

## My Memories of School 1960 – 1966

by Mike Whitmore – *written 2017*



My name is Mike Whitmore. I was a pupil at Hodge Hill Junior and Infants School between 1960 and left in 1966 some 50 long years ago. My brother and sisters also attended the school. My mother, Mary Whitmore, was a teacher there from around 1964. Eventually I followed in my mother's footsteps to become a teacher and served a short part of my training at Hodge Hill. Unlike Mary, Her Majesty's school inspectors never ever praised me for my ability to write neatly on the blackboard.

My headmasters during my childhood were Mr. Barley and Mr. Tillson. I have half a memory of an elderly Mr. Barley being presented with his leaving present in front of the school by a tall, clumsy boy with very large, flapping ears, who managed to drop it. The tinkling sound indicated that there was a lot of glass inside the wrappings.

Mr. Tillson had a funny nose, I recall thinking.

Other memories?

Doing 'corking' in the infants class (apparently Mrs. Shakespeare(?) thought it the worst she'd ever seen, according to my mother, many years later.) This involved making a pipe of wool by stitching together strands that were wrapped around 4 nails in a cotton reel. What emerged from the base of *my* cotton reel was more like an irregular Staffordshire knot.

A naughty boy once climbed 30 feet up a drainpipe onto the hall roof to retrieve a ball. We used to play a variety of ball games like 'hot rice' where we'd charge about, linking arms, chanting 'ha-rt roiss' and throwing a ball hard at anyone nearby. If we hit them, they joined us. My favourite game was to be a member in one of two teams at either end of the playground, where we'd throw the ball with all our might up into the air to the other team, some distance away. Needless to say widows were frequently broken. Then there was French cricket, and non-ball games, like giant strides and fairy steps, British Bulldogs, marbles using the drain covers as targets and so on.

An even naughtier boy put blue paint into a fish tank, killing all the goldfish.

A fearsome Irish lady teacher, Mrs. Faughey- whose **"You silly goose"** was followed by a pinch- and whom I consequently have to thank for my thorough knowledge of the times tables (my son is currently studying maths at Cambridge, as an indirect result!)- caused a young lady to wet herself because she was too afraid to ask for the toilet. I remember the warm stream forming a yellow puddle around my Startrite sandals. Mind you, if she'd gone to the toilet building the loos were probably frozen up, as it was located outside, unheated. At playtime the dinner ladies would dispense maybe 4 sheets of waxed toilet paper to you when needed, or a few more if you complained.

I'd have been sitting at a desk with a creaky hinged bench. It would have had two ceramic inkwells, where we learned to dip our pens and scratch and blot our way through the alphabet. I was often made to stand in front of the class to recite 'Jack of the Inkpot':

*I dance on your paper,  
I hide in your pen,  
I make in your ink-stand  
My little black den;  
And when you're not looking  
I hop on your nose,  
And leave on your forehead  
The marks of my toes.*

as I was hopelessly covered in ink stains.

Later, under Miss Green, we had to buy 'Osmiroid' fountain pens and we'd enter the annual Cadbury's handwriting competition: with prizes of tins of chocolate. Instead of receiving these wondrous things, I'd be again in front of the class, reciting the poem.

There was the awful sing-along to BBC radio with 'Johnny' on the piano. Mrs. Smith suppressed a laugh when one boy irreverently changed a folk tune's words and sang 'Westering Home with a f\*\*t in the air.' I didn't know (then) what the word meant. I'd expected the word 'song' instead.

Oh, and the school dinners. You could have broken your teeth on the 'chocolate concrete' with pink custard. Or on the green-tinged sixpenny bits in the Christmas pudding. The food was usually overcooked and smelled of cabbage. There was one dinner lady who made you scrape unwanted meat into a brown paper bag with which she'd later feed her dog.

We had one teacher who only lasted a few weeks. My mother said he'd been caught trying to steal a chicken from a supermarket. Value three and ninepence. He went to jail for 3 months. Instead we had Mr. Verrier, a tall, strict man, who once reinforced the idea that there were 360 degrees in a circle by angrily making two girls walk 360 times around a chair. He clouted me on the back of the head with a book once for talking on the way to assembly. The only teacher ever to hit me.

One nature study trip was to walk alongside the River Cole. There was no nature on view however, nothing grew within ten yards of it such was the pollution. I'm not sure what we drew on our notepaper.

My proudest moment? I was selected for the school football team! (team colour: yellow & blue halves, white shorts.) I dreamed of scoring World Cup goals that night. I think I got one kick, it was played at such great pace, unlike in our kickabouts. I just played the once.

I wish you and your school all the very best in your, indeed, *our* anniversary year.

Kindest regards

Mike Whitmore



*Hodge Hill School, Teacher: Mary Whitmore*



*Hodge Hill School 1966*



*Hodge Hill School 1963*