children to go to 'Saturday Morning Pictures' with the 'Hi de Hi' Club at the Embassy Cinema.

[When she left school Sheila worked at Forrest Stores, opposite the Green, which sold general provisions including wine and spirits, and also contained the village post office with a clerk coming in from Dorking each day to run it. She now lives in Reigate.]

Colin Batts

My memory of the school is very limited. I did not like school.

I recall the head master Mr.Earl, Mr. Webb, Miss Venus and Miss Gore.

The classes were of about 36 pupils each. With ages ranging from 5 to 12 or 14 I do not know how classes were arranged. The usual lessons were held, arithmetic, geography English and General Knowledge and Scripture.

We had two bomb shelters built. One on the edge of the playground and another down in the allotments. I do not recall ever having to use them due to a raid. Another shelter was built at the top of Ashley Road. These were constructed of brick walls with a thick concrete roof. Above ground so really useless if bombs fell directly on them. The windows had some brown tape put on them supposedly to stop the glass showering us. We had a third of a pint of milk given out by a monitor each morning who was of course nicknamed "Milky" and it has stayed with him to this day.

Sport was not possible .No field. We did country dancing! After school and tea the boys met in the meadow and kicked a ball around trying not fall over in a cow pat.

A few children from London came to the school and fitted in well. I understand one of the girls became a pop singer.

Improvements were made to the entry of the school when I think it was Sir George Touche gave some land for a foot path to be built from the Cricketers to the main entrance of school lane and a Belisha crossing was installed. A tragedy occurred on the crossing when a truck killed one of our pupils.

On the introduction of the eleven plus and the free entrance to grammar schools the school prided itself with four passes to Dorking County School. No mean achievement for such a poor school.

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Through another acquaintance I am trying to connect the daughter of Mr. Webb in the hope that her memory is better than mine and that she may have some memorabilia to offer.

John Weyman

One early June day the Diocesan Architect rang up : “Could the roofers start on Thursday?” The roof was not letting in water but it was very old and badly needed renewing. If I said ‘No, not this term’, when would our turn come again?

I said, ‘Yes’. This was to cause the biggest strain on my relationship with the Head in my twenty on e years as Chairman. Teaching is one thing, but teaching whilst the roof is being pulled off or hammered on is very stressful. Why couldn’t it have been done in the holidays? In fact the roof was not completed until the beginning of the autumn term. It cost some £63,000 and when the autumn rains came – Yes, you guessed it – it started to leak. Not the builders fault, of course!

Come the day the number of School managers (as they were then called) increased from six to twelve – enough to run a battleship, I used to think. One of the new young managers had his own business and aeroplane. More than once the phone would ring at about six o’clock. Sorry, old boy, I’m still at 20,000 ft. I won’t be able to make our evening meeting.

Staffing was always the number one issue, but things were never what you expected. At the end of one Summer term we discovered that one of the staff had been pinched to head somewhere else and leaving us no time to interview a replacement. On one occasion a planned advert brought eighty applicants, but when the chosen person was later to leave to have a family one advert brought but a single person to interview.

With the ongoing opportunity of parents to leap frog their second children on to the Dorking Schools, the staff and governors always had to be good – and they were.

Dan Wadey

I remember that Mrs Illsley always used to say that she was watching us with her 'beeeeeeeady eye'this was especially at assembly time!

We always used to have friday sweet time where you would get to choose a sweet from the glass jar if you had been especially good or had had a birthday (everybody wanted the black ones!) and afterwards singing the going home song (were going home, ssh, ssh, were going home ssh, ssh.) Something to that effect anyway! That was always an exciting time!

There was one time when Mrs Tutt fell in the swimming pool when we were at Dorking. She ran and went to jump one of the corners and ended up straight in the middle of the pool! I can remember Alan Miles, son of the school's Ann Miles falling fast asleep as Miss Tutt read a story to us and snoring in the book corner. I remember Dawn Rowe sucking up paint through a straw when she was supposed to be blowing it across her page and having a blue mouth.

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Lynn Hall (1947-1954)

Infants in separate building to the side of the school, in front of school canteen.

There were two classrooms off the main hall separated from the hall by green partitioning. These were for the 2nd year infants (Miss Beasley) and the top class (Mr Earl). There was a pillar in the middle of the hall with a clock (with roman numerals) on it. I also remember a picture of King George IV, and a copy of a message signed by him about D-Day, and a barometer, all hanging in the hall.

The other two classes were upstairs. We also had a library and a craft room.

Toilet block at back of school. Sinks with cold water in cloak room off hall.

Mr Baker, 1 School Lane Cottages became caretaker (daughter in Springfield Road – Mrs Edna Potts)

School allotments next to 1 School Lane, worked during war and afterwards by older children to help grow food for war effort. These were abandoned when older children went to secondary school and it became just an infant/junior school.

An air raid shelter to the left side of the school had desks and chairs in. It later became a school store for the gardening tools etc. and forms for use in the playground.

School garden to the right of the school, had lots of lavender bushes. We made lavender bags in sewing class. I was not keen on gardening (so it said on my report).

Miss Hayden (Reception Class) would sit in playground at break time and call you over to hear you read. She must have been a diligent lady, as there were no class helpers or other help. She coped with all teaching, reading and writing, outdoor exercise activities, painting, drawing and sewing, taking us all to the toilet at the back of the school playground and using the classroom as a dinner room at lunchtime, when plastic cloths were spread on the desks and infants had their meal served through a hatch from the kitchen next door. A number chart covered this hatch, and it always intrigued me to find that it became a hole to the kitchen at lunchtime. The school room was heated by a large open fire in the corner with a very heavy iron fireguard around it. We had one-third of a pint of milk to drink each day which came in little bottles in a crate. In the winter the crate was put behind the fireguard, so we got the milk warm!

When you were six you went up to Miss Beasley's class in the main school building and took part in morning assembly. This was conducted by Mr Earl with Miss Beasley playing the piano. Being a Church School, sometimes the Vicar would come and take part. We then had half an hour of religious instruction every morning, and learnt the catechism by heart. (I can still remember these questions and answers). On Ascension Day we had a Service in Holy Trinity Church and then the rest of the day off school.

We were taught to read and write in pencil in the first two classes, but when you progressed to the top two you were able to write in ink. This was with a dip pen and an ink well. The ink was mixed up powder and water. The ink wells were sunk into each desk. On a Monday two boys from the top class would collect the wells and wash them and refill them and then distribute them around the classrooms. We also had little pieces of blotting paper to mop up the ink. We were taught a new writing script called *Marian Richardson*, which has prescribed the way I write all my life.

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We were all taught our tables by rote, another thing that has stayed with me to this day.

Miss Gore who later went to be Head Mistress of Abinger Common Primary School, taught country dancing, and we used to practice Maypole dancing on the vicarage lawn.

Mr Earl was very keen on music and history. We used to take part in the Leith Hill Music Festival at the Dorking Halls each year. Being a very small school (less than 100 children 4 – 11+) I don't think we ever won anything, but taking part was fun. Ralph Vaughan Williams was a patron of the Festival, and would come and listen to the choirs.

The Headmaster's wife, Mrs Earl, would come and do craft work with us. I remember doing weaving on a small hand loom, raffia work making table mats, paper folding making little baskets and filling them with sweets and basket and tray making with cane. Mrs Blomfield taught us needlework and there was also a hand sewing machine, but I can't ever remember seeing any children using it.

Books were very difficult to come by just after the war, and a lot of our books dated from before 1939 and were in poor condition. I learnt to read thinking that Beacon Readers were always covered in strips of sticky tape. It was only later when I saw a new one that I realised that faded covers and tatty pages were not how they always came. But it did not stop my learning to read. We had little bags with loops at the sides to hang on the back of our chairs to keep our books in.

We had swimming lessons in the summer term at the Watermill outdoor swimming pool along the Reigate Road. We were taken there by coach, a real treat, even though it was outdoors and the weather was not always kind. But we did learn to swim.

We had a school netball and football team, and competed against local schools, but they had the advantage of being larger with more children to choose their teams from. We used to wear coloured bands for netball to distinguish the teams. We did not have any general PE kit, but the girls had some home made shorts and tops when competing in matches.

Sports Day was on Westcott Football Ground, Milton Street. Boys also played football here.

The school meals were cooked by a professional chef and were of very good quality. Because of rationing they were very well patronised, as it helped to eke out the weekly rations. I remember them being 2/1 a week or 5d a day. (About 10½p a week in today's money). Waste food was collected in a special *pig bin*, which was collected separately and used to make pig swill to feed local pigs. Nothing was wasted. During the school holidays our family used to go to a *National Canteen* in Junction Road, Dorking, where hot, basic meals were sold. This again was to help out the weekly rations.

National Saving stamps were sold at the school and we collected them on special cards, which could then be put into National Savings Certificates when you had collected enough money.

When I first went to the school the playground for the infants and girls was all sand and very uneven. I had a bad accident there when I was 8, which put me in hospital for two weeks. Later, when building materials became more available, it was tarmacked over and was much safer to play on. The school playground did not have

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gates or a fence either, so it was quite possible for anybody to wander in or out. It was later fenced and gated, probably again, when building materials once more became available, but we were not a priority. There was no apparatus or any other organized things for us in the playground. We played skipping, marbles, five stones, ball games, chasing, singing games, and in the winter sliding on the ice that came on the puddles in the playground. There was a row of large trees around the back that were utilised for some games.

We had gas lighting in all the class rooms. In the winter these mantles sometimes had to be lit and would pop and hiss and throw out a very yellow light. At Christmas we had class parties, with everybody contributing the food, a real pick and mix, the class rooms would be decorated and the gas lamps lit. (A real fire hazard!)

We had regular visits from the Attendance Officer, District Nurse to look at our hair and nails, the School Medical Officer and the Dentist.

At the back of the school was a pink marble plaque celebrating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. We also had a new water fountain put in to celebrate the Queen's Coronation, this had a brass plaque. (Are they still there?)

We had school Coronation Celebrations on 29 June 1953 on the Football Ground. We had a pageant and all dressed up. All the children were given a Coronation Mug to commemorate the day. (I still have mine).

We had a school outing to Blenheim Palace, by train from Dorking Town Station. A special train trip organized to celebrate the Coronation. Lots of schools around the district came and the train went directly there. It was only years afterwards that I found out exactly where Blenheim Palace was and how far away it was from Dorking.

The school did not have a television, although we did have a wireless and listened to schools' programmes, like Music and Movement and Singing Together. We lived in School Lane and my Mother invited the older children to come and watch, on our television, the Queen's Accession Proclaimed in February 1952.