

Memories of St John's school from the early 1960's

Jane Tait

I have lovely and not so lovely memories of primary school.

My recall of the school buildings is very different to the modern layout. When I was at school the canteen and kitchen were in the corrugated iron building. The infants' classroom (Miss Burns group) could be merged with the second class by wooden concertina doors being opened. The second class (Mrs Temple's year group) had to move desks to allow the daily morning assembly. The third class (Mr Temple's group) were in a classroom situated between the Headmaster's house and the second classroom. A small macadamed area allowed access between the house garden's high brick wall and the rear entrance. A little corridor led to each of the classrooms.

It was the bane of adults' lives when us children tried to rescue the baby swifts that fell out of the numerous nests under the eaves of the roof into the rear tarmac. The sound of summer was the swifts' calls and children playing. The taste of spring was sampling the sweet apple blossoms in the orchard and lying underneath their small closely cropped branches, staring up into the blue sky. The curiosity came from finding things for the nature display in the rear corridor and later sampling some of the books on shelves. That corridor became a museum in my last year at school. It taught me about the breaking of trust when things that I had loaned were deemed as given by the Temples and not returned when the museum was no longer present.

Mr Temple, the Headmaster, was much kinder in his approach than Mrs Temple. She was of the old authoritarian style. Miss Burns and her assistant, Mrs Tomberry, were lovely. My brother was gutted when Miss Burns married and became Mrs Payne, because Roy was determined he was going to marry her! Janet and John books introduced us to reading, "Look, John. Look!". The smell of purple ink printed sheets with content "OO" that we could make into eyes to remember the 'oo' sound mixed with floor polish used on the wooden flooring. Printed blank clock faces had a different printer's ink smell. The smell of the Roneo rotary hand cranked printer that wafted from the office in a little room by the main entrance. The smell of the copious amounts of tippex being applied to the etched roneo master sheets when the school secretary was having a bad day. The clack, clack, clack of her mechanical typewriter that changed in intensity depending on whether the typewriter keys had to penetrate the roneo master sheet that mounted into the printer and the ink would ooze through the letter holes, or if she were typing using an ink ribbon for the keys to strike against the paper to make letters. The smell of Mrs Nusome's great school dinners that taunted us with the prospect of another of her award-winning school dinners. Hands up if you wanted the skin off the custard!

Mrs Temple played the piano to accompany the hymns in morning assembly. When it was a rousing piece the fresh flowers in a vase on top of the piano often shed their petals as she hammered those chords home with conviction. I remember Mrs Temple laughing until she cried when one of our morale play's props went awry. We had a metal tray with a sheet newspaper on it, which we set alight, during our scene about fire safety. Of course, the paper burned out quickly and we had to carry on acting as if the flames were there and high.

Oh yes, Health and Safety was different then, but I am alive and can tell the tale today, aged 63 and the school did not perish in a puff of smoke.

It was also pre Ofsted days and the streamlining of Primary to Secondary education as a national system. I had never taken an exam like the one that filtered children into ability streams in

transition from being a child to an adolescent, so I failed the 11 Plus spectacularly. Stanborough School had its first year as a comprehensive and I rose from the lowest ability class to the top ability within two years.

I took with me into life the social foundations that St John's imbibed me with and the drive to always be curious and have wonder.