

School Days at Seacroft Grange

by Eric Hives

I started at Seacroft Grange (*which was formerly Tottie Hall*) in 1955 when I was four years old. My first class room was in the old main building itself. After that, most of the classes were in temporary wooden huts, which were stood on bricks, outside in the grounds.

The headmistress, Miss Annie Dowgill, had her study in the Grange and the room next door was the staff room. Miss Dowgill was a little, white haired 'old' lady. She would occasionally visit our class and hand out sweets.

Morning assembly would start each day with all the children reciting "Good morning Miss Dowgill, good morning every one". When she retired, our new head was Mr Parsons. Not long afterwards, it was a sad occasion at morning assembly, when it was announced that Miss Dowgill had died.

My teachers over the years were: Miss Wrigglesworth, Miss Hall, Miss Celia Firth, Mr Arthur Tempest and Mrs Jane Bourke. Miss Firth and Mr Tempest were later to marry. It was obvious to us, even as children, that they were sweet on each other! The school caretaker was Mr Beck and he had a distinctive purple birth mark on his face.

I was only in receipt of corporal punishment once whilst at the Grange. I had to stand on a chair and a teacher vigorously and angrily slapped my legs with both hands, for what seemed like ages. This was quite painful as I was in short trousers and I still can't remember what I had done to upset her! I was about eight years old at the time.

Even as children, we were aware of having such an old building as our school and had a real sense of its history. It was always exciting to go into the Grange whenever we could. In one room we had music lessons. We would play cymbals, the tambourine and the triangle. Later, we progressed to recorders – although I always thought that there was too much emphasis and time spent on disinfecting them at the end of each lesson!

We would sometimes go upstairs and do bird-watching out of an upstairs window, looking out across the grounds. At other times we would collect jam jars from people's houses. Hundreds of these were stored in an upstairs room and they would eventually be sold for school funds. I remember once, looking into an upstairs room and it had an old white bath. It reminded me that this old building had once been someone's home.

One thing we didn't like upstairs was the school dentist. It was in a room above my first nursery class and I can remember having teeth extracted there. The dentist would clamp open your mouth by winding the metal clamp, then he placed a rubber mask over your mouth and nose. The gas was fed in and you drifted away, eventually waking up to a mouth full of blood and cotton wadding! Often, children would be physically sick afterwards.

Outside the Grange there were grounds with lovely old trees, including the first monkey puzzle tree I ever saw. (*Does anyone know whatever happened to that?*) We had flower gardens that the older classes tended. There was a climbing frame

which was a favourite for the boys. When the 'gong' went to end playtime, we would drop out of the climbing frame, pretending we were paratroopers exiting an aeroplane!

In the playground we played many different games – whip and top, hop scotch, marbles, conkers, etc. and a child's imagination in those days was endless. On the school wall outside the head's study, there were painted wickets for impromptu games of cricket. I can still remember when an older boy, who could be a bit of a bully, was hit accidentally on the head with the cricket bat. He cried like a baby, but I was secretly very pleased! I recently met an old school friend that I haven't seen for about forty seven years. He recalls this incident well and was even able to remind me of the boy's name who swung the bat!

We regularly had flag days for charity. The children would knock on all the local doors and hopefully sell them a flag. I can remember going on my own to sell a flag to the occupant of the farm at the windmill. I was a bit scared, but I wanted to see the windmill close up!

My friend and I once, shamefully, stole a large pack of OXO cubes from the Thrift store in Seacroft village and then ate them all on the way home from school! It's a wonder they didn't make us sick!

If the weather was bad at playtime, we had a 'wet weather routine' where we would play games in the school hall which was one of the wooden huts. I recall myself and a girl, fighting over the last wooden hoop and I got a long splinter in my left hand. I showed this to the dinner lady/supervisor and much to my disgust, she showed no concern at all. I still have the scar!

When I look at my school report for 1962, for physical exercise and games, Mrs Bourke wrote "slow, but works well". I can't have been that slow because in the school sports day I won the egg and spoon race three years running!

I remember one little girl called Valda Evans, who would run with the egg in one hand and the spoon in the other. Everyone would be hysterical with laughter.

Every summer at Roundhay Park, Children's Day was celebrated and schools from the whole of Leeds took part. Events were staged in the arena, surrounded by thousands of spectators, including many proud parents. Many boys did the 'massed displays' where hundreds of boys within their school groups, performed co-ordinated gymnastics. Other activities were country dancing and maypole dancing and these were the activities that I volunteered for!

My dancing partner was Heather Walsh. I wonder where she is these days. I have a photograph taken at Seacroft Grange, of a large group of us children around the maypole when we would celebrate May Day and also practice for Children's Day. Traditionally, narrow coloured tapes were used on the maypole, but later, broader tapes were used to give a better visual effect at Roundhay Park.

Throughout the year we had school plays and at Christmas, Nativity plays. I would read the scripts and then volunteer for the parts that had the most dialogue! At other times, I loved to stand at the front of the class and read to the other children. I was a confident young boy, but not as clever as I thought when I failed my eleven plus exam! My two older sisters, Janet and Marian, both passed theirs in the two preceding years.

We had weekly swimming lessons at York Road Baths and sometimes, Meanwood Baths. I didn't learn to swim, but I enjoyed the bus ride and the biscuits! We had school trips to Kirkstall Abbey and also to Whitby – a real treat.

Burglaries happened fairly often at our school and I can remember two detectives interviewing small groups of us in the head's study in case we had any information. After one burglary, Mr Beck, the school caretaker, had seen two teenagers running across Seacroft Green carrying axes! We were all very shocked.

After another burglary, our classroom was totally ransacked, with everything thrown around. We then realised that our pet goldfish was missing. Sadly, we eventually found it. Many text books had been thrown around and it was in one of these that the intruder had placed the goldfish and then slammed it shut! We were all very upset. The person that did this will now probably be a grandparent. I wonder if he ever looks back with any deep shame or regret.

One boy in our class had often been caught stealing small items from other children. He would be searched on a regular basis, at the end of the school day, in front of all the class. This wouldn't be allowed today, but it probably taught him an early lesson in life. I was told, years ago, that he was driving a Porsche, so I don't know!

In what was originally the coach house and stables, (*the detached buildings*) we had the school toilets and upstairs the canteen, where dinners were prepared and eaten and where we had our Christmas parties.

In late summer the children would bring items of fruit and vegetables and these would be made into a lovely display for Harvest Festival. At Christmas time we would all bring a tin or jar of food and these would also be put on display. All this food would then be made up into parcels and distributed to local or 'needy' elderly folk.

My oldest sister, Janet, was in the class two years above me and there was a boy there who would go on to become a very successful Leeds United goalkeeper. He was David Harvey. He made his league debut in 1966 and went on to play more than 440 games for Leeds United. He also went on to play for Scotland. (*Although he was a Seacroft lad, his father was born in Scotland*). David Harvey was voted the best goalkeeper in the 1974 World Cup Finals in West Germany.

Also in Janet's class was a girl called Rosalie Priestley who had a really good singing voice. On special occasions she would sing "Scarlet Ribbons" to the whole school. I think that this was the only song she knew, but she sang it well!

I can remember the names of many of the children in my class. Some of these were: Michael Blackburn, Paul Blackburn, Paul Bisset, Geoffrey Brown, John Gannon (who I recently found out had passed away in 1998), Brian George, Graham High, Ian Johnson and Frank Littlewood. Some of the girls were: Maureen Allinson, Denise Brophy, Janice Gray, Valerie Priestley, Angela Sharp, Heather Walsh, Anne Waterland, Janet Woods, Anne Wigglesworth, Susan Nicholson and Carol England, who's parents ran the Cricketer's Arms. I wonder where they all are now!

My final teacher at Seacroft Grange was Mrs Jane Bourke and Irish lady. If we answered the morning register with "Yes Miss Burke" she would sternly reply "It's MRS Bourke".

I was quite a chatterbox and often instead of "Eric" she would call me "earache". I remember her fondly though and when she wrote my final report in July 1962, it said "I shall miss the Hives family. Good luck to all three of them, Janet, Marian and Eric".

A touch of serendipity - when many years later, when I was about 32 years old, I was rummaging through a collection of old Seacroft photographs at the Pine and Cane Furniture Shop on York Road. One photograph suddenly stopped me dead. It was of a group of young boys playing cricket on Seacroft Green and it was of me and my classmates and I had never seen it before! The photo would have been taken around 1961 when we were about 10 years old and I recognised most of the boys. It now hangs proudly on my landing at home.

The years 1955-1962 which I spent at Seacroft Grange County Primary School, were very happy and I have so many memories. I am absolutely delighted that the Grange is soon to be restored after being allowed to become a ruin. Well done Springfield Healthcare Group.

I would also like to say well done, not only to the Seacroft Green Residents Association and their hardworking committee, but to all Seacroft people who are so proud of their unique village.

Eric Hives

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