

# "SMALL BEGINNINGS"

No 9

Autumn 2004

---

The last Reunion was held on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2004 at the new Barling School. Around 75 ex-pupils and partners attended. We had a good evening, being well fed, and entertained by presentations of photographs. Everyone who attended added enjoyment by sharing memories and having a good natter. The raffle and on-the-door donations raised £242-50. A total of £80 was left after expenses were deducted, and this will go to the School.

For many of us, that the tour of the old school was the highlight of the evening. The new owners generously invited us, and have offered the premises for future reunions. As we walked around the rooms and playground many discussions could be overheard. Some examples are "The boiler was here, in Mrs Horner's room"; "The playground is much smaller than I remember"; "We used to go into the shelter during the war"; "This is where the dinners were served".

Many people, too numerous to mention here were involved in the organisation of the reunion and must be thanked for their dedication and hard work, but particular mention should be made of Peter Griffiths, who has taken on the co-ordinator's role. I was probably not alone in missing Paul (Abercrombie), but it was good to see a large picture of him appearing every so often on the screened photo presentation. I think he would have been pleased at the continuation of his hard work and the success of the evening.

Lynne Askham (nee Marshall)

**A group of Barling School ex-pupils, friends and partners occasionally meet for lunch. All are welcome.**

**Dates and venues for the next three lunches are:**

**October 16th 2004 at The Cherry Tree, Stambridge**

**January 15th 2005 at The Castle Inn, Little Wakering**

**May 21st 2005 at The Cherry Tree, Stambridge**

**From 12.15 until 3.00 pm**



## David Freeman's Memories 1950 – 1954

I guess as an only child going to school for the first time was quite a daunting prospect. Indeed, in all probability, this was my first visit to Barling.

I was born in November 1944 in one of the bungalows where the lower part of Barrowhall Road meets with Barling Road, known as Stonebridge. The family had moved from London in 1942 after their house had fallen victim to one of the Luftwaffe's nightly attacks on the capital. It was inevitable, in the absence of any brothers or sisters, that my pre-school social life was inextricably linked to that of my mother's. Prior to my arrival, my mother had been employed in the Borough Treasurer's Department in Southend so our social life understandably, gravitated towards town, rather than village life. Indeed our little corner of the world was geographically and socially quite isolated, although within the parish of Little Wakering. It was sufficiently distant to be regarded as almost having a separate identity, and reinforced by the fact that most residents originated from suburban London with no tradition or understanding of country life.

In essence, my first encounter with village life started on my first day at Barling School. Any apprehensions we had were soon allayed by the kindly approach of Mr Learmond who patting me on the head reassured my mother in his broad Scottish accent that "err, he'll be alright here, we'll look after him", as indeed he did.

I cannot say that I had a particular favourite teacher as each had their own effective way of motivating, encouraging and imposing their own method of social control. Were we better behaved than our contemporaries? I wouldn't say we were frightened, but certainly all teachers commanded the utmost respect and were held in the highest esteem and, on reflection, a degree of sincere fondness.

When we became too exuberant, Miss Riley would bring instant order by instructing us to place our right fingers on lips and left hand on head, Mrs Horner would prowl round the class with rulers in hand, ready to inflict instant punishment for any misdemeanour, intentional or otherwise. I can recall on one occasion that no one was allowed out at the morning break until they had successfully recited their 12 times table.

School life 50 years ago lacked the refinements taken for granted these days. Sanitation was primitive to say the least, and operatives visited at regular intervals to take the necessary action to keep the school toilets as hygienic as conditions would allow. I can recall one boy being severely reprimanded by Mrs Horner for announcing the arrival of the operatives in more graphic terms than was thought appropriate.

Full responsibility for keeping the school at an agreeable ambient temperature, especially during winter days, fell to the boys from Mrs Horner's class. On a rotational basis two boys fondly known as "Boiler Boys" were assigned to drag large scuttles of coke from where it was heaped in the far corner of the playground, to boilers situated in Mrs Hoare's and Mrs Horner's classrooms. The boilers heated the water that fed the radiators to the rest of the school.

All the teaching staff had a love of music and gave encouragement in that direction. Mrs Hoare had us hitting the triangles, banging the drums and shaking our castanets long

before the milk monitors passed around the free school milk, which had been festering on the hot pipes since its early morning arrival.

I can remember the excitement of going to far away places such as Wickford, Nevendon and Benfleet to play in the School percussion band. It was on such an occasion when the principal boy went sick, that I was called upon at the last minute to take on the role of the Farmer in the Dolly Dawkins musical sketch. Does anyone remember this? The Farmer and his wife walk up and down flanked by the remainder of the class who play the roles of farm animals. Even at such a tender age my voice did not impress, and it was Mrs Horner (I think) who had every confidence in my ability to act the part, but gave the stern instruction that I was to open my mouth wide, but not let a sound pass my lips.

All children find Christmas an exciting time, and during the austerity of the late 40's and early 50's, Christmas party activities started early. No ready-made streamers, so all decorations were hand-made to the highest specifications. First by cutting large sheets of stiff white paper into strips, then applying a variety of bright coloured powder paint (which usually ended up everywhere) before dolloping a generous portion of "Gloy" to the end of each strip to form a paper chain. If you remember, Gloy was just about the stickiest substance available, which often ensured that both paper and fingers remained locked together until rescued by Mrs Hoare.

We all enjoyed Mrs Riley's nature walks observing the flora and fauna. This created an awareness and appreciation of our surroundings. I recall the wild flowers, and the leaves that had to be pressed on our return.

I don't know any boy who did not look forward to the Friday afternoon ritual when those of us lucky enough to don the green and white squares of Great Wakering Rovers\* lived out our footballing fantasies. I only remember one match against another school, away to Great Wakering. We all arrived a little weary having practised all afternoon, and walked best part of the way, with Mr Learmond shuttling to and fro in his car, until we had all arrived. No team coach in those days. We lost, however, by the narrowest of margins at 7-1.

On a personal note, my most memorable moment was the day Mr Learmond took me out of class and sat me down next to a radio that he had rigged up in the corner of Mrs Hoare's room. This allowed me to listen to my mother's maiden broadcast on Women's Hour, which in those days went out live on the Home Service, now, Radio 4. On reflection, I think this act of kindness expressed the community spirit that Mr Learmond had fostered within the small village school. I imagine the special incident would almost certainly have gone unnoticed elsewhere.

With no village tradition I guess I have a slightly different perspective, but everyone was friendly and I cannot recall any bullying or unpleasantness that seem to be common these days. In fact I consider my life to be that much richer as the result of friendships formed at an early age, and there is little doubt in my mind that school days at Barling were the happiest of times.

*\* The editors have been in discussion over these shirts and have been unable to reach a conclusion. We know that green and white were the colours of Great Wakering Rovers,*

but were Barling School colours green and white too? If this is the case, the shirts may have belonged to the school. Can anyone shed any light?



## Barling Creek

Under big skies, above the flats, within the bounds of fields,  
Resonant with wildlife, bordered by salt marsh and farms  
Just a small creek that flows from countryside to sea  
Hosting childhood adventures and play upon its walls  
We learned to swim in its water, chemical-free and clean  
Using grassy knolls to exit the water and miss the mud  
That oozed 'tween toes, tarry, viscous and miring,  
And dried to grey crusts in the plummy hair of my dog  
The path invited walking along the banks for hours  
'Til other creeks joined in with this, through twists and turns.  
And could we travel further we would have met the sea  
But days and legs too short, curtailed our gypsy wanderings  
Assaulting the cockleshell castle at Gaffer's shed  
Brought crackles and scrunches from under our feet  
While the ever-shifting shards of shell, gave no hold  
For young limbs, growing lithe and strong by the climb  
The grass, and banks of sandy earth teemed with unseen life  
'Til, thrilling us with horror, a snake slides into view  
And, as children will, we screamed and ran, scared giddy  
With the thought of adder, bathed in the summer sun  
Masters of the skies and lowland the birds were throng.  
Quails fluttered from the banks, while curlews cropped the fields  
A skylark coiled its flight to clouds; gulls, the entourage of ploughs  
Drew curlicues against the chocolate autumn earth  
Visits to any creek or salt marsh seduce me with the scent  
Of sun baked mud, tide-driven water and fresh sea air  
And reedy plants whose lives depend on salt and dirt.  
A perfume whose power returns to me my youth  
Under big skies, above the flats, within the bounds of fields,  
Resonant with wildlife, bordered by salt marsh and farms  
Not just a small creek that flows from country to the sea  
But a host of childhood memories of play upon its walls

Lynne Askham (Nee Marshall)



*Paul Abercrombie's legacy of "Small Beginnings" continues under the united editorship of Lynne Askham (nee Marshall), Bob Avery and David Freeman.*

*Please accept our apologies for this edition looking like a showcase for the editors. To avoid this in the future, add your contributions to "Small Beginnings"*

If you would like to contribute to "Small Beginnings" please contact:

Lynne Askham  
Mulberry Cottage

48 Thomas Bell Road

Earls Colne,

Essex CO6 2PF

*Phone: 01787 224237*

*Email: [lynneaskham@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lynneaskham@yahoo.co.uk)*