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This is a memory-jogging excursion into the past, where some things are best forgotten but others are well worth retelling. From playground games to lessons in the classroom, from Ink and Milk Monitors to terrifying experiences of music lessons, the nit nurse, vaccinations, corporal punishment ... and death. It’s all here!

For those who are too young to have been there, these accounts will shed a powerful light on how their parents and grandparents behaved, played, learned and coped ... and judge for themselves how lucky they are today!

The author is well known for his nostalgic, informative, perceptive and highly entertaining books covering the history of his home town of Wellington in Shropshire. This is the seventh book in his popular WELLINGTON’S PAST series.

Allan, with help from veteran Wellington author George Evans, has written this book specifically to help fund the Wellington Civic Society, whose main interest is the preservation of important aspects of life, past, present and future, in Wellington.

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Constitution Hill School
Left: Prize medal for best Empire Day essay writing, 1927, won by Mary Griffiths.

Centre, left and right: Aftermath of the 1936 thunderstorm during which a pupil died.

Constitution Hill Infants school, c. 1919.
The author’s father Leslie Frost is the fourth boy from the left.

Class 4, Prince’s Street Junior school, c. 1930.

Pupils at Wrekin Road Junior school, 1920s.
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WELLINGTON’S PAST

Memories of
Early Schooldays

ALLAN FROST

Published by Wellington Civic Society
Acknowledgments

Contents

Foreword by George Evans 5
1. Introduction 7
2. Barn Farm Infants 11
3. Constitution Hill Infants and Junior 15
4. Orleton Lane Infants 26
5. Park Junior 29
6. Prince’s Street Infants and Junior 35
7. St. Patrick’s Infants and Junior 41
8. Wrekin Road Infants and Junior 43

1960: Celebrations of events from English history and folklore involve children at Park Junior school; home-made costumes and self applied make-up produced some interesting results. Great fun!
In addition to Infants sections in Wellington’s main Junior schools, the High School in King Street ran its own fee-paying Preparatory Department for boys aged between 5 and 8 and girls 5 to 11 from the late 1920s, when annual fees were £4.10s; it was known as the Kindergarten. The children shown above attended there in the mid-1930s when Miss Fielding was in charge; in fact, she was its last mistress and also taught History to girls in the High School itself. Most attendees were the children of local businessmen and farmers, and it was not unusual for former High School girls to assist in the classroom. The last vestige of the Kindergarten was seen in 1948, when only two girls remained.

**FAMILIAR OBJECTS**

Left: One of Addison’s ubiquitous ceramic ink wells, the bane of Ink Monitors at Junior schools for many decades.

Right: A most uncomfortable Primary school small oak chair, suitable only for those with equally small (and well padded) bottoms.
Foreword

Primary Education is of Primary Importance

Following the success of Allan Frost’s last book, Wellington Shreds (and Patches), Wellington Civic Society asked for more. Allan and I decided that writing a book on Wellington schools would be a good idea. So much information was available that we concentrated on primary schools. This is a joint effort, together with the co-operation of several friends, though Allan has done most of the work and all the compiling.

Wellington has been to the forefront in education for many years, especially in the public sector. The first school we know of was Roger Kyrkbie’s Grammar School in 1534, though there were probably earlier schools. We have uncovered some fascinating information on schools in the 20th century, and have concentrated on memories of Primary and Junior schools up to the 1960s.

Until the early 19th century, many people did not attend day school and were illiterate or only semi-literate. Most schools were Sunday schools run by churches. Gradually, day schools were opened and by 1872, when the School Board was formed, the National (C of E), Wesleyan Methodist and Roman Catholic schools had respectively 396, 313 and 56 pupils. By 1903 all schools were run by the Board, chaired by Richard Groom (the timber man) except for the Methodists and Catholics, a larger proportion than any town in Shropshire.

All Wellington’s schools have a long history of overcrowding as their numbers expanded beyond the capacity of their premises. To alleviate this, part of the school moved into new buildings but these soon became crowded again, needing fresh expansion. However, a school is a group of teachers and children with a tradition of learning rather than a building. Excellent schools often occupied inadequate premises.

Jessie McFall, who wrote the education section of the Victoria County History, told me that she had been impressed at the high quality and forward-looking aspects of Wellington’s schools as she researched their history. Many ‘new ideas’ advocated recently were practised in Wellington long ago. Teaching children out of school is a case in point: we did that at Prince’s Street in the 1950s, and thought it was the very latest idea until my mother told me that she had been taken out for lessons in the 1890s!

What follows is a collection of memories of primary and junior school days. It’s nostalgia for old folks and an insight into bygone days for the young. Teachers might easily learn some new ideas.

George Evans
Life President, Wellington Civic Society
Dinner Ladies were crucial to the smooth running of lunch times, both in the playground as well as in the dining room. Ida Skelton, Mary Frost and Gert Davis with children at Wrekin Road school, mid-1960s.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Allan Frost

Everyone remembers their early years at school. Perhaps many memories are so vivid because our minds were uncluttered with the worries of everyday living. We had someone who fed, watered, clothed and kept us warm, which left us with a lot of time on our hands. School came as a Great Relief for our parents, if only to get us from under our mum’s feet for a few hours from Monday to Friday. We had begun Life’s Journey, ostensibly under the watchful eyes of teachers who cared for us and had our best interests at heart. Or so we believed.

After bidding a tearful farewell, mums gently but firmly prised our white-knuckled fingers from the hems of their dresses and ushered us through the school gates. We were on our own in a place full of strangers. Gradually, other stunned, uncertain faces sidled up to introduce themselves. They would be our allies in a parallel universe for the next ten to 13 years. A few would get us into trouble, others would stay faithfully by our side well beyond school leaving age.

What went on inside the school gates was no real concern to our parents except when our work or behaviour fell short of teachers’ expectations. At least, that was often the case in Infants and Junior schools. Parental expectation had a tendency to come into the equation unexpectedly when important Secondary school examinations reared their ugly heads, but for the next few years all that mattered was keeping your head down and learning whatever dribbles of information were flung at your sponge-like brain by teachers, without getting into trouble. (And we learned a lot. You only have to see how comparatively limited the general knowledge many people under the age of 30 have today to realise how wide and varied our diet of information was. The same applies to arithmetic; we didn’t need calculators or ‘intelligent’ shop tills to calculate simple sums. Many employers and colleges are only too aware of the general decline in written and mathematical ability among an unacceptably large number of school leavers today, whatever the government would have us believe.)

Unfortunately, Education was something completely new to us, whose only previous experience had been listening to Bible stories in the Primary class at Sunday school or learning to read basic tales on our mother’s knee in between sessions of holding our arms wide while she rolled skeins of wool into balls ready for knitting a never-ending supply of woolly jumpers, essential apparel for every child at a time when central heating didn’t exist in most homes and chipping ice off the inside of bedroom windows was the only way to see what the weather was like, as if we couldn’t tell from our frost-bitten toes and fingers.
Now, suddenly, Educational Grown Ups appeared from nowhere. Their forced smiles, donned especially for Day One only, weren’t convincingly happy ones. (I later discovered that there were a good many ex-service men and women who had taken up teaching after the Second World War; although keen on discipline, they wanted Britain to be a better place in which to live and children to have better lives.)

Someone blew a shrill whistle, sending the pea inside into confused overdrive (they were always ACME chromed metal whistles). Amid the confusion, in which any thought of whining was instantly dismissed, we were herded into lines and marched ‘Left! Right!’ into our respective classrooms and instructed to ‘Sit!’ It didn’t matter where we sat; time would inevitably allocate seats at the front for trouble makers and strugglers.

‘Silence!’ (as if that was necessary in a room of children terrified into silence anyway).

Next, in a humourless voice: ‘Answer “Present, Miss” when I call your name!’

Our names were in a register; from this point on, we were neat little ticks down lined columns, to be added to for the rest of our school lives. We had, unwittingly and without prior consultation, become part of The System.

**SCHOOL SMELLS**

George Evans seen here in his pre-teaching army service days, early 1940s.

Sometimes smells can be very nostalgic. You just sniff something you had forgotten many years ago and the memories come flooding back. Perhaps this little essay will stir a few thoughts.

Do you remember the smell of a pencil being sharpened? There’s two distinct parts to it; the first is the soft smell of the wood as it is pared, either by a knife or a sharpener. My first memories are of knives; I rather think it was later that those little sharpeners were invented. Before then it was done with a sharp knife, or when they’d invented safety razors, then an old, used blade of Dad’s. Then there’s the graphite, which we used to call lead. That had a darker, more metallic smell. I once had a sharpener shaped like a globe, which collected the parings and could be opened at the equator. Do you remember the big school sharpeners with a handle, fastened to a desk? And remember that good, usually expensive (1d. each) pencils had the smell of cedar wood but cheap ones (1/2d) were of harder material, more difficult to sharpen. Then there were the pencils that had broken inside and the ‘lead’ kept breaking as soon as it appeared.

The inside of a classroom stationery cupboard had a whole collection of smells; pencils, paper, gum, Plasticene, rubbers, rulers, chalk and ink. This was all very exciting because the stationery cupboard wasn’t opened very often. Stationery was in short supply in the Good Old Days. We had to make do with what we’d got. Any unused pages from previous years were torn out of books for use again. Both sides of the paper must be used and every line had to be written on. Often you could find old exercise books in the cupboard but they had a ‘used’ smell. Sets of text books were usually old, especially bibles, which lasted for centuries; they had a musty, organic smell that would have put you off reading them had it not been compulsory.
Allan will tell about the ink. He was an Ink Monitor, a post to which I never rose. This may have been because my dad was in the Great War and warned me never to volunteer for anything. Or perhaps that the teachers thought, as one once said, that I was ‘too wild’ to be given any responsibility. All I knew about the Ink Room was that it was out of bounds and smelled strongly of ink powder mixed with water.

How about the smell of new desks? Were you lucky enough to have new desks? It didn’t happen often and some might have missed it altogether. They smelled of newly cut wood, stain and especially of glue. Not any of this modern synthetic glue made of oil and chemicals but old fashioned glue that came from boiled animals’ bones and had to be heated and kept liquid in a little double pot with a stubby brush to put it on. New desks smelled exciting; they were light brown, inch thick solid wood, with a cast iron frame and made at Addison’s in Orleton Lane, Wellington. The older versions had a desk top for writing on and a narrow shelf for books beneath; they were often six or more boys long. New ones were semi-detached with a lifting lid and a box underneath for your gear – books, pencil cases, gym pumps and so on.

Games were smelly. Footballs were made of leather and greasy polish or dubbin, though that changed for the worse as soon as they were wet, soggy and very heavy. Boots were also leather, with leather studs, all well loaded with dubbin. The grass, especially when newly cut or damp from rain, had its own pong, often mixed with cowpats. Inside the ball was a rubber (real rubber, not synthetic) stench, mixed with talcum powder to stop it sticking. The bladder’s inflation tube (called a mammy) had to be used each time for blowing up the ball with a bike pump (smelling of oil, grease and stale air) using an adaptor. The mammy was held closed in the fingers, doubled over and tied with strong cotton. You ended the game by scraping the field out of your boots with a knife gadget (the one for scraping boy scouts out of horses’ hooves), drying the leather and applying dubbin to boots, ball, hands, trousers and floor.

Ink wells were precious. There was a little ceramic pot for dipping your pen, covered by a sliding brass top. In many schools there were periodic Desk Inspections (rather like Army kit inspections). Children would bring Brasso polish and two rags – a ‘putter-on’ and a ‘buffer-up’. Those without polish had to negotiate for some, often at the cost of a sweet or two. There’s another smell – Brasso. Before fountain pens were invented we were issued with dipping pens. These were pencil shaped, with wooden handles, a thin steel nib holder and the nib itself. A good nib might last several weeks and produced spidery writing with thin and thick strokes. ‘G’ nibs were a little thicker but you had to buy your own. When you had a new nib it was best to suck it to ensure that the ink stuck to the nib. There’s an interesting taste! Of course they broke, refused to mark the paper, crossed, blotched, spilt ink on your hands and clothes and had to be blotted with pink blotting paper.

Inside desks there was a collection of smells – sweaty gym pumps were usually the strongest. Remember there were no showers and few children washed too often. Sometimes there were stale bananas or other fruit, wriggly (or more often dead) things in matchboxes, liquorice, humbugs, gob stoppers, birds’ eggs, elastic bands, string, marbles, conkers, caps for pistols and even a few books. Sudden Desk Inspection could create panic.

Prince’s Street School had special smells that told you which way the wind was blowing. To the north was the Laundry (see the excellent book by Allan for its history). It gave
out a sort of soft wet scent of washing and soap. South-west was Murphy’s pop works, the chimney belching black smoke and the works smelling of orange, lemon, dandelion, burdock and a whiff of beer from the bottling plant. Due south were Woodhall’s stables with its aroma of horse dung, hay and sweat.

As we all know, school dinners were all about cabbage but on closer inspection there was custard, meat and gravy. Mind you they didn’t have school meals in the old days; you had to bring your own butties and eat them standing in the playground.

Teachers had their own individual smells. The men seemed to be mostly pipe tobacco in my day, partly because they hadn’t invented aftershave. Weren’t we deprived? Women when young had perfumes of varying sorts, though older ones smelled of soap and talcum powder.

Cloakrooms had a different smell in winter and summer. The boys’ cloakroom in wet weather smelled of woollen cloth, often steaming, before they invented plastic and such. The girls’ cloakroom was far cleaner and stank much less. Many junior schools had ‘Please may I go across the yard with paper?’ lavatories. Paper was kept in the school for conservation reasons. The boys’ urinal, open to the sky, had its own distinctive stench.

Remember stink bombs? They still have them I’m told. Sulphuretted hydrogen was the gas I believe but you didn’t get a ‘stinks’ lab until secondary school. Juniors had to buy them from a joke shop. There were also kids who had a natural tendency to produce the same smell all on their own.

Area of Smells: 1950s aerial view of Prince’s Street school (just left of centre) with the Laundry buildings (to the school’s left) and Woodhall’s stables (to the right), and O.D. Murphy’s Pop Works on Holyhead Road just below Woodhall’s. School Lane lies between the Laundry and the school playground.
Chapter 2

Barn Farm Infants

Beryl Parker, born Davies, 1950. Lived at Rose Grove.

I started Barn Farm aged five in 1955. School was the first place that you separated from your mum in those days, as there were no such things as nurseries. I was very small and all the children seemed taller than me.

I don't remember much about the first day's lessons but I can remember sitting at a table with other children drinking milk from a small bottle with a straw. I hate milk but was too frightened to say so. What I didn't know was that before leaving me, my mum had told the teacher than I probably wouldn't drink the milk as I didn't like it (wish I'd known that at the time!). I have never drunk milk since.

I remember that the classrooms had latch doors and the top half was small glass squares. The classrooms were very bright, with friezes of alphabet letters with pictures beneath. There was a piano in the corner of one of the classrooms. Sometimes we used to work in small groups in the corridor, doing our sums with counters. Each classroom had a folding bookshelf with extended wires to hold the books in place.

Miss Freda Jones was the Head teacher. She was a kind lady who seemed to care about all her children. She was firm but friendly. The hall was where we had P.E., dinner times and assembly. The stage was made up of big wooden blocks placed side by side. Miss Jones used to stand on there to address the children in assembly. We had a school percussion band (I played the triangle).

If it was your birthday, you went on the stage to say what gifts you had received and the school sang Happy Birthday to you. Music for assembly was played on another piano, which also stood in a corner. At Christmas we had school productions. We practised often and performed them for parents. I remember being in them. The costumes were always good. We always had a Christmas party with a present from Father Christmas.

I remember the smell of vegetables being cooked long before dinner time. By dinner time the hall smelled horrible. We had to line up by the door and collect our dinners from the ladies who served them from silver tins. It was take it or leave it – no choice in those days. Good, wholesome meals were served. Always potatoes and vegetables and maybe meat pie, fish, casseroles, etc. The puddings were traditional ones like rice pudding, sago, steam pudding or fruit pies. We sat on long benches and the tables were long trestle ones. Teachers walked around supervising and encouraging you to eat up.
Playtimes were happy times and there were always adults outside organising skipping games or ‘The Farmer’s in his den’, ‘The Big Ship Sails’ and ‘Oranges and Lemons’. Girls took dolls to play with and the boys took toy cars. On sunny days at the end of the afternoon we were quite often led across the field to sit under the big oak tree for a story before parents came to pick us up.

We had a savings club where one of the teachers sold savings stamps on a Monday and you stuck them on your own card. The price was 6d or 2/6d for each stamp, with Princess Anne’s face on the first and Prince Charles’ on the more expensive. When the card was full, we could take it to the post office in exchange for the amount saved or put it into our own special children’s account at a bank, like the Trustee Savings Bank in Walker Street.

At the bottom of the lane near the school there was quite often a rag and bone man who would have goldfish in plastic bags in exchange for rags. In those days Limekiln Lane was just that – a lane – full of potholes and I don’t remember there being any street lights. When it rained heavily, it was full of puddles and sometimes flooded by the overflowing stream. There were lots of lovely green fields and farm land around the school. Unfortunately that cannot be said now as the school has a new housing estate built near it.

Some of the teachers I remember were Miss Jones, Mrs Gough, Mrs. Styles and Mrs. Ellis. I left Barn Farm in 1957 to go to Prince’s Street school.

Barn Farm classroom, mid-1950s. Beryl Davies (wearing a white ribbon in her hair) sits by the piano next to Wendy James. Geoffrey James sits between two boys at the back right of the room.
Children at Barn Farm perform the pantomime Cinderella for delighted parents in 1956. Back row, from left to right: -?-, -?-?, Gillian Dyke, -?-?, Terry Sermon, -?-?, Colin Newberry?. Middle row: Robert James, -?-?, David Everson, -?-?, John Hall, -?-?, Geoffrey Jones, Jillian Bennett, Graham Batchelor, Michael Hunt, Adrian Felton. Front row: Jennifer Jones, Rodney Honess, Jennifer Jackson, Trevor Moore, Linda Leedham, Beryl Davies, Gloria Thomas.

1959/60 Barn Farm Infants school Christmas Nativity Play ‘The Living World Worships the Baby Jesus’. Those taking part were Linda Plant (Mary), Joseph Oliver (Joseph), Julian Goode, Keith Williams, David Sherry (Shepherds), David Blythe, Paul Edwards, June Dalton (Kings), Ann Hammond, Betty Haycox, Marian Shepherd, Wendy Tanner, Andrew Sleeman, Sheila Luckock, Jocelyn Rogers, Alison Moore, Marilyn Sellers, Neville Dunn, Clive Carter, Julia Addison, Linda Carline, Clive Hillsley, Betty Powell, Susan Rennie and Susan Madeley.
Young pupils at Constitution Hill school, c. 1947.

Teachers and children inside the Infants classroom at Constitution Hill, 1908. The child marked with an ‘X’ is Maggie Roberts.
Chapter 3

Constitution Hill Infants and Junior

Charlie Parton, born 1914. Lived at 70 New Street.

We really had a good choice of schools in Wellington just before and during the 1920s and it was pretty much up to your parents to decide which one you went to. I could have gone to Wrekin Road or Prince’s Street (which was a Methodist school whose head was Charlie Smith). Even though we were Methodists, I wanted to go to Constitution Hill because that’s where my pals were going.

Boys and girls were taught together in the Infants (or Primary or Babies) section but, when they became seven and went up into the Junior section, were kept very strictly apart. Even their playgrounds were separated with a metal railing. The only time we ever mixed was when Miss Purcell (head of the Infants) got a bit worried that the girls’ netball team wasn’t doing very well; head teacher Cecil Lowe thought they could do with a bit of stiff opposition so he sent a few of his boys over to make up a team which played against the girls’ team a couple of times a week. The boys ran rings around them, but their game improved so much they won the schools’ competition at the end of the season!

Wednesday afternoons at the old swimming baths were set aside for children from Wellington schools. We had half an hour to enter the door, get changed, swim, dry ourselves and leave. Constitution Hill school’s session was from two o’clock until half past. Not before, and not after. I used to go home for my dinner (they didn’t do school meals in those days, although a few kids took something to eat in the porch if they couldn’t go home for some reason, like they came in from the countryside, but no drinks were provided) and join the queue waiting in the baths yard for the door to open. The next half hour was always a blur, things happened so quickly. Mr. Rogers, the baths attendant, used to shout, ‘Come on, you ’erbs, get a move on!’ He kept a very close eye on us to make sure we didn’t fool around too much. If we were caught, he’d yell, ‘Oi! Out! C’mon! OUT!’

‘I won’t do it again!’

‘Never mind won’t do it again! OUT!’

And that was it.

The swimming bath water was changed on a Monday and overnight on Wednesday so that it was clean for swimmers on Thursday morning. Needless to say, it was pretty dirty on Wednesday afternoons. The public paid sixpence on a Monday and Thursday, fourpence on Tuesdays and Fridays, and threepence on Wednesdays and Saturdays, to take into account the increasing dirtiness of the water. We could always see grime on the bot-
tom of the pool during our school sessions, and when we went there at half past nine on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the school holidays! Except during the winter. There was no call for swimming during cold months, so the pool was emptied and covered over for whist drives, dances and shows and concerts until spring came.

We used to go to the Slipper Baths once a week to have a proper bath; they had about six of those. Very few folk had baths at home, so we'd pay sixpence (or threepence for small children) to have a decent bath. They supplied the soap but you had to take your own towel. It was great because there were bags of hot water, really hot. An attendant used to run the water for you to make sure you didn’t use too much. Slipper baths were always available throughout the year ... they had to be! Many folk used to go there on a Saturday afternoon after they finished work, ready for going out in the evening.

Poverty affected a lot of families during the 1920s, so much so that many children couldn’t afford to have a slipper bath and had to use freezing cold water from a rainwater butt in their back yards. It may have removed the grime but didn’t do much to get rid of the smell. It was quite overpowering at times and you soon got to know who you didn’t want to sit next to in the classroom!

School lessons concentrated on Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, with very little else. We were assessed under seven Standards, numbered one to seven. Miss Howells was one of my first teachers, then Mrs. Davies who became Mrs. Hamer, then I went into Mr. Jimmy Parton’s (no relation) class, then Percy Ferriday’s, then Cecil Lowe’s (he took Standards six and seven). English (‘Composition, Writing and Spelling’) and history, geography and a certain amount of art and geometry, but only as much as they thought was suitable for a council-run school. Nevertheless, we were very well educated in the basics,
especially things like mental arithmetic. These days, children don’t seem to be able to get things right even with computers! We only used slates in the Infants section, not the Junior, probably because we hadn’t yet learned to write properly.

The governors of the school came round once a year to see how we’d got on. One of the governors was Mr. Littlewood the solicitor; another was John Bayley of Wrekin College. He had a habit of shooting out questions to the class, saying, ‘Anyone who can answer this question can win half a day’s holiday for the whole school!’ They weren’t easy questions but sometimes we managed to answer them, much to Cecil Lowe’s annoyance.

I was quite good at composition so Cecil Lowe entered me for a newspaper competition. I wrote **The Best Day Of My Holiday**, which was about my first visit to the Shrewsbury Flower Show, and won the prize for Shropshire schools.

We played football on the playground and Jimmy Parton devised a version of basketball: no hoops, just chalk-covered wooden boards which left a mark on the ball and immediately solved any disputed goals. When we played other schools at football, our pitch was in a small field farmed by a Mr. Thompson by the ‘Chocolates’ (Chockley’s) at Leegomery who let us leave goalposts there. We had to walk all the way there along Roslyn Road and straight down ... and back. The cows were often still on the pitch when we arrived; he shooed them off so’s we could begin the match, cow pats and all!

We also played cricket on one of the pitches belonging to the Wrekin College, but only after the pupils there had gone home for the summer. They used to break up a few weeks before us, and they gave us their cast-off balls and bats to play with. The council didn’t provide that sort of thing for us at Constitution Hill.

Cecil Lowe, in my opinion, was an excellent head master and streets ahead of his time. He devised the idea of prefects and monitors, and dividing the pupils into coloured 'hou-
es’ to encourage competition. No other schools in the area had houses before he devised the idea, and they all copied him. Ours were Britons (blue), Saxons (yellow), Normans (green) and Danes (red); we were each given a badge with our house colour, and one head boy for the whole school: he wore four ribbons (one of each colour) on his shoulder.

If you were seen doing something you shouldn’t by one of the senior prefects, he told you to tell your teacher you had been summoned to the Prefects’ Court, which comprised the head boy (I became head boy in my last year), the captain of your house and the captain of one other house. They would hear the evidence and give a sentence (usually a punishment of writing a number of appropriate ‘lines’) and enter the whole proceedings in a book for Cecil Lowe to examine at regular intervals.

The head boy had to make a report of the school’s achievements, failures and shortcomings at a special monthly assembly of all pupils. These reports included the way we behaved in public and respect for others (including never calling adults by their first names), as well as all the usual things to do with school life and obeying rules. You never addressed a teacher without being invited or putting your hand up first to attract attention. Furthermore, the teachers were expected to treat the children with dignity.

Cecil Lowe also introduced the school magazine (see illustration on next page for the 1928 cover) using a duplicator, put together by us kids with help from the teachers. Some, like Percy Ferriday, were good artists. We had to produce each page on a purple waxed sheet which would then be placed in the machine where ink was transferred onto ordinary paper. The front cover was a picture of the school drawn by Percy. I remember one showing Father Christmas trudging up the hill. During the weeks leading up to Christmas we used to paint pictures which were sold for school funds, sixpence each. We sold two or three hundred of these each year.
I was naughty at the school only once. We had an iron railing separating the playground from the gardens along King Street below. If a ball went into a garden, we were supposed to ask permission to go down the road to retrieve it. Well, one day, I didn’t.

We’d been round to Mrs. Pinches’ house three or four times already and she was getting more and more ratty so, the next time the ball went into her garden, four of us boys climbed over the fence to search for it. The garden had some nice apples and we each scrumped one. She recognised one of us (Alf Whitcombe) and reported him to Mr. Lowe, who immediately knew who Alf’s partners in crime were as we always hung around together. We each received whacks on our hands from the cane.

Tommy Payne was always in trouble. If caning had to be done, only Percy Ferriday (who was assistant head master) or Cecil Lowe were allowed to administer punishment. Percy could only cane pupils in his own class; Mr. Lowe did the rest, usually on the backside. There weren’t any special schools for children like Tommy in those days, so the teachers had to do the best they could.

Not everyone at the school had a uniform because most couldn’t afford one. Cecil Lowe introduced a scheme in about 1924 whereby parents could pay a few pence whenever they could afford to so that they could eventually buy a cap or black blazer with a yellow badge.

Percy Ferriday got hold of some old football jerseys which were also black and gold, so those were our colours at football matches. We even won the local schools trophy (which included teams from Lawley, Dawley and Hadley) and the County Shield (the final was played at Shrewsbury) during my last years at the school, around 1928.

I can’t say I enjoyed every subject, but I really did enjoy my days at school. I was sorry when I had to leave. I would have liked to go to the High School in King Street but my parents couldn’t afford the fees and scholarships were very limited.

Leslie Frost, born 1913. Lived at Noah Frost’s Bakery, New Street.

Although Cecil Lowe was held in high regard, there was one occasion when he completely lost control while caning a lad called Cornish. The whacks began in the normal way, but then Mr. Lowe seemed to lose control and thrashed this boy so hard the whole class was frightened. It’s an image I’ll never forget.

Mr. Lowe was very strict, yet respected. Except when he lost his temper. Punishment was an accepted fact of school life if discipline was to be enforced, but not to the point of excess, or where the exercise of power becomes an unjustified obsession or pleasure. Respect should not have to be gained through fear.

Mental arithmetic was one of the school’s strong points. We were like little computers, coming up with answers without having to think. The whole class chanted the times tables until it became second nature. The same applied to poems and speeches from plays.
Mary Frost, born Griffiths, 1914. Lived at 19 High Street.

My education was interrupted in 1926 when I went to live in Canada for a year, but I returned to Constitution Hill (‘The Bank’) school immediately upon my return in January 1927. I first attended the Infants section on 12 April 1920. In the corner of the room was a doll’s house which the children were allowed to open and touch the miniature furniture as a treat on Friday afternoons.

My favourite teacher was Miss Brewster, who married Hubert Reese, a furniture maker whose workshop was in Tan Bank. There were two Miss Purcells at the school: the younger one was in charge of the Infants section. It’s very likely that I and my future husband Leslie Frost were in the same class but children tended to play with their own sex at break times.

Discipline at the school was quite severe and the cane was dreaded by everyone; headmaster Cecil Lowe was not slow to mete out punishment. My only experience of the cane came when I was spotted sucking a sweet during a lesson. Another punishment for the whole class to suffer was sitting with hands on heads in silence for a period of time.

Much of the teaching was done by rote, especially arithmetic tables, poems and even speeches from Shakespeare. It was very effective. After the Great War, the history and ideals of the British Empire and its colonies were drummed into pupils. On Empire Day, the school sang patriotic songs and had rather a jolly time. A competition was held one year to see who could write the best essay on the Empire. I won and was given a special medal. I also won a wooden pencil case from Mr. Littlewood during a governors’ visit.

Girls at the school didn’t have uniforms but were expected to wear gym slips. Patches were the order of the day as many children had to make do with secondhand clothes, and wear them until they wore out. The same applied to both girls and boys. Sometimes pupils were unable to attend in bad weather because they didn’t even have shoes. There were many poor families in the town in the 1920s and the school attendance (or ‘truant’) officer, sometimes called the ‘Babby Hunter’, had a difficult time carrying out his job because the practical problems caused by poverty couldn’t be solved by fines and court summonses. Quite a few children wore cheap pumps which were no good in rain or snow, but they had to keep them until the soles wore out or until one of the local charities saw fit to help.

Miss Riley, the (‘Bug Hunter’) nurse, came at intervals to check for nits and head lice (armed with her metal comb and bowl of disinfectant), neither of which differentiate between the children of poor or well-off families. Anyone found infected was given a note to take home to their parents so that remedies could be applied. Bearing in mind that hygiene was unheard of (except in spelling lessons), it’s surprising more people didn’t catch every disease going! Flea bites were common, as were a variety of skin disorders. Turning mattresses over to examine closely for fleas was a regular occurrence.

Children were expected to be punctual and arrive at school before the bell rang, after which we were assembled into lines by class ready to be marched into the main assembly room by the teachers. We had a morning hymn, prayer and a reading from the Bible before going to our separate classes. The door to the school was shut, and woe betide anyone who turned up late! Their names (and times of arrival) were noted in a book to catch habitual offenders. One of the worst offenders was a boy who lived at the bottom of the hill!

Miss Purcell was a great disciplinarian, very strict as a teacher. She wore pointed shoes.
I had the cane once (you didn’t want it twice!) for eating a sweet in class. Nor were you supposed to eat food in the street anywhere in town as it reflected badly on the school. And you never wanted to be caught talking to a boy at school!

We didn’t have school treats but we did put on pageants, where we dressed up. The girls didn’t have Christmas parties, although I remember the boys having one organised by Mr. Lowe; it was held at the Parish church hall.

**Allan Frost**, born 1950. Lived at 74 King Street.

My first experience of national education was at the age of three or four when I attended the nursery school at Hartshill, Oakengates while my mother Mary recovered from a fall downstairs. It was there that my friend Johnny Cooper taught me a few choice swear words (which, after all these years, I now realise I misheard and consequently mispronounced) and Ida Jones, one of the teachers and a great friend of my mother’s, added value to the lesson by introducing me to the enduring taste of carbolic soap. But this is a book about schools in Wellington, so we’ll move swiftly on to my experience of more formal education offered by Constitution Hill school in the mid-1950s.

My mother escorted me to the school gates on my first day; it was a promising routine which failed to repeat itself. We lived near the crossroads where Victoria Avenue and Regent Street meet King Street, so future journeys to the school entailed me being shown across the crossroads (where Roberts’s grocery shop stood on the corner) and then left to my own devices. It was obviously considered a safe journey even though, at that time (long before motorways blighted the landscape), King Street formed part of the main route from the north to the south of England and through traffic could be quite intensive.

The route took me over the railway bridge, after which I turned right into the southern part of Constitution Hill with Sandiford’s motorbike shop on the corner and past an ancient wooden summer house in a garden next door. I was convinced a witch lived in the rickety timber building, so I shot past it as fast as my five-year old legs could carry me. After continuing up the hill to the crossroads, I then turned left into the northern stretch of Constitution Hill and crossed the road into the school, where the imposing red brick building on the right constituted the Infants (or ‘Babies’) section.

The main Junior section ran leftwards down the hill; it was there that school dinners were served. More of that later. The journey home was down Constitution Hill where a lollipop lady saw me safely over King Street where Dooney’s (later Wright’s) grocery shop, which sold sweets, beckoned on the opposite side.

Looking at photographs of the classroom when my parents attended the same Infants section around 1920, not a great deal seemed to have changed in over 35 years, although I don’t remember the doll’s house mentioned by my mother. The classroom ceilings were very high and it was impossible to see through the windows whose sills were halfway up the wall to rule out any possibility of distraction. The walls were festooned with rather ancient pictures, each depicting a letter of the alphabet accompanied by an object or animal whose names began with that letter. The floor comprised hard wearing wooden parquet blocks.
I have several vivid memories of the two years I spent at the school. The first was a temporary obsession with hob-nailed boots. A few boys took great pleasure in crouching down and being dragged along the tarmac playground by two other boys, leaving a trail of highly impressive sparks in their wake. Ordinary leather-soled Clarks shoes just didn’t do the job, it had to be shoes with nails in the soles and heels. It transpired that the boys wearing this must-have, highly desirable footwear were residents at the Vineyard Children’s Home, whose staff believed such shoes would last longer and thus save ratepayers’ money. It never crossed my mind that children at the Home were in some way disadvantaged; all I knew was that I wanted nails in my shoes like them so that I, too, could be dragged along the ground shedding sparks like Dan Dare’s rocket. Not to be outdone, I stealthily borrowed my father’s cobbler’s last and, with a weighty coal hammer, drove a few carpet tacks through the soles. I then discovered the pointy bits stuck out on the inside, which made it impossible to walk let alone be hauled across the playground. I gave up.

Playground games included ‘hopscotch’ (on a grid drawn on the ground with purloined stump of chalk); boys as well as girls took part, although it was predominantly a girls’ game when I went to Wrekin Road school in 1957. Girls tended to play with skipping ropes, often chanting ‘Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper’ for some unknown reason, perhaps a sinister way of familiarising them with basic culinary ingredients. Both sexes played ‘Tick’ (it was more energetic) but boys tended to play various games using marbles, including ‘Toad-in-the-Hole’ (steel ‘bollies’ or ball bearings were prized items and easily outclassed glass marbles) or football with a small stone and goalposts painted decades earlier on a brick wall. French cricket with a short bat and tennis ball was popular during the summer.

Singing nursery rhymes (Three Blind Mice; Ding Dong Bell; Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, etc.) and carols (like Away in a manger) were very popular, but these were overshadowed by sad attempts at making music. The teacher entered different coloured chalk notes on ledger lines drawn on a blackboard. Each colour was supposed to represent an instrument ... nothing too challenging: red for drum, blue for triangle, yellow for tambourine, green for cymbal. The idea was that one teacher played the piano while the other pointed at the notes; if she pointed at a red note, all the children clutching drumsticks beat a single note on their tin drums. If a blue note was indicated, triangles ‘tinged’ away merrily, and so on.

The fun started when we were taught the difference between breves, crotchets and other notes. The notes on the blackboard became confusingly more complex:

‘No, Allan, it’s ta-fa-ti-ti, not ta-da, ta-da! Are you deaf??’

‘No, miss.’

Exasperation soon set in. I’m not deaf, nor am I stupid (despite what many may think), but making that enormous leap between seeing a series of notes on a blackboard and passing that information through a terrified brain with an unjustified expectancy of immediate hand co-ordination was asking for the impossible. The end result was predictable; Miss Baum, the head, decided I would benefit from a minor taste of corporal punishment, so she smacked the side of my leg with a wooden 12-inch ruler. It broke.

Quick thinking suggested this would not be a good time to laugh out loud and my scarlet, terror-stricken face (conjured up ready to accompany a dramatic flow of tears) seemed to do the trick. I love music but have never been able to play a ‘proper’ instrument. I can conduct with an air baton as well as the next man (especially with a full orchestra under my control) but my initial musical experiences must have deterred further pursuit.
Mental arithmetic and spelling were my strengths. I quite enjoyed the learn-by-rote technique whereby the whole class was taught how to count to twenty and then chant their ‘times tables’ (‘one nine is nine, two nines are eighteen, three nines are twenty-seven’, etc.), as well as scribbling answers to mental arithmetic on a wooden-framed slate (whatever happened to them? They were far more eco-friendly than wasting reams of paper, although we did use individual sheets for tests.) and then wiping it clean with a dusty rag ready for the next question.

We also made use of cardboard coins: half crowns, florins, shillings, sixpences, threepenny bits (copper twelve sided, not round ‘silver’ ones), pennies, halfpennies and farthings; farthings stopped being made in 1956 and were withdrawn in 1960, after 677 years in circulation. Ten shilling and one pound notes (let alone fivers and tenners) weren’t supplied, presumably because we weren’t likely to see them very often until adulthood.

Sums often took the form of something useful, like shopping lists, where items (oranges, six for a shilling, and apples at five for 10d) were cunningly devised so that you had to learn how to calculate the cost of, for example, three oranges and one apple to reach a total amount payable. Sums were never presented in an abstract way; numbers were always associated with something specific, like fruit and vegetables, pints and gallons of milk, water or petrol and feet and yards of cloth.

The annual Nativity Play staged shortly before Christmas verged on the surreal. It was one of those rare occasions when parents (usually restricted to mothers only) turned up to simper over their offsprings’ contribution to the school’s version of the greatest story ever told. I can’t have been the only one in the cast to shuffle around the stage nervously, forgetting where I was supposed to stand after completely ignoring directions hissed ever louder with more than a hint of rising frustration and despair by the teacher.

Every child, of course, was expected to take part: I was one of a number of shepherds who must have been more numerous than the Heavenly Host; my authentic Gingham teacloth headgear was held in place with a ring of black garter elastic and the grey serge ex-army blanket ‘gown’ was not only extremely itchy but stank of moth balls. The scene of so many shepherds clutching wooden crooks must have looked more like the vanguard of an ancient army than a bunch of peace-loving farmers keeping a watchful eye on their sheep at night. And even I thought the crown of one of the kings was a tad too large; crowns are supposed to sit on top of the head, not on the shoulders.

I also remember the system of ‘monitors’, where pupils took turns to take responsibility for some aspect of school routine. I was Milk Monitor for a while, which entailed hauling metal crates containing third-of-a-pint bottles of milk for consumption by every child as part of their calorie uncontrolled diet. After everyone had drunk their milk and returned empty bottles to a wire-metal crate, the crates had to be carried outside for Arleston Dairies to collect and replenish next morning.

The Ink Monitor’s job was one fraught with catastrophe. Classrooms were supplied with rigid steel-framed wooden desks, many containing two seats with independent-opening lids (one for each child sharing the desk) and made by Addison’s at their Crown Works in Orleton Lane. The back of each lid (lovingly etched with the initials of present and past pupils as well as the legendary names of certain Wellington Town Football Club players) contained a long groove (for pencils and cheap dip-in-ink pens) and a removable porcelain ink well in the shape of a traditional Welsh woman’s hat.
The Ink Monitor was expected to mix permanent blue-black ink powder with water in a narrow-spouted metal jug and pour the resulting goo into each well after they’d been washed out and dried. Without spilling any or daubing him- or herself. It took no effort at all to see who was the current Ink Monitor, nor to recognise the dried dark pools on the floor, which resembled the aftermath of the battlefield at Agincourt.

Replenishing supplies of ink was one thing. Using the darned stuff with dip-in pens with twisted nibs was an entirely different challenge. We tried to write the alphabet after we’d learned it (again by rote with the whole class chanting ‘A, B, C, D, E’, etc. like a mantra for weeks on end until we (well, most of us) got it right). I can remember writing out whole lines of ‘A’s, then ‘B’s and so on in capitals, first with a pencil and then with ink, then repeating the exercise in lower case letters, with particular attention being paid to the height of certain letters. For example, the downward stroke of letter ‘t’ was always slightly shorter than those of ‘l’s and ‘h’s. Finally, with a great sense of achievement, we were taught how to write our names and addresses using a combination of both capitals and small letters, although not always in the right places.

We then progressed to writing whole words, I suspect solely to satisfy the teacher’s cruel streak, in spelling tests, although it could have been a way of teaching the rudiments of grammar and spelling rules (‘i’ before ‘e’, except after c, etc.).

As for spelling ... well, my family were all avid readers (even if my father was addicted to Zane Grey cowboy books borrowed from the library every week); I loved reading cartoon-style Minnie Mouse stories until I progressed to Noddy, Toby Twirl and children’s abridged versions of classics like Pinocchio. At school, colourful books eased us on our literary way. *The Little Red Lorry* was one, which seemed to spend its sad life going up and down a hill. (That same old lorry was still chugging up and down the same blasted hill

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*Class 2 at Constitution Hill school, some time before the 1920s.*
when my children learned to read two decades later.) I also seem to recall learning from the ‘Vanguard’ series of text books, whatever they were.

I’ve never really liked school dinners. They were a relatively new phenomenon in post-war England, designed to give each and every child at least one nutritious meal a day. Goodness knows who determined what ‘nutritious’ meant in practical terms. Semolina pudding wasn’t too bad when mixed with a generous dollop of raspberry jam, but rice pudding and Frog’s Spawn (sago) were definitely acquired tastes.

The heady scent of stewed cabbage seemed to accompany every meal, even if it wasn’t on the menu. Carrots were either boiled to a pulp or so hard they could have honed knives, whereas sprouts made wonderful projectiles using forks in the style of Medieval catapults. Drink was supplied in the form of water poured from grey aluminium jugs into Duralex Made In France glass tumblers.

One aspect of school meals has haunted me for some 50 years. I was never particularly fond of meat in any form, although I seem to remember liking luncheon meat before I went to Constitution Hill school. However, I was once served a greying ball of knotted string with chunks of grey gristle and white fat clinging to its threads. It turned out to be meat. At least, that’s what they said it was. And it was good for me. Despite my objections and persistent pleas to let me leave it on the plate, the teacher stood over me while I chewed my way through each revolting knot. I was violently sick and have never eaten meat since.

It came as something of a relief when my parents told me I’d been given a place at Wrekin Road Junior school. I couldn’t wait to leave as I didn’t relish the prospect of joining the bullies in the Junior (sometimes called the ‘Senior’) section at Constitution Hill. They probably weren’t bullies at all, merely over-energetic Big Boys who played rough, but that was how they seemed to me. On reflection, I have to admit I enjoyed most of my time at Constitution Hill, despite a few far-reaching hiccups.

In fact, I would even admit to enjoying all my years at Wellington’s schools.

Some twenty years before my time at Constitution Hill, in March 1936, a devastating natural phenomenon caused the death of an 11 year old boy. A tremendous storm developed at midday and a lightning flash struck the caretaker’s house occupied by the Stokes family in the centre of the Junior school building. Masonry was thrown into the playground as well as collapsing into the building itself.

Two classrooms were affected; children were hit by flying debris and glass. Everyone escaped with minor injuries except Dennis Crane, whose parents kept the Oddfellows Arms public house in High Street.

Fortunately for the survivors, their music master had moved them away from the windows to be nearer the piano, leaving two or three rows of desks empty. It was there that most of an interior wall fell. Casualties could have been much higher.

Coincidentally, Cecil Lowe was discussing electricity with his own class when the lightning struck.
Chapter 4

Orleton Lane Infants

Paul Evans, born 1952. Lived at 44 Roseway.

My bus stop to the infant school in Orleton Lane was on Holyhead Road. Maybe I travelled that route once, perhaps every day, I don’t remember. What I do remember is a grass snake in a jar of formalin in a store room. And a short flight of wide stairs and waiting there for a slap with a wooden ruler. And gang warfare in the playground like the collision of differently coloured squares. And the smell of Crayola for colouring-in squares. And the scar I gave to the face of a boy, the same scar seen on a man many years later. And going to hospital to have tonsils out. And a nativity play, a party, the magical wheels of Dairylea boxes, the quiet hymnal of mown grass and wide windows and the alphabetical life lived in small round shoes. Just across from the Infants is the Secondary Modern and, between the schools, a ravine of years which I cross, understanding by now the nature of knowledge: coiled and coiled, the snake in a jar.

Orleton Lane Infants class with teacher Ethel Payne, 1959. Miss Pye was head teacher at the time.

I started at Orleton Lane Infants’ School in Wellington in September 1954, just before I was 5, and left 2 years later in July 1956. My memories of that time are rather vague but there are a few things that stick in my mind.

I remember that my first teacher was called Miss Johnson: she had dark hair and was quite young. I was a little over-awed when I first started and was impressed that some children in the class could recite the alphabet, which was still a mystery to me. One of the first things we learnt was how to write our names: Miss Johnson used to print our names on cards (pink for girls, blue for boys) and give us tracing paper so that we could trace over our names.

I seem to remember that our little desks were arranged in small groups of about 8 children. We used to have coloured counters to help us with arithmetic. I can recall working through a book of sums, and being baffled when I turned over the page and came to some sums with the division sign: we had only been taught to add and take away! However, one of the boys in my group told me that I just had to join up the dots and then add the numbers!

At the end of the day we would have ‘story-time’, when we used to arrange our chairs in a circle while Miss Johnson read to us.

I don’t remember anyone having to be punished for being naughty. However, if we started to get a little noisy, we would all be told to put our hands on our heads and we would have to remain like that in silence for a minute or two.

My second and last teacher was Miss Briscoe. She had transferred from the Wrekin Road school where she had taught my brothers. She seemed very old to me and in fact must have been in her fifties. She was over 100 years old when she died only last year. She was fairly strict, but kind.

In those days, parents had to leave their children at the gates when they brought them to school. In fact, most children made their own way to and from school: I think my mother only took me there on the first day; after that I went with my friend who lived across the road.

I cannot remember a great deal about playtimes, probably because I was a very fussy eater and insisted on going home for my lunch! However, one of the games I remember playing is ‘The Farmer’s in his Den’, which was great fun. I also remember that there was some climbing equipment and a paddling pool. The girls were not allowed in the pool unless they wore a bathing-cap as well as a bathing costume.

I don’t remember any bullying at the school although one time a boy put a worm on my head to try to scare me. However, I happened to be very fond of worms at the time and calmly removed the worm from my hair, giving the boy a look of disdain!

Another memory I have of the school is somebody bringing in the council heraldic shield for the class to draw. Although not particularly artistic, I happened to be quite good at copying and so won the girls’ prize (there was also a prize for the best effort by the boys). I cannot remember what I won, though!

Although I cannot remember a great deal about my time there, what memories I have of Orleton Lane Infants’ School are quite fond ones.
The author, left, wearing the red ribbon of Clive house, leaps with balletic grace over a hurdle during Park Junior school Sports Day, 1959. Note the buildings at the rear right; they belonged to The Vineyard which was still a working farm at the time; its main building acted as The Vineyard Childrens Home. The school and the whole of the North Road housing development was built on farm and park land, much of which had belonged to the Dothill estate. Hence the name of the school.

Chapter 5

Park Junior

Allan Frost

My first day at Park Junior school in North Road was an eye-opener. For a start, my mother ushered me out of the house to make my own way there along King Street, into Whitchurch Road, then down Meyrick Road and Parklands before turning left into North Road. It was a long distance but I must have been sufficiently aware of the town’s geography and sensible enough to cross never-busy roads on my own for her not to have accompanied me on the customary First Day journey.

Then, astonishingly, the whole school building seemed so light compared with Wrekin Road and Constitution Hill. Until that moment, I’d been convinced that all schools were former prisons with high windows. But this school was brand new, having been opened three or four years earlier to accommodate offspring arriving, somewhat inevitably, during the Post-War Baby Boom. Everything seemed so clean and the window sills so low you could actually see through them while seated at your desk.

The desks themselves were, in effect, tables: four legs and a flat surface, unlike the flip-top ones I’d got used to. Two tables were pushed together to make a hexagon shared with other children to encourage them to work together (in theory). (None of the tables had been lovingly etched with initials or slogans, they were that new.) Furthermore, instead of teachers always standing at the front of each class near the blackboard, they tended to wander around the desks, occasionally clipping someone round the ear if they weren’t paying attention. Another remarkable feature was that the school had lawns at the front and two large playing fields at the rear. I didn’t think anything so colourful as grass was allowed anywhere near a school in case it distracted the pupils. The tarmac playground, marked with netball pitches for the girls, was to one side at the front of the school grounds.

The usual third-of-a-pint milk was handed out during the morning (by this time I avoided it like the plague as I’d been put off by one which had turned sour) and most pupils had school meals; only a few bought sandwiches or went home for lunch at this time. Park Junior had its own modern kitchens, supervised by school cook Mrs. Pinner and a small army of helpers. I have a feeling the strong smell of cabbage was strangely absent for many of the meals but beyond that I have no strong recollections (except that beans and chips appeared on menu for the first time), so they can’t have been too bad. As before, Duralex (still Made In France) seemed to have cornered the market in drinking glasses and, despite repeated requests, many of us continued to flavour jug-borne water with fizzy sherbets, much to the annoyance of the dinner ladies who afterwards had to scour out solidified sugar deposits.
The nit nurse continued to appear at intervals but this was also the time of the dreaded Polio Jab. We were all very aware that polio was a disease which could kill or result in severe physical problems; in fact, one of the children in the school had contracted it and inspired us with his determination to overcome practical difficulties with movement. Knowing the dangers is one thing, but finding yourself in a long queue, rolling up your shirt sleeve, watching faces draining rapidly of all colour and wondering who would be next to go weak at the knees and faint, gracefully, to the floor, was something else.

Although the learning set-up was rather less formal than I was used to and discipline a little less rigid, children knew from past experience where tolerance boundaries lay. Punishments seemed less frequent than I had witnessed hitherto, although headmaster Ralph Brookes could be persuaded to mete out moderate amounts of ‘plimsol punishment’ if certain criteria were met. More of that anon. I was taken aback, however, by the use of sarcasm as a means of rebuke by the male teachers; it struck me as a weakness in their own characters if they felt the need to resort to sarcasm (most of which was lost on the victim anyway) to prove their own intellectual superiority.

The fact that we were obliged to wear a school uniform came as another surprise. Boys were expected to wear grey socks, short grey trousers, a grey shirt with white and green tie, and a blazer complete with a ‘PJS’ embroidered badge on the breast pocket. Most conformed to this standard but a few mothers insisted their male offspring wore white shirts (presumably they were sponsored by OMO, TIDE or OXYDOL), which was asking for trouble. I honestly cannot remember what the girls were supposed to wear, although blue and white Gingham skirts ring a bell.

I was very conscious from early on that some teachers seemed to favour certain children more than others. With hindsight, I feel they were the children of town officials, businessmen, farmers and wealthier families. I can remember mixed emotions at the time; it seemed terribly unfair to me that the attention paid to educating children from poorer neighbourhoods, such as the Council estate behind the gas works, was not so willingly given as it was to the better dressed pupils.

In an effort to dispel such myths, the school renamed the three classes per intake year to, for example, Form 4, Form 4A and Form 4α (‘alpha’) instead of 4A, 4B and 4C, to appease parental concerns. It didn’t convince anyone. Form 4 was still the A stream, 4A the B stream and Form 4α the C stream. And we were educated accordingly. A stream children were expected to pass the 11+ examination and proceed to the High or Grammar school; the B stream stood a reasonable chance whereas the C stream were most likely destined for the Secondary Modern school. The A stream was also favoured with providing the most prefects and sub-prefects in the hope they would gain more experience in taking responsibility; in practice, it usually meant they were dogboats the teacher could trust a little more than the other children. Whether by fluke (probably) or natural ability (doubtful), I found myself in the A stream. Presumably some sort of assessment had been done while at the Wrekin Road annex to determine which children went into whichever stream, but once allocated it was unlikely you would move.

Everyone wore black pumps while inside the school buildings. As in earlier schools, we weren’t supposed to run anywhere indoors, just walk smartly. Most lessons, with the exception of Physical Education and occasional special projects, were held in the same classroom. One of the projects, in 1960, was an appreciation of English history and folklore.
wherein each class dressed up in whatever costumes their long-suffering parents could put together to construct a pageant and the teachers created minimalist scenery with the help of their pupils. My class produced a scene celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Restoration, which included us dressing up as Cavaliers and Roundheads. Another class realised the legend of St. George and the Dragon.

I continued to be passably good at maths and English, particularly the latter. Like many of my peers, Enid Blyton’s books (Famous Five, Secret Seven and her ‘Adventure’ series) were high on my favourites list (although Miss Knowles, an elderly retired teacher who visited occasionally to read stories out loud to the class, disliked them because the authoress was too fond of using the word ‘got’).

Writing presented new challenges. We no longer used dip-in pens, we were expected to use proper fountain pens when not using pencils. In fact, Osmiroid sponsored a ‘neat writing’ competition using their pens one year, most probably to boost sales, but some of us used Platignum pens with either a lever or syringe-type filling mechanism (cartridges were still quite rare at this time and disproportionately expensive). We were expected to supply our own bottles of Quink or Stephens ink in a choice of permanent blue/black or royal blue (black was frowned upon and washable ink was for softies). Filling pens became a new art, especially if stained fingers, desks and floor were to be avoided; we were scared to damage pristine wooden surfaces. Blotting paper invariably came to the rescue. After considerable time spent practising, we made the giant leap to accomplish joined-up writing, a sure sign we were growing up.

The downside of being able to read and write with a modicum of ability was that English lessons shifted towards placing strong emphasis on ‘parsing’ sentences while concentrating on grammar and punctuation. I’m sure the concepts of verbs, adverbs, nouns and pronouns, definite and indefinite articles, genitives and ablatives and so on were devised by someone nursing a grudge against children, but have since come to appreciate they are essential building blocks upon which all forms of effective written communication depend. It annoys me that such an essential aspect of education has been allowed to deteriorate so much in recent years. But I digress.

We covered a wide range of topics in addition to maths and English; history and geography became two of my favourites. We were also introduced to more practical subjects where manual dexterity and a steady hand played an important part. Unfortunately, those aspects of human development came late to me. My woven raffia place mat was received with unconvincing enthusiasm by my excessively overjoyed mother, and my father never had the opportunity to make use of the lovingly-crafted Gloy-glued cardboard wallet (it fell apart within minutes), but my glitter-littered Christmas cards left a longer-lasting impression by brightening up the carpet in our living room for weeks, strongly resisting repeated applications of suction from the vacuum cleaner which had been purchased thoughtfully by my father from a door-to-door salesman to ease my mother’s domestic workload. (‘You should never have let him in!’ was her initial comment, but dad could never resist a new gadget. Besides, the old cleaner made a good sledge for sliding down the stairs.)

Art lessons were great fun. These entailed mixing powdered poster paint with water to produce a workable paste which was then applied to absorbent cartridge paper held with Bulldog clips to a wooden easel complete with a tray for holding brushes and jars of filthy
water. All of the stiff brushes had seen better days. Not surprising, then, that my artistic efforts displayed that same innocent naivety as those of comedian Tony Hancock in the film *The Rebel*. One of the most interesting discoveries I made was that mixing every available colour resulted in something identical to a fresh cow pat which, if the paints had been watered down incorrectly, had exactly the same consistency.

Physical education was also fun. Wherever would we have been without bean bags, rubber quoits and hula hoops, skipping ropes, coarse coconut fibre mats and long wooden benches? You could do so much with them, limited only by a teacher's imagination and sadistic streak. As at Constitution Hill, every child was placed in one of four houses and wore a sort of cotton ribbon-like band in our house's colour whenever inter-house games took place: Clive (red), Hunt, Stretton and Webb. Points were not only awarded for sporting successes, they were also given via a coloured star system whereby every child in each class had their name on a chart and gold, silver, red and other coloured gummed stars were affixed according to the degree of success achieved, for example, by a good piece of work. The house with the most points won the annual trophy.

The annual sports day was an event not to be missed. Sadly, many parents did but it was probably for the best. Certificates (tangible proof of how individual competition was constantly encouraged throughout school life) were awarded to those who did particularly well. Sports days were very well organised, with field and track events taking place concurrently to save time and keep the busy schedule rolling along. Fun events (like Egg-and-Spoon, Sack, Three-Legged and Slow Bicycle races) were highly amusing to onlookers, whereas track events (80-yard sprint, hurdles and relay) generated the most excitement. The High Jump, Long Jump, Discus and Javelin competitions took place away from the general crowd to minimise casualties. A group of ‘better’ athletes also took part in a mini-Olympics held at Much Wenlock as part of the Wrekin Area Schools Sports programme.

Outdoor games periods took place whatever the weather during one afternoon each week. Football, with an overweight leather ball and impenetrable bladder, gradually gained additional weight and lethal qualities during wet weather. No one dared head it in case they were carried off, unconscious, to the Cottage or Wrekin Hospital. Some bright spark of a teacher even introduced us to a rugby ball, with the result that members of the two teams spent more time crashing into one another trying to catch the ball as it bounced with predictable irregularity in all directions. Cricket was slightly safer unless, like me at the time, you had a ‘lazy’ eye, which made it difficult to focus properly when gauging the direction and speed of the ball. (A patch over one lens of my glasses and frequent visits to the Eye, Ear and Throat hospital at Shrewsbury eventually corrected my vision.) I’m sure my inability to perform at all well came as a great disappointment to Mr. Machin, who played for Wellington Cricket Club at the time.

Girls, clad conventionally in navy blue knickers and white vests, played netball and rounders. How their tops ever managed to stay white after a game I’ll never know, nor why boys’ tee-shirts invariably got filthy before a game began. ‘Music and Movement’ was pursued in P.E., although with a more artistic approach than at Wrekin Road, perhaps due to improving limb and brain co-ordination. I remember taking part in a local competition held at a school in Trench. Our entry was something to do with good and bad witches (played by girls) and demons (self-conscious group of boys) dancing (or prancing) around a pretend fire to the music of *Mars, the Bringer of War* from Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*. 
Music lessons took the form of communal singing while a teacher played the piano or gifted girls played recorders. Among the popular favourites were *The Ash Grove; Bobby Shafto; Soldier, Soldier, Won’t you marry me?* and another about a cross-eyed cook who had ‘One eye on the pot, the other up the chimney’. We were also expected to memorise poems and even compose our own. I was remarkably useless at both but some folk were able to recite a series of long verses without difficulty.

Playtimes were fun, normally comprising fifteen minutes’ break in the morning and afternoon, plus lunch time. Both boys and girls tended to play the same games as they had at previous schools (hopscotch, skipping, catching a tennis ball, tick, etc.) but with more proficiency as co-ordination improved with age (except for me; I’ve always had butter fingers). An innovation to me was ‘chain tick’, whereby one person was ‘it’ until they ticked someone. They then held hands, chasing everyone around the playground until they ticked someone else, who also joined hands with them. And so on, until a long chain of children cornered the last person. A variation of this was to restrict hand-holding to two or three people, so the playground was full of mini-chains chasing individuals who’d managed to avoid capture so far.

Occasionally (between the game being banned from time to time for its roughness), boys played British Bulldog, which followed the same idea as tick but, instead of ticking someone, ‘it’ had to lift the victim off the ground. Having done so, two ‘its’ ran around trying to lift someone else, either working individually or as a team. This continued until one person faced the prospect of running across the playground, blocked by thirty or so mean and determined faces.

The new St. Patrick’s Catholic school lay directly opposite Park Junior on the other side of North Road. On bad days, kids from each school would trade insults; on good days (weather permitting) we’d throw bald tennis balls over our respective fences and across the road while keeping a watchful eye out for members of staff who seemed more concerned with potential injuries to unwary passers-by and damage to the lawn than anything else.

Playtime during the summer weeks had an added attraction: Kiss Chase. It had simple rules. Boys took it in turns to chase after the girls and, having caught one, kiss her. Then the girls chased the boys until they returned the favour. I remember one incident when I was (gently) slippered by headmaster Ralph Brookes for being seen grabbing Laurel Cook’s long hair to bring her to a halt; thereafter we played out of sight of the classrooms. Several aspects of this pastime have always intrigued me. One was that the girls seemed to hunt like a pack of ravenous wolves determined to devour their prey; boys, poor things, enjoyed the thrill of the chase slightly more than the actual catch. Furthermore, why did girls suddenly go lame when it was their turn to be chased? And why was it that the girls executed so many different types of kiss? They varied enormously: soft lips, hard lips, dry lips and soggy lips (which risked acting like suction pads if they came anywhere near a flat surface) ... and various combinations. There was so much variety! It was an area I resolved to explore in some depth when I reached my teens ...

The 11 Plus exams took place at the Boys Grammar and Girls High schools, depending on your gender. Both were full of BIG teenagers. I desperately wanted to go to the Grammar school because my brother David was School Captain and I hoped he’d give me some protection, in my first year at least. In the event, I didn’t pass first time (apparently I’d been entered a year early) but I did on my second attempt, by which time my brother
had gone to Cambridge university. Nevertheless, I arrived at the school gates with two ambitions; the first was to become School Captain like him (I did: sadly, the headmaster had to choose the lesser of many evils) and get more ‘O’ level GCEs than him (I did; how I managed it still remains a mystery. Perhaps the examination system was flawed.).

Coming back to the 11 Plus: in Form 4 we were drilled in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests, yet not taught how to reach answers using logic, which I still think missed the point somewhat. I’m sure more children could have passed if a little more explanation had been given rather than trusting to dumb luck. We were made very aware that The Rest Of Our Lives Depended On Passing, it was such an important exam.

But the pressure to pass, exerted unreasonably by both parents and teachers, proved too much for some of my friends. Whether they just weren’t up to it or fell apart when presented with these all-important papers, I don’t know. But I do know it distressed me to see abject disappointment in their eyes when presented with negative results. Tears were plentiful; how on earth would their parents (or, more specifically, their fathers) react? The classroom was filled with a heap of mixed emotions.

We awaited the next stage in our educational journey with an odd mixture of elation, hope, anxiety ... and trepidation.
Chapter 6

Prince’s Street Infants and Junior

Naomi Evans, born Hurdley, 1928. Lived at Crystal House, Holyhead Road.

When I was five I started at Prince’s Street School. An only child, I lived with my parents at Crystal House, which was part of the ‘Pop’ Works – Wrekin Mineral Water Works – owned by O.D. Murphy, who had lived with his family at The Uplands next door, which seemed a very grand red-brick house surrounded by a wall and high hedge.

It only took a few minutes to walk to school, turning into Prince’s Street and passing the horses in their stables owned by Woodhall’s. I can still smell those horses and the laundry chimney, which was nearby.

On my first day I told my teacher that I didn’t think I would stay at school. ‘We’re going to thread beads,’ she said. ‘All right, I’ll stay,’ I said – and I did.

I learned my tables thoroughly and recited every day for Miss Freda Jones, the head-mistress ‘E–R’ says ‘er’ and ‘O–R’ says ‘or’. I also played the xylophone in the percussion band conducted with great enthusiasm by Miss Jones.

I moved into the junior school, class two, and from there into class five. Mr. T. Cliff Buttrey was the tall, rather frightening headmaster who was very successful in getting children past the scholarship and into the High Schools. On the morning I learned I had passed Mr. Buttrey let me go home and tell my mother. I moved on to the Girls’ High School and at sixteen I took a commercial course at Shrewsbury Technical College.

During the War several young lady teachers came to Prince’s Street and Mr. Buttrey asked my mother if she could ‘look after’ them, so they lived with us and several of my mother’s friends in Rose Grove and Roseway.

We also had evacuees for a short time and two girls from Holly Lodge High School, which was evacuated to Wellington.

Some years later I married my husband George who, after his Army service, trained to be a teacher. He started at Dawley National School in 1950 and eventually moved to – why, Prince’s Street of course! I went to the school regularly but this time as a teacher’s wife and Mr. Buttrey was still the headmaster – it was very strange.

Eventually Prince’s Street closed after having only three headmasters in a century – ‘Jimmy’ Fance, Charles ‘Smock ’em’ Smith and T. Cliff Buttrey.

Ercall Junior School was built at Arleston and Mr. MacGowan, deputy head at Prince’s Street, became head of Ercall Junior. Some years earlier Barn Farm Infants school had been
built and I can still see Miss Freda Jones standing so proudly in her new school and saying, ‘Isn’t it lovely!’

How different the Prince’s Street area is now – the ‘pop’ works long ago demolished together with the stables and the laundry. But the old school building remains as the Belfry Theatre. I wonder if, when all is quiet, anyone hears the clatter of children’s footsteps and the faint chanting from the infants’ school?

David Frost, born 1943. Lived at 74 King Street.

I attended the Infants section for a little under two years. According to my mother, I once followed my sister Margaret (who was then in the Junior section) one morning as I was so anxious to attend. I was only about three years old at the time. I arrived there in my pinafore (acceptable attire for little boys at the time) and was promptly taken back home where I waited a couple of years until I was old enough.

I remember there being two separate buildings, one for the Infants, the other for Juniors. Miss Jones taught us simple arithmetic. I remember one occasion in which I stood next to her as she sat on a low chair. She read from a card that contained a list of numbers which added up to 10: viz. 1 + 9 = 10, 2 + 8 = 10, etc. She read out loud, pointing to each number as it was named. I watched and listened. This process seemed to go on for a very long time, at the end of which I felt quite dizzy. Playground games, as elsewhere, included hopscotch and skipping.

I also remember one wet morning when I started off for school without my (detested) green gabardine raincoat. My aunt Elsie (Price) came to our house every Monday morning to do her weekly washing with our family’s. She tore after me clutching the raincoat and caught up with me about 80 yards up the road. I struggled to resist and, during the struggle, she accidentally stepped into a turbulent flow of water shooting out of a broken drainpipe. She got soaked and angry. I was so aghast that I let her put the coat on me.

I left Prince’s Street for Constitution Hill Juniors. I have vague memories that this was partway through a term and rather sudden – perhaps owing to a Local Education Authority directive to adjust catchment areas to ease overcrowding.

I remember being given a work card and some coloured wooden rods (like short sticks) to solve addition/subtraction problems. I recall getting frustrated and upset because there were fewer rods than the size of the numbers on the work card. How could I subtract, for example, 12 from 37 when I only had 10 rods? In retrospect, I can only assume that I was supposed to deal with the units and then the tens, or else to make use of the different colours (and sizes?) of the rods. However, I was given no instructions or help.

I now assume that, as a ‘late-comer’, I had missed out on some vital teaching that the rest of the class had received. From memory, the boys’ playground was long and narrow, next to the low wall that overlooked the road which went up Constitution Hill.

My parents weren’t happy with the teaching methods, my lack of progress and the effect it was having on me. They managed, after just a few weeks, to get me a place at Wrekin Road Juniors.
Beryl Parker
I remember my first introduction to Prince's Street School quite clearly. We all had to assemble in the playground with our parents and wait for a teacher's name to be called out, then we waited for our name to be called and we had to line up behind the teacher. Very quickly we were led away from our mum and into our classroom. My teacher was called Miss Davies.

Prince's Street was an old building in sort of an 'L' shape. It was strictly girls in one playground and boys in the other, with a metal fence between the two – although there was a gap at each end. The girls entered from Prince's Street and the boys from School Lane. The toilets were outside and didn't smell very nice.

The rain came in through the roof. There was a long corridor off which were some of the classrooms. In this corridor was also Mr. Buttrey's office. He was the head teacher. At the opposite end was a shelf and this held the commended and detention lists. If you did good work, you were rewarded with cards: single, double or triple commended. I'm not sure what happened if you had a detention list – thank goodness!

Another set of classrooms was across the playground and there was a woodwork room too which doubled as a classroom. In the girls playground was an old air raid shelter I think. It went along the back wall of the school. It was split into two. The one end held the P.E. equipment and the other was the tiniest, narrowest, most claustrophobic area you could imagine. We often had a lesson in there. Whoever went in first was furthest away from the door which was not a nice feeling. It had one long table and chairs each side. I don't think it was used too often.

There was a lovely garden in the school grounds. We were allowed in there only with a teacher. We didn't tend to change classrooms for lessons. Our class teacher taught us each subject. We changed teachers each school year.

I remember maths lessons with Mr. George Evans in the playground. Calculating how many bricks were in a wall by timesing the number of bricks in the length by the number in the height. Also trying to work out the height of the laundry chimney. We had trundle wheel too which calculated the length and width of the playground. Mr. Evans also took us on walks up the Wrekin and also got us interested in reading and when I was in his class, he enrolled us all in the Lone Pine Club which was run by author Malcolm Saville.

Friday afternoons were for leisure and we enrolled in clubs at the beginning of the term and a list was put up in the playground stating which club you were in. You had a first, second and third choice. If you were lucky you got your first choice.

I can remember county dancing, sewing, gardening, art, P.E., nature and look-out club but I'm sure there were more. The nature club often went up Limekiln Lane with jam-jars on strings to see what was in the stream that ran along side the lane.

I lived near to school so I was lucky to go home for dinner, which broke the day nicely. Those children who stayed for dinners had to walk in a ('crocodile') line down New Church Road and High Street to the school canteen, which was in New Hall Road, near Austin's paper shop. I suppose a member of staff went with them, although I'm not sure.

I remember we were taken to stand on Roseway once, as part of a road safety campaign. We were taught how to cross the road safely and how to sit safely in a car. This was demonstrated by a Police car which had a child-size dummy in it. As the car went past, someone opened the door from the inside and the dummy fell into the road. I also took part in the
Cycling Proficiency training at Park Junior School on Sunday mornings and taking the test as we rode around the streets of Wellington. I was pleased that I passed with 99%.

Some of the teachers I remember were Mr. Buttrey (head teacher), Mr. MacGowan (deputy head), Mr Raxster, Miss Davies, Miss Smallman, Mr. Hookway, Mrs Buttrey and Miss Bradford. Some of these teachers went on to teach at Ercall Junior School, built to replace Prince’s Street, which had had a very long life: 1858 until 1970. I left Prince’s Street school in 1961.

LOOKOUT CLUB
Friday Fun in the Fifties

George Evans, born 1923. Lived at 49 High Street. Seen in 1934 as a 3rd Wellington Troop boy scout. Nowadays, most children in junior schools enjoy school; it’s fun. But they’ll tell you they don’t think it was anything like so enjoyable in the ‘old days’ because of punishment and strict teachers. So here’s a little story about having fun at Prince’s Street School in the 1950s and 1960s.

WE HAD FRIDAY CLUBS – all Friday afternoon – chosen by the children themselves. Cliff Buttrey, the Headmaster, was very progressive and ran a lively school full of good ideas; this was one of his best. There was a wide range of activities to choose from - art, music, soccer, cricket, rounders, netball, chess and my own group called Lookout Club, which I will write about. Usually we went for a walk, often in the woods. I enjoyed it and I’m still being told the children did too. Certainly they kept voting for it.

ON MANY FRIDAYS we went up The Ercall along the ridge to a place we named Lookout Point. Here you get a clear view across the golf course to Limekiln Wood, Maddocks Hill and the houses and fields beyond. I apologise for the destruction of the undergrowth, heather and bilberry, caused by our feet. Some of the club later brought girlfriends, then wives and children. They bring their grandchildren now.

WE NAMED SOME OF THE TREES – the Lazy Oak is still leaning on its neighbour, the Climbing Trees are constantly tempting youngsters to shin up them and the Spider Tree hangs over a quarry. The Blasted Oak, struck by lightning, is somewhere under the motorway. The Pani (water) Tree always had water in a crack and still had this morning.

THE LIMEKILN WOODS were also popular. Here we hunted fossils (‘You’re standing on a million tons of fossils’) and found crinoids, graptolites and many shells. We also dipped the pools with homemade nets, made of wire, sticks and nylon stockings. We caught tadpoles, minnows, water beetles, water boatmen, pond skaters and water plants. Falling in was not allowed! Here also were orchids, bluebells, garlic, anemones, and vetch.

HAZARDS were all over the place, starting with a busy road to cross with 30 to 35 children. Then there were the quarries, mines, trees, pools and streams. Regulations now would forbid most of what we did, especially with only one teacher. Apart from one boy who walked into a lamp post, however, we had no accidents. Why? Because I didn’t allow them! Discipline was quite strict and I’m a firm believer in the First Rule of Teaching –
never take your eyes off them. I don’t ever remember having to punish anyone. Risk assessment? What’s that?

IN LOCO PARENTIS was the rule – you treated other people’s children as if they were your own. A very sensible principle. Of course I was careful and planned each visit in detail. I suppose most of the things now ‘laid down’ were done in my head before we went, but it was common sense, not government rules. I did rather worry sometimes about the large numbers. Once I walked the club past my wife without noticing her.

WE LEARNED geography, geology, biology and anything else that popped up. We measured the height of trees using a protractor, a plumb bob and a bit of trigonometry. We observed plant growth, weather and atmosphere, slope angles and rock crystals. We compared a map with the landscape in front of us and used a compass to measure angles. Then we found that geometry was useful to measure distances and checked our answers with the map.

ROAD SAFETY accounted for some of our time. We visited the Midland Red Garage in Queen Street, where Bernard Westwood and Ken Bennett showed us round. Under a bus in the inspection pit was popular, also in the wash. Usually we persuaded the smallest child to lift a six-ton bus – with a hydraulic jack. Ken showed them how to drive a bus and Bernard explained his fascinating collection of tools.

OBSERVING TRAFFIC meant making a traffic count – usually at the Cock Hotel crossroads, which was very busy (before the M54). We made clipboards and recorded pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, cars, vans, lorries and buses on each of the four roads, together with destinations. I recently watched some ‘professionals’ doing a similar job and reflected on the greater efficiency of my juniors. Of course I had 36 assistants, all doing as they were told.

WIDE GAMES, with a lot of hiding and creeping up and British Bulldog, a bit rougher, were occasional features of our walks. Sometimes we competed against John Bailey who also had a similar club. We had competitions to find the greatest number of different flowering grasses. The programme was flexible and constructed on the basis that the children wanted to have fun and I wanted to teach them something.

WHEN IT WAS TOO WET to go out we stayed in and drew, noted, calculated and generally wrote up our outdoors activities. As we had 360 children in a building big enough for 250, it wasn’t easy to find a space and sometimes we had to double up and have 60 to 70 children in a classroom big enough for 30.

LIL’S VALLEY is south of the Ercall, where Lil Pritchard (Corbett) had her caravan. Some club members were terrified of her. ‘Let’s go another way,’ they said, ‘She’ll set the dogs on us’. True to form, Lil rushed out of her caravan followed by dozens of dogs. Her face was like thunder until she realised who it was. ‘Hello, Mr. Evans,’ she said pleasantly, ‘Hello, kiddies’. I looked

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Signed: ..........................
Class: .......
at them sternly and said, ‘Not a word!’ We still call it Lil’s Valley.

**SOME READERS** will remember Lookout Club, with affection I hope. Others will find it difficult to believe that children in the ‘bad old days’ had such a good time. Some will be teachers wondering how I ‘got away with it’ and bemoan the fact that they can’t now. I’m afraid regulations have taken the place of common sense and personal responsibility.

Commendation card certificate (or ‘Sticky Foot’), given to pupils at Prince’s Street school in recognition of good work. Such devices were intended to encourage study and nurture a healthy competitive spirit.

Chapter 7

St. Patrick’s Infants and Junior

Mary Moruzzi, born Manning, 1924. Lived in Watling Street

The school in Mill Bank had two classrooms in one building, with a playground to the front and rear. The old church building next door was in a bad state and unused until it was made safe and secure in later years, after which it was used for additional classrooms.

The Juniors were in one classroom and their teacher, Miss Ward, was short in stature and a firm, kind and very good teacher. She had a strong faith, as well as a very strong voice, and used the ruler on our fingers when needed. During this era, discipline was tough for children. Miss Ward taught there for two generations of Juniors.

The room was heated by a large stove; morning milk was placed near it on cold mornings to warm it up. The windows were high so we could not see outside but the ledges held some interesting things in jars: flowers brought by the children as well as tadpoles and the odd newt.

There was a small porch outside the room which contained a basin and cold water; the Ink Monitor found this very unpleasant at a time when hand washing was not a priority. The toilets were outside, the girls having the furthest to go across the playground, which was a miserable journey on cold, wet winter days. They were grim, but this was not the fault of our cleaner Mrs. Oliver.

Even worse, there was a field at the rear of the school, and every so often there would be the most awful stench when animal parts, bones and skins, were burnt. The smell pervaded the classrooms, making us sick. We had no facilities for sport, except perhaps a football and whistle, and our playtimes were full of imagination. No facilities for music either. The girls were taught simple needlework.

Important days were our first Holy Communion, and Confirmation. We were well coached in behaviour and dress by Miss Ward. Some families were very poor and could not afford to dress their little girls in the expected white dress, but Miss Ward always managed to find one for them. Christmas was a happy time with our nativity play and party, lots of crepe paper and tinsel made into decorations, or a dress, or a crown. The highlight of the summer was our trip, by coach to The Wrekin Hill. We had races in a field by the reservoir, then we walked to the Forest Glen pavilion for tea, served by Mr. and Mrs. Pointon. Cakes were never forgotten. Mr. Sidoli also came to the field with his pony and cart, bringing us ice cream. Then we returned to school by coach to be met by our mums who would be anxious to know how we had enjoyed ourselves.
Mention must be made of our priests at this time. Father Vincent Corcoran came in 1928; a lovely, gentle man who, sadly, suffered from asthma but often came to see us at school. He died in 1934 and was followed by our beloved Father O'Reilly, also a sick man when he arrived in Wellington but stayed for 25 years. He had been seriously wounded during the Great War but in time his health did improve. He, too, visited us often and played a big part in our lives. Some of the children took him around the town for him to find where his parishioners lived, and helped with his garden and did small jobs for him. He showed us great affection, especially when he made great events of Corpus Christi and May processions in honour of Our Lady. In return, we loved him dearly.

The headmistress in charge of the Senior school was Miss Cossentine. Children came to school from a scattered area: Dawley, Hadley, Oakengates, Ketley, etc. We children found Miss Cossentine to be very severe as boys and girls alike received six of the best with a cane, even for trivial things. On one occasion, two brothers, who came by train, were thrashed for an offence and their railway tickets taken from them so they had to walk home that day. On another occasion, we saw two boys react to their punishment by waiting until the other children had gone out to play and used the cane on Miss Cossentine! These poor boys got another dreadful thrashing; the priest was sent for and many parents were unhappy with the event.

We were well taught in our Faith but it was hard learning the Latin hymns, especially as we were not taught their meaning in English. I remember getting the cane for mispronouncing ‘Tantrum Ergo’. Children were expected to attend Mass at 9 a.m. on Sundays; we sat together in the front rows of St. Patrick’s church and Miss Cossentine would be there to keep an eye on us. Woe betide you if you did not behave!

Every so often a gentleman came to give us Science lessons. The girls were taken to Dr. Cranage’s Children’s Gospel Hall in New Hall Road for Domestic Science lessons; the teacher there was Miss Leach. Swimming lessons were given at the town’s old baths.

Some of the children came from very poor homes and many fathers were out of work at this time. Health and cleanliness were checked on a regular visit from Nurse Riley. Head lice were very common but, as doctors had to be paid, the nurse was also able to help with advice. Tuberculosis was quite common.

On a good note, we had a little sweet shop next to the front gates of the school (adjacent to Mr. Freeman’s Green Man public house) where we were able to buy sweets for a farthing. It was very sad to see some of the children begging sweets from those who could afford them, and we did share.

Pupil numbers grew as time passed. When children from Birmingham and Liverpool were evacuated to Wellington during the Second World War, classrooms had to be shared and two additional rooms rented from Constitution Hill school. The parish hall at All Saints church was also ‘borrowed’ for a while.

The new St. Patrick’s school in North Road was opened in 1955, whereupon the old school closed. Accommodation and facilities there were a marked improvement on what earlier generations had had to suffer at Mill Bank. John Dooney recalls there were two classrooms at North Road and Mrs. Anslow was one of the teachers. The premises in Mill Bank, where Mrs. Sankey taught in the early 1960s, was Wellington’s senior school for Catholic education until the opening of the Blessed Robert Johnson college in 1963.
Chapter 8

Wrekin Road Infants and Junior

Mike Greatholder, born 1940. Lived in Haygate Road.

I was nearly five when I first went to Wrekin Road School in 1945, being taken there from our home in Haygate Road, by my mother, who had also attended the school at the start of the 1920s (see photograph inside back cover, bottom).

But the start to my school life was not an auspicious one. Halfway up Wrekin Road I realised that I had forgotten a clean hanky, and we had to show one every morning. Luckily ‘aunt’ Maud Leighton lived near Sidney Speed’s shop, opposite the school, and we dashed round to her back door and she found one for me. It wasn’t until I had to wave it in front of Miss Payne that I realised it was a big lacy one – not the sort a five year-old usually wiped his runny nose on.

Ah, Speed’s shop. What a wonderful site for a sweet emporium! Whenever we could find some spare pocket money we would ‘abseil’ down the school wall (I could never work out why we didn’t go through the gate, possibly because we weren’t allowed to), and gaze into the shop window. My favourite buy was four Oxo cubes for a penny, and a twist of bright orange ‘Kali’ (pronounced ‘kay-lie’) into which I dipped the Oxo cubes. This was then sucked until the beefy bundle had disintegrated. No wonder I sometimes suffer from a dicky tum.

But back to school. My first teacher was Miss Payne, and she was lovely. So gentle and understanding that it was no surprise my early years were very happy ones. Other teachers I can remember were Miss Onions, Miss Knowles, Mr. Reynolds and the headmistress Miss Wase. Mr. W.C. Allen was headmaster of the junior school section and one day Miss Payne told me to take the school register to him. I knocked on his door and a voice boomed out ‘Come!’ Now, I was five or six at the time and knee high to the proverbial grasshopper. He was at least 6ft 6ins tall and to my child’s eyes his head was way up in the clouds. I made my mind up there and then never to do anything to get on the wrong side of ‘Daddy’ Allen.

Going through some of my mother’s possessions when she died a few years ago, I discovered that she had kept my school report for the end of the summer term, 1948. It seems that my literary English was ‘excellent’. I had a reading age of 11.1 years and was able to read any book of junior school standard. My writing was ‘good’ and I had a good vocabulary and spoke fluently and well.
I was a ‘good all round type’: Miss Payne summed up my progress in these words, which I shall have engraved and given to my grandchildren: ‘A careful, diligent worker. Is one of the outstanding boys in his class. Well informed and anxious for more. Give him plenty of informative books. A good leader, shoulders responsibility. Should do well in the future.’ And Miss Wase added at the bottom of the report: ‘Would be glad of more like him.’

There was no mention of my mathematical prowess. Just as well. It was no wonder I made a career out of journalism where the only need for adding up was doing your weekly expenses! One thing that stood me in good stead as a journalist was the end of day spelling test. Starting at the front we had to spell a word and if we got it right we could go home. If we didn’t we had to wait until our turn came round again. Concentrates the mind, does that!

I made some great friends at Wrekin Road, friendships that have stood the test of time. Gilbert Barlow, Roger Lamb, John Davies, Michael Hartland, Brian Treherne, to name but a few. We raced around the playground like whirling dervishes and also played in that hallowed area of the junior school, the top playground, or as we knew it, The Gardens. If my memory serves me correctly there was a big fallen tree that we used to play on, and one of my friends distinguished himself by constantly falling off and breaking most bits of his body that it was possible to break.

We scrumped apples from the orchard next door to the school, which we could reach from the Gardens. One day when the owner complained, Mr. Allen lined us all up in the top playground and asked who had been in the orchard. Nobody volunteered despite the fact that the snake belts on our shorts were holding in our pullovers which were bulging with sour apples. ‘Daddy’ was not amused.
A treat in the height of the summer, and of course it is a well known fact that the sun shone constantly from 1945 until 1951, without a drop of rain, was to have our lessons outside....sitting on the concrete playground on rush mats. Oh, the joy of it!

Then there was playing in the school band. My father was an accomplished musician who played in Sankeys Band for more than 20 years. Unfortunately none of his skill rubbed off on me and counting the notes until it was my turn to hit the triangle was something I never could grasp. I also used to like the Fridays when we were told to bring a tin of furniture polish and a duster to school and polish our desks. The smell of beeswax brings back the memories even to this day.

We had to pay various visits to THE CLINIC at the bottom of Haygate Road and we would set off in a crocodile, hand in hand, and queue to get into the wooden building for whatever was on the agenda. I recall going to see the school dentist when his drill touched a nerve and my leg shot out, completely involuntarily, and caught him just below the belt. Much to the delight of my class mates he was unable to continue, but boy, did I fear going back again next term.

The nit nurse examined us, we had to say 'aaah' when the health visitor looked down our throats (why?), we had injections, inoculations and we came through it all smiling.

The highlight of our mornings was the third of a pint bottle of milk at playtime. In the winter, when the little bottles froze, we had to put them on the radiators to thaw out.

It would be just after the end of the war when Wrekin Road received a food parcel from Canada. I don’t know if it happened regularly, but this box came into our classroom and I received a packet of Demerara sugar to take home. I was most unimpressed.

Talking of food, I will never forget the Christmas parties when we had to take a spoon with us and a contribution towards the eats. I was introduced to brown blancmange, and whether it was made with Demerara sugar or not I don’t know, but I was very sick.

I think this was the party where our class had to recite A Highwayman Came Riding. It was very impressive in the big hall, which was decorated with the streamers we had spent days making from gumming coloured strips of paper together. And don’t forget the lanterns we made from folding coloured sheets of paper and then cutting them with our little scissors. Blue Peter had nothing on us.

Do any other Wrekin Roadians of that era remember the pickled snake that was kept in a jar in the stationery cupboard? I was wary of it every time I was picked to refill the Ink wells. Also in there were boxes of broken crayons, colouring pencils, jars of powder paint, reading books ideal for an eight year old with a reading age of 11.1, and nibs for our pens. I don’t know who the supplier was but he made rotten nibs; they were all crossed, or was it because they were sometimes used in our games of darts when Mr. Reynolds wasn’t looking?

Eventually the time came for the dreaded 11 Plus. Miss Knowles was confident that I would be all right with the English, but it took a lot of cuddling on her ample knees and cajoling to get me up to tackling the sums. But she got me through, and I will always remember the pride of leaning over the wall that day when the letter came, shouting to my friends: ‘Have you passed’?

I think our reward for gaining a place at Wellington Grammar School was an outing to Grinshill and a game of cricket on Acton Reynald’s pitch. Life didn’t get much better. Thank you Wrekin Road School, and all who taught in her.
David Frost

I attended Wrekin Road Juniors for about 3 years. Classroom desks were double-seated with cast iron legs, with tip-up wooden seats. There were two playgrounds – perhaps one for Infants and one for Juniors.

The bottom one was on a slope and access to the top one (where we played) was through a small gap in a wall. The top playground was split into two; the lower part was level with tarmac whereas the higher one comprised rough, uneven ground. The upper part had a fallen tree-trunk in the top right-hand corner which was used for throwing off/wrestling competitions. Boys used to bring toy cars to play with on the dividing wall (between the two parts) that had a curved top.

The boys’ open air toilets were outside, next to and below the level of the playground. Playground games included hopscotch, skipping, football and (when in season) conkers. Fights between boys occurred every now and then, when a hastily-formed circle of spectators surrounded the combatants who were encouraged by calls of ‘Fight! Fight!’.

We referred to male teachers as ‘Daddy’: Daddy Allen, Daddy Rogers and Daddy Bentham. Mr. Bentham came from Market Drayton; his preferred punishment was hitting across the hand with a ruler at the front of the class.

Mr. Rogers gave a useful tip after swimming lessons at Wellington Baths: brush water off your arms, legs and torso with your hands before using a towel to dry yourself. On one of our first visits our swimming abilities were assessed. Those who claimed to be able to swim were lined up along one side of the baths and told to swim across the width and to get out on the opposite side. We thrashed our way across, got out and looked back. One boy was less than halfway across, performing a breast-stroke that was so elegant and gentle that it didn’t cause any ripples … or much forward progress. I remember that those of us on the side thought that this was hilarious, and we cheered (or jeered) him on, almost rolling around with laughter. After he reached the side, and the noise abated, we were admonished and informed that his swimming was far better than ours.

Allan Frost

The main reason I was so keen to attend Wrekin Road Junior in 1957 was that my mother Mary was the school meals supervisor there. From what I remember, her job seemed to entail holding one end of a skipping rope for the girls and generally maintain some sort of order on the playground before blowing her silver chrome ACME whistle for the children to form themselves into lines ready to be marched into the main hall. The hall served the dual purpose of being a dining hall at lunchtime and acting as a classroom during the rest of the day. In fact, it was two classrooms when divided by roll-out wooden doors which could be folded back to the walls.

My mother not only supervised the children as they each grabbed a plate and passed along the serving table (where several dinner ladies ladled out portions of over-cooked vegetables and over-steamed puddings smothered with thick custard) but also made sure nothing which had previously had a face and moved on its own accord was allowed to land
on my plate. This was a major plus point as far as I was concerned, although my co-pupils thought it a little odd that I had no desire to explore the taste of God’s wonderful creatures.

However, my mother’s favours did not extend beyond the dining room. I was treated in exactly the same way as every other child, which meant I could be publicly told off if I transgressed. Even now, exactly 50 years after I attended the school, many people still remember her with fondness and affection. All I can remember was that it seemed a little odd to be sharing my mom’s attentions with a schoolful of other children.

After my first day, I was again expected to find my own way to the school unaccompanied. Whether they realised it or not, our parents were contributing to a healthy lifestyle by not driving us there and back. The fact that we didn’t have a car may have been a deciding factor. Nevertheless, children were expected to walk to and from school, wherever they lived in the town and whatever the weather, and think nothing of it. Furthermore, now that we were at Junior school and therefore ‘big’ boys and girls, we didn’t want to be classed as ‘cissies’ by having our parents accompanying us.

Mr. Fifield acted as head teacher at this time and was very well liked by everyone who taught or learned there. Wrekin Road school was often referred to as the Annex to Park Junior school in North Road. Children attended the Annex for one year before going automatically to Park Junior.

A similar system of Milk and Ink Monitors existed here, although the ink was no longer supplied in powder form but as liquid. It was still blue-black and, as ever, extremely permanent, especially on fingers and clothing. And the simple pens served better as darts than writing implements. I confess I cannot recall much of note happening in the lessons, which must mean a) I didn’t cause any problems and b) I enjoyed learning.

On the other hand, my innate inability (at that time) to co-ordinate brain with body actions continued unabated. The BBC broadcast regular ‘Music and Movement’ programmes especially for schools, wherein a ‘BBC-English’ voice enunciated in very clear tones that we should ‘Find a space’ by extending our arms ‘Like the branches of a tree’ and turn on the spot to make sure our fingers didn’t touch anyone else. The same clear-cut voice instructed us to bend, stretch, stand on one foot (I often stood on someone else’s), hop, prance like a horse ... there seemed no end to the antics. I imagine the broadcasters would have collapsed in fits of hysterical laughter if they could have witnessed the unpredictable results of their instructions first hand. But it was fun. Tiring, but fun.

There was one aspect of school life I avoided: swimming lessons. Despite the fact that my father Leslie was an excellent swimmer and often gave lessons to children during public sessions at the town baths and had won a silver medal as reward for his prowess several decades earlier, I just wasn’t interested. Perhaps I didn’t relish the trot down to the Baths (all 200 yards of it), or walking back to school in half-soaked clothes afterwards (no child is capable of drying themselves properly); whatever the reason, I never learned to swim until I went to the Grammar School in 1961 where Mr. Roberts, the Games master, worked on the principle that you either swam or drowned during his lessons. (By the way, there were only two swimmers in the race for which my father won the medal. And the winner only had one leg. But it was still an achievement.)

Playground games were pretty much the same as I’d experienced at Constitution Hill, but with one difference: there were two playgrounds. The main one was located around
the school itself, the second was on raised ground at the back of the school. While I was there, the upper ground was used for various sporting activities during games lessons. The main playground was for both boys and girls. I can remember being very impressed and slightly jealous of girls who could bounce one, two and even (Wow!) three tennis balls against a wall and catch them on the rebound before tossing each one back just in time to receive the next returning ball. I could never aspire to such incredible hand-to-eye co-ordination which is why I didn’t seek a career as a circus juggler.

An integral part of school life was the proximity of a sweet shop within yards of the gates, in this case Mr. Speed’s shop on the other side of the road. During the 1950s, the shop was near the corner of Roseway but moved into Laud’s former bakery a few yards down Wrekin Road during the 1960s. It still maintained regular patronage, despite the additional walking distance.

Some pupils managed to make a few coppers’ worth of pocket money last the whole week, and I should imagine most sales amounted to no more than one or two (old) pence at a time ... four Blackjacks for a penny were a bargain and each could be chewed for several minutes. Liquorice sticks or wheels, Kali and flavoured sherbet fizzes (individually wrapped flat tablets about four centimetres square which dissolved in water to make a fizzy drink or could be nibbled to fizz inside the mouth) were also popular. Bars of chocolate (like Fry’s Five Boys and Cadbury’s) cost more, although it was quite rare for anyone to spend more than one shilling on sweets at any one time despite sweet manufacturers constantly creating confections to encourage children to part with their pocket money.

My weekly pocket money in 1957 was a florin (two shillings) which enabled me to go to the Saturday Club at the Clifton Cinema (6d) and buy a penny round raspberry ice lolly or two (one often fell off its stick half way through the Club session), and still left enough for several sweets during the ensuing week. Returning Corona and O.D. Murphy pop bottles to shops to recover the threepenny deposit was a good way to supplement pocket money and enabled me to buy the occasional Matchbox or, better still, Corgi car.

My year at Wrekin Road passed very quickly. It was time to go to Park Junior.