

Lemsford J.M.I. School 1944 to 1950

I was a pupil at St. John's School from 1944 until 1950 – just before the first extension to the building was completed to provide a new toilet block, cloakrooms and facilities. The school as I knew it was a large room with a dividing wooden screen between the Infant classroom and the Junior classroom. There was a connecting door through the screen. At the side of the Junior classroom there was a third classroom built between the school and the school house and accessed by a door from the Junior classroom. In the third classroom there was the rope to ring the bell atop the bell tower and from time to time a pupil who had been good was allowed to pull the rope although mostly a hand bell was used. At the road end of the main building there was a small cloakroom from which the Juniors room was accessed. Heating for each classroom was in the form of a cast iron stove - fuelled by coal. They certainly put out a lot of heat but it was poorly distributed around the room and pupils nearby were roasted whilst those further away were cold. In winter the daily milk deliveries had frozen outside the porch by the school gate and the crates had to be placed by the stoves to thaw out.

The school toilets were in a separate brick building at the East end of the main building with the girls section accessed via a playground reserved for only girls and infants. There was a dividing wall along the South side of the school building with a gap for the girls to go through. The boys had a urinal outside the main toilet block at the Eastern edge of the boundary. It was exposed to the elements and consisted of a simple half-round gulley sloping to a soak away at one end. Privacy consisted of a 5 foot high brick wall [whitewashed] between the user and the garden next door. A 'right of passage' was to pee over the top of the wall into the garden of the cottage on the other side. The main toilet block had two bucket closets and the seats were just planks of wood with a hole to take the waste. There was a pair of similar closets on the other side of a dividing wall but that wall only reached down to the seat level and it was possible for the boys to reach through beneath the planks and tickle the bottom of any girl occupying the adjacent compartment [nasty if the tickling stick was a nettle].

The main playground to the North of the school was only partly laid to tarmac and the North end was gravel up to a hawthorn hedge. There was a field with fruit trees over the hedge and this belonged to the school but was out of bounds to pupils although some went scrumping when the apples and plums were nearing ripeness.

The school canteen was the building alongside the road and had the eating area at the South end and cookhouse at the North end. The school cook was Mrs Newsome and she with a helper prepared all the meals.

David also Sent emails to the group with some interesting memories:

Dear Andy,

Sadly my memories of Christmases at Lemsford School are slight. In the period that I was there it was still a time of rationing and very 'post war' and there were in fact probably less than 25 pupils [Infant and Junior together]. There were no 'Plays' or concerts for parents and I think that the only festivities were the school pupils going to a special service at the church at the end of the year. The Vicar would have been either Mr R.R.P.Rigby [Roger Raggy Pants] or Mr K.Mitchell [no nickname but not so popular with the pupils]. Sorry I cannot remember more. I have a better memory of the school buildings, playgrounds and the separate toilet block [very Victorian and basic]. I will write about the school in more detail when I am able and as I was involved in converting the old toilet block to a store for Fete stalls and often attended PCC meetings at the school those memories are better recalled.

Kind regards, David Roden.

I am able to provide some information on Dennis Whittaker who was Headmaster at St John's School in the 1950's. I had left that school at that time but it was in the mid 50's that Mr Whittaker set up the Lemsford Boy Scout Group [Hatfield 4th]. He went round all the houses in Lemsford and Stanborough asking if any boys would be interested in forming a group if he ran one. From the list of lads who wanted to take part Dennis selected four to train as potential Patrol Leaders and Seconders and I was one of those chosen. We had two patrols and I was Leader of the Peewits. Meetings were held at the Old Village Hall. We had many trips out including several camping stints in Brocket Park for which we had a hand pulled trek cart. I remember on our first trip 'Skipper' [Dennis] loaded his old army gear at the back of the cart which unbalanced everything [Dennis had been a Major in the army and his gear was heavy]. All was fine until it was time to change the two lads pulling the cart and once a lad was free of the handle the cart went down at the back - to great amusement. I hope this note gives insight into Dennis and what he did outside of school.

Kind regards, David Roden.

p.s. I still live in Stanborough and am willing to recount memories if they are of interest. I attended St. John's School between 1944 and 1950 and remeber it before any extensions were added.

