

Mrs Brenda Macrow (nee Tanner)

Memories of St Paul's School 1938 - 1945

“I started school in September 1938 aged 4yrs 10mths and my first teacher was Miss Scrivens. A very old lady!!! We sat on very small chairs at very small tables. We had slate boards and chalk to write with.

The following year I “went up” to class 6 and Miss Clarke was the teacher, a very strict lady who stood no nonsense. It was whilst in her class that Bibles were available to buy for one shilling!! I had to have one and still have it to this day.

Also, as the war had got under way, we started to take a penny to school on a Monday to buy a penny stamp which we stuck onto a card which held 12 stamps which when full we exchanged for 2 savings stamps 6d each to put towards the war effort. I think the book we put them into held 5/- worth. Although Miss Clarke scared the living daylights out of us I remember her combing my hair for ages trying to remove some chewing gum that someone who sat behind me had put into my hair. I had very thick hair so it was a bit of a problem!

From that class I “went up” again to Miss Williams in class 5. She gave me “the cane” for bad writing. I always smudged my work and she got very cross. On hearing about my caning my Mother went and saw Miss Williams and told her I was left handed and therefore dragged my hand over the wet ink (it was nibs and ink wells in those days). Apparently there were so many children in the class she had not noticed.

By this time the air raids were becoming worse and we spent a lot of time in the shelters situated in the school field, one shelter for each class. Ours was at the top of the field so we had a long way to run when the sirens went off. We used to sit on benches along the cold damp walls and say our tables, sing songs and I think we had stories sometimes. My most vivid memory of the shelters was THE SMELL!! We had a bucket behind a piece of sacking at the far end of the shelter and it really did smell awful!

Talking about toilets reminds me of the girls toilets situated outside in the playground. I was terrified of these because they used to flush all by themselves. We never knew when it would happen. There you were, sitting spending a penny, when this sudden flush of water would take off: funny now, but for a 5-year old

very scary.

I then “went up” to Miss Harwood’s class 4, a lovely lady who had the most beautiful handwriting. She actually taught my Mother years before and eventually my brother some ten years later.

We were “put up” by ability in those days and I finished in class 1 aged 10/11 with 14 year olds who left school at that age in those days. I took the scholarship exam and passed and was top of the school and had my name on the Roll of Honour (wow). I obtained a scholarship to go to the Dorking County School later to become Dorking County Grammar School in 1946. Classes 3-2-1 are complete blanks as regards teachers. We had so many changes due to the war. No one stayed very long and it is a wonder any of us learnt anything.

Mr Williams was Headmaster. Mr Wareham was senior teacher but was called up so we lost him until after the war when he came back as Headmaster when Mr Williams retired. Mrs Wareham became a teacher. I remember her teaching us to write with slopes and loops, no help to a left-hander!

I recall we had Scripture exams, I believe annually, and if we did well we were allowed a half-day holiday: what joy! Life during the war was not very pleasant. For a while we had to be at school by 8am and left for home at 1pm before the afternoon and evening bombing started. No canteens in those days, I think we took a sandwich or a piece of cake.

Mr Nickols was the Vicar, loved by all. He came to the school every Thursday morn, to take assembly when we would sing a cheerful hymn and then pray for the safe return of Fathers, Brothers, Uncles etc. We used to have a fete in the school field in the summer and the Vicar used to bring his car and give us a ride round the field. It was absolutely exciting as “only very rich people had cars”.

Being a Church school we had to go to church for special services, one being Ascension Day and we then had the afternoon off.

Apart from regularly getting splinters in one’s bottom from the rough wooden seats we had to sit on fixed to the desk in front of us I do not think I have any other memories that will be different to so many of the ex-pupils. I was very happy at St Paul’s and delighted it is still such a GOOD SCHOOL!”