

*My Memories of Stechford Road School from 1948 – 1950*

By Margaret Birkett – written 2017

This is what the now Colebourne School was called, Stechford Road School, by the time my sons attended 1976 – 1986 the name had changed to Hodge Hill Primary School.

I started aged 5 (no rising 5s then) in January 1948. School life was very much different in those days. The Country was still in the grip of austerity and rationing after 6 years of war.

The school building was very different from the lovely new building you have now. We had one hall, which was the focal point for most things, PE, assemblies, school dinners and radio programmes. The classrooms in both the infant and junior departments had no corridors just a veranda with open sides. Can you imagine how cold the classrooms were, when the winter winds blew across the sports field? On many occasions we had no heat in the winter so we sat with our coats on. The boilers that generated the heat were run on coke (a derivative of coal) often deliveries of coke never came because it was rationed out. The toilets were outside and frequently they froze so we missed school.

Because of the cold we march round the classroom, with our coats on, chanting our times tables so by the time I was 6 years old I knew all my tables up to 12s, and I still know them to this day.

This will make you take a sharp intake of breath, before morning playtime we were expected to complete two blackboards full of sums, copied and answered into our exercise books neatly. No wasting paper it was on ration so all written work was had to be small and neat. We covered all our exercise books with wallpaper that was if your parents had some left over after decorating. Nothing was ever thrown away everything was recycled.

Each school day I walked 4 miles my mother walked 8 miles to and from school. There were no school dinners only for those whose mothers were working in the factories that were helping produce much needed parts and equipment to get industries working again after the war. Most pupils went home for lunch except on days it rained hard or was snowing then mothers were allowed to bring a sandwich for their children.

Our school day was 9.00 – 12.00 and 1.30 – 4.00 in the winter, summer time we had 2 hours lunch break and finished at 4.30, double summer time was reintroduced by the Government in 1947 – 1950 because of a fuel shortages.

Very few families had cars, on rare occasions the man across the road from where I lived would drive along Stechford Road in his car on his way home for his lunch break and give my mother and I a lift, that was a real treat.

I can remember vividly walking to school on the crisp autumn mornings looking for spider webs with dew or hoar frost glistening in the weak sunlight. As children we would get a little twig from the privet hedge take the leaves off bend it over and collect the webs whilst crunching under foot the fallen leaves from the trees along Stechford Road.

Standards of behaviour were much stricter in my school days. All exercise books had to be covered to keep them clean, no dog-eared pages. Every child aspired to be awarded a gold star to stick in its workbook. We had just one pencil a year with your initials on it, woe betide if you lost it. Last thing on Friday afternoon we polished our desks and the insides were inspected for tidiness of our books. There was no talking in class or moving out of your seat, you would not dare to ask to go to the toilet that's what playtime was for.

We were encouraged to save our empty fish paste jars to use in art lessons for water to mix with the power paint and as glue pots. My favourite art lesson was potato printing, if your mother could spare one. I was all right we grew potatoes in our very large garden. We didn't have art very often so when the desks were covered in newspaper excitement ran through the classroom. With over 40 children in the classes and no hot running water to wash brushes etc. art lessons were a major exercise for the teachers.

I was naughty only once; I scratched another girl's face, a bit of rivalry over something or other. My teacher, Miss Bird made me sit with my hands in paper bags, which were tied on my wrists with string. At the age of 6 I learnt the lesson of humiliation, to this day I have never deliberately scratch anyone.

The school by this time was bulging at the seams. Many hundreds of new houses had been built just before the war in the area. Therefore school places were at a premium, it was the only primary school in the area. The Gospel Hall in Bucklands End Lane was used to house two classes, I was there for a few weeks, it was so cramped with insufficient toilets and coat pegs. By this time temporary classroom were erected which were still in use until you had your new school built.

My parents decided to move me to another school in June 1950 in readiness for the start of my junior school education. The Heathlands School was almost built, some classrooms were ready for pupils, the school was named Ashville Avenue for many years. Going to this school gave me the opportunity to have school dinners; the school had a kitchen in which the meals were cooked. Also once my Mother had crossed me over the Coleshill Road I could walk the rest of the way to school on my own, instead of walking 4 miles to and from school I only had 2 – 3 miles.

I have many happy memories of Stechford Road School, the halcyon days of summer with classroom doors, which ran the length of the classroom, were opened with the soft, warm breeze floating in while we had our heads down, fully concentrating on the task in hand.

Having our morning assemblies in the Hall singing *Morning Has Broken*, I'm sure that was the only hymn we sang. Another favourite of mine was our 'Music & Movement' lesson that was broadcast from the school's programme on the radio; a large speaker was mounted on the wall at the side of the stage and we all danced around in our underwear, no PE kit in those days, to the instructions given out from the radio.

Little did I know that in 1954 I would still be running around in the Hall again when I joined the Girl Guides aged 11. I then went on to run the Guide Company until I married and moved away in 1965. By 1967 we had moved back to the Hodge Hill area, in the Hall again to place my vote on election days and for residents meetings. By 1976 my eldest son started school back in the Hall again for events, I was soon asked to join the PTA. In 1980 the Government legislated for schools to have Governors, these were the days when dozens of parents were scrambling to be voted in. I was one of the parents chosen and re-elected until both my sons had moved on to secondary school.

The school has many memories for me, although there are times when I wished I had paid more attention and realised how important education is, more so now than ever.