

# **Mr Brian Buss**

## **Memories of St Paul's School 1932 - 1940**

Brian Buss was the son of the caretaker at Dorking Halls. His father took up the post after having been a foreman carpenter on the construction of the Halls. The Buss family lived in the caretaker's flat in the Halls building.

### **“The school**

I have always been under the impression that I started school at the age of four years, though others say I was five. I went to St Paul's C of E School that stood high up overlooking Dorking from the south at the apex of the road of the same name. The school, built in 1860, had tall church-like windows with a small bell tower above the entrance to the Headmaster's quarters. Behind the school were two raised, level, hard-earth playgrounds. They were separated by metal railings, the one to the east was for girls and the one to the west for boys. At the south end was an open wooden shelter stretching partly across both playgrounds, as all children were expected to be outside at playtime irrespective of the weather. Beyond the playgrounds a sports field swept up almost to the edge of Glory Woods. You were only allowed into the field during the summer months or for football in the winter. At other times the tall metal gates from the playground were kept firmly closed.

### **The classes**

The school had 7 classes, where Class 7 and 6 were infants and Class 1 was the top class.

Class 7 was taught by Miss Scrivens, a rather tall, frail-looking, grey-haired lady, very quiet and kind. I never heard her lose her temper. We sat at low wooden desks in small individual chairs that I believe could seat four. Etched into the desktop at each position was a square subdivided to make a total of 100 smaller squares. I must have started school in January 1932 if I was five years of age.

Class 6 was taught by Miss Fleming, who was short and rotund. She had a stern outlook, a sharp tongue and was a strict disciplinarian. I was probably in this class during 1933.

Class 5, I believe, had a change of teacher during my stay around 1934, but I can't

recall the name of the first. For most of the time we were taught by Miss Tyler, who took us and most other classes for their music lessons. I look back with shame at how we treated her as I think it was her first teaching post. We thought we had grown up now that we were no longer infants and had become little terrors. As the school did not possess a piano, all music lessons were conducted unaccompanied, and singing would commence with Miss Tyler striking her tuning fork following which we were to begin. On several occasions the class decided not to utter a note at this point. Despite her repeated attempts we all remained tight-lipped until she would burst into tears. At this stage she would rush out of the room to compose herself and fetch the Headmaster. Naturally when he arrived and struck the tuning fork we would all commence singing. Then, as soon as he left the room and Miss Tyler tried once again, not a note was sung. It was so cruel. Later on in my days at school she was to prove to me just how kind, thoughtful and generous she was.

Class 4 was taught by Mr Howard Downing, known to all the children as Dicky. He was rather short and stocky with thick horn-rimmed spectacles and well-brushed hair. He invariably wore heavy tweed clothes. He was very pleasant and too easy going for a teacher. He could be easily persuaded to talk about subjects more interesting than those to be taught. After about 20 minutes he would realise that most of the lesson time had been wasted. However, I cannot recall that we teased him as we did Miss Tyler. He was extremely interested in athletics and was a fair contestant with the javelin and the discus.

There is one incident concerning Howard Downing which stands out clearly in my mind. A certain Mrs Baxter had a girl and boy at St Paul's and she took strong objection to anyone touching her off-spring, whether they deserved it or not. She was a tall, well-built woman who wore long, dark-coloured clothes almost down to her ankles and, I believe, laced-up boots. On her head she wore a large, toque-like hat and always carried a rolled-up umbrella with a long handle. Her son, who was in Class 6, had erred in his ways and had been caned by Howard Downing. On each and every occasion this happened to one of her children before, she had entered the school at great speed shouting the name of the teacher she was about to molest and wheeling her umbrella above her head. I recall that her entrance this time was up to par as I was standing in the corridor. She swept into one classroom after another shouting "Where is he? I'll murder him!" When she did find him she chased him around the school landing blows on his head with her umbrella until other teachers came to his aid by restraining her. We, of course, considered the whole event quite entertaining, but poor Mr Downing was somewhat crestfallen for a time afterwards.

Class 3 was taught by Miss Mills, an extremely stern, forthright disciplinarian. Her word HAD to be obeyed immediately! She was tall, very erect with dark graying hair and was the epitome of what I believed a Victorian teacher must have been

like. We all trembled in our shoes for most of the time we were in her class, but needless to say we learned our subjects. I think it was about this time that I started to absorb what I was being taught, especially arithmetic and geography. However, while in this class I started to loath dictation which I came to hate and fear. It wasn't that I couldn't spell, it was because I was frightened that I would miss a word and you could never but never ask Miss Mills to repeat what she had just said. This fear of taking down messages has remained with me throughout my life, despite the fact that much of my working life involved communicating by phone. Once someone asks me to take something down a certain fear grips me and 10 to one I'll make a hash of it. I think psychiatrists are right about the importance of our early childhood. I recall that dictation was on a Wednesday. From after that day in the week life was free and to be enjoyed up to Monday morning, then fear of Wednesday would increase by the hour and I don't think I ever really slept during Tuesday night. I was probably in this class in 1936.

Class 2 was taught by Miss Chesterton, a quiet, middle-aged lady with no outstanding characteristics, except on rare occasions she could lose her temper when she then lost control of herself. She was not a particularly inspiring teacher, but I was really beginning to take more than a passing interest in many subjects. In other words, I was starting to enjoy learning. For some unknown reason she took a liking to, I suppose, the interest I was showing and she gave me additional help and encouragement, particularly in arithmetic. In fact, she created a special prize for this subject at the end of the summer term 1937 so that I could win it. It was a book called "Brown Owl and the Beaver" by Harper Cory, which still resides on my book self to this day. This became extremely embarrassing, as I was fast becoming a teacher's pet, which carried with it the disdain of all the class. I recall that several boys picked fights with me after school in order that the rest of the class could witness my downfall, as I was certainly no fighter. It became so bad on one occasion that my Mother made enquiries about me changing schools and I know she made contact with the Catholic School, then situated just off Coldharbour Lane adjacent to the Catholic Church. Mother never knew the reason why I suddenly became so unhappy at St Paul's.

I'm glad to say that due to my aspiring standard of learning, Miss Chesterton recommended that I move to Class 1, one year before I was due to by age. This was accepted and my troubles at school disappeared overnight.

Class 1 was taught by Mr Walter J Wareham, always known as Wiggy. He was tall, good-looking and had a smart appearance at all times. He had very strong views on most matters and was an excellent teacher. He had, we believe, been invalided out of a guard's regiment when training as an officer cadet. He must have been only about 21 or 22 years of age when he started at St Paul's around 1932/33. Therefore he had no previous teaching experience, yet he soon proved himself to

be head and shoulders above all the other teaching staff at the school, both in stature and ability. Most of the more senior girls swooned at his every word while us boys hung on all that he said and did. He alone influenced me more than anyone else at this time of my life.

On entering Class 1, possibly in January 1938, I think I must have thought that I knew it all and did not have to work. At the end of my first term I think I came 39<sup>th</sup> out of a class of 40. It was at this point that Mr Wareham took me aside and read the riot act to me. If I didn't wish to return to Class 2, I had just one term more to pull my socks up. I also found out that he was not in agreement with me entering his class a year early. I had fallen from being teacher's pet to teacher's doormat in one short term.

Having spoken to me like this, he was not slow to identify any potential that I may have had and encourage me to develop it. Several members of Class 1 were excellent at freehand drawing and at watercolours. They were a great spur to me and he encouraged me to emulate them, which I desperately tried to do. At the start of one drawing and painting class (it was never called Art in those days), he produced a small folding table and told me to find a chair and sit myself anywhere outside of the school and sketch what I saw. At that time parts of the school walls were covered in ivy, especially around the bell tower, and this added character to the building. I was to carry on with my sketching during future lessons if the weather permitted until I had sketches of the school from every angle. I cannot recall how many I made but it seemed like dozens and I understand that he carried these with him to his future posts. I often wonder whether they are still around somewhere as he died in 1984 at the age of 73.

He turned up one day with a load of painting books supplied by OXO which all interested children could complete and return if you wished to enter for the prize. It was at his insistence that I participated and to my astonishment I won. I can't recall what the prize was, but I still have the book that was returned after they were judged.

I can think of many incidents that show what type of teacher he was. During our reading period each week we were expected to read part of a book on which questions would be based at the end of term. We did this quietly while he sat at his desk, and he rarely walked around to see that we were doing so. I read very little at this time as it tended to bore me, I always wanted to do something with my hands. It was early on in WWII and the news of battles and the fighting fascinated me. I found that I could easily conceal a small plain-paper exercise book below my reading book and that I could sketch a scene of one of the week's war incidents without anyone noticing what I was up to. This I did for week after week. Then, one day, he walked straight up to me and asked me to hand over the exercise book.

I then had to stand on a chair in front of the class while he castigated me up hill and down dale for wasting my time and explaining what impact this would have on my end of term exam. At this point I wished the chair seat would break, the floor would open and I could disappear. At last it was over and I returned to my seat with my tail between my legs. Then he held up my sketches to show the class and praised me for the imagination and detail I had managed to portray.

### **Headmasters**

We had two Headmasters during my time at St Paul's. The first was Mr Hibberd, who was said to be pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in WWI. Perhaps I was too young to recall what he was like as a Head, but I understand that he did often relate his wartime experiences to some classes. Unfortunately, as he didn't take a class that I was in, I was unable to listen to many of these as they were no doubt about aircraft. I do not know the reason for his leaving, but he was replaced by Mr Williams in about 1935/36. He was a tall, slightly bent man with brushed back white hair who smoked a pipe and wore dark brown suits made from a thick heavy material. He was quite stern but fair, had strong religious beliefs and ran a well-disciplined school.

### **Memories of my time at St Paul's**

Life at St Paul's holds many memories, like trooping into the large playing field behind the playgrounds on each Empire Day, 24 May. We would all form up in front of the flagpole and sing patriotic songs like "I vow to thee my country" and not pay too much attention to various speeches made by the Headmaster and the Rev A C Nickol from our nearby church which to a large extent controlled the school. All we were waiting for was 12 noon when we could all go home as we always had that afternoon off.

There was always great interest in the University boat race in the spring. Every newsagent and sweet shop had enormous rosettes, pins and ribbons of the two colour blues and virtually every child opted for the one or the other and proudly displayed the appropriate colour. There was much argument and debate at school during the week before the race.

Then there was the amusement fair, which regularly occupied Cotmandene during the week of Ascension Day. At mid-morning playtime on the Monday of fair week we would all rush to the top of our school playing field to look through the small copse and down the steep slope of the adjoining field to Chart Lane to see how many large traction or fair engines as they were called, and the number of wagons each was hauling. Some would have four or five each, all waiting for the 12 o'clock deadline to move onto the Dene. There would be much discussion of whether we thought there to be more than last year. We couldn't wait for lunchtime to arrive so that we could dash down St Paul's Road and onto Cotmandene to see

whether our earlier estimates were correct or not.

As autumn approached, and just before the playing fields became out of bounds during winter playtimes, the hedges would contain hundreds of cobwebs, all holding water droplets glistening in the early morning sunlight. We would cut small supple hawthorn sticks and bend them back to form a small tennis racket shape and then collect the cobwebs to represent the strings.

Many memories are associated with Mr Wareham. He encouraged me repeatedly in my love and interest in aircraft. On one occasion he asked if any of us were interested in making a model aircraft from printed cards that he had obtained, knowing full well that I couldn't resist. Over the next few weeks I carefully cut out the marked shapes of a famous airliner of the day – a four-engined sliver biplane with a large fixed under carriage and box tail, a Handley Page HP 42 that operated out of Croydon, which was London's Airport of the day. I returned to school with my model so proudly. Only two of us lads had completed one, but mine was nothing compare to Arthur Cloudsdale's. He had used the card shapes as templates for the metal sheets that he used to make his model. When they were soldered together and polished the model was excellent compared to my pathetic effort. We found only later that Arthur's father had made it, but never the less it was of a very high standard.

Walter Wareham could not believe the name I was acquiring for my ability to recognise aircraft by their noise before they came into view. At the top southwest corner of our playing field we had about ten allotments, each one tended by two boys in Class 1. (I shared one with Harold Elson and we once won first prize in the District competition for which we were each awarded a medal. As ours was the first allotment inside the gate we presumed the judges were in a hurry!) During one of our gardening periods a noise arose which sounded like several aircraft flying together. "Alright", said Mr Wareham, "what are these aircraft, young Buss?" It was obvious there were several, so they must be military aircraft, but there was a different note amongst them. As I knew that the nearest airfield at Redhill had Westland Lysanders and Fairey Battles and the noise resembled both, I said immediately that it was a Lysander leading a formation of Battles. To my and the assembled company's utter astonishment, and especially Mr Wareham's, over the tree tops came a formation just as I had described. He never questioned my ability to recognise aerial noises again, and I'm glad that he didn't as my luck couldn't possibly hold a second time.

### **The start of Dorking St Paul's Athletic Club**

Both Mr Wareham and Mr Downing were keen athletes and with the help of Mr Williams, the Headmaster, and the Vicar of St Paul's Church, the Rev Nickol, the Dorking St Paul's Athletic Club was formed in 1935. The enthusiasm of the first

two was heightened after they attended the Olympic games in Berlin in 1936. On their return they told us in vivid detail of how Jessie Jackson won the 100 yards race. Soon permission was given to use the Pixham Lane sports ground for the club's practice and meetings to compete with other clubs. As there was little storage facility on the ground, much of the equipment was taken down by hand from St Paul's School.

Mr Wareham soon found that he could entice the boys in Class 1 to help in this task if they became junior un-paid members. Many is the time that I, along with others of my age, carted various items backwards and forwards to that ground which is no short walk from St Paul's, especially when carrying awkward and sometimes heavy gear. However, there were some perks, as we were often allowed to go with the club on an away meeting if our parents agreed. I recall one at Crawley that was held in what is now the Memorial Gardens. I believe it was then the local recreation ground and it was right on the eastern edge of the town at that time. Also that I spent much of the time there looking at aircraft taking off and landing at nearby Gatwick Aerodrome. It was before WWII and as we passed Lowfield Heath on the way to Povey Cross you could see the lights of the terminal building across the fields as it was dark by then. Little did I know that some 30 years later I would be living alongside this airfield when it became a major international airport. I did start to run with the club on practice nights, but I was not athletic, so after I left St Paul's I gave it up.

### **Other aspects of school life and monitorial duties**

Whilst talking about sport, I must mention the knock-out 6-aside football matches that were played throughout the winter months which Messrs Wareham and Downing organized and refereed. Oh how I hated those cold, bleak, miserable days when I had to turn out in football gear. I neither understood what was expected of me or had any interest to find out, so I usually just stood on the spot and froze, hoping against hope that my team would be knocked out. The school had no amenities: the toilets were outside and exposed to all the elements. They were always dirty and smelly and there were no showers, just two small sinks in the cloakroom. If you got into a mess on the football field you remained like it until you arrived home.

The school had one wireless set, as it was then called. The amplifier with its batteries were kept in a high cupboard halfway down the long corridor that separated the classrooms. Each of the top three classrooms had a speaker, wired back to the cupboard, and my job was to wire up the appropriate one to the amplifier unit according to which classroom was to receive a school's programme at a particular time of the day. This meant climbing over the wires. To start with there were insufficient strands of wire to make a good connection, but more worrying was the electric shocks that you repeatedly received. I never really

became interested in things electrical because of my experiences with that unfriendly set.

Most members of Class 1 had some form of monitoring duty like the one just described. There were others like shepherding the boys in the lower classes into school after assembling in the playground following the ringing of the bell in the tower, or being ink monitor. Every Monday morning, the last mentioned monitor had to make large quantities of ink by mixing a dark blue powder with water. This was usually concocted in large enamel jugs in the coal-fired boiler house where none of us liked to linger, as the caretaker at the time who frequented this area was not a very pleasant character. Then the monitor would have to visit every class excepting the infants, to fill or top up each inkwell. These were made of a ceramic material and fitted in a hole in each desktop. It was an extremely messy job as each inkwell had but a small hole at the top and invariably one's hands, cuffs and shirt front were splashed and stained with ink by the end of this duty.

All teaching was carried out with the aid of the blackboard. This was a large wooden board about 4ft square painted matt black that sat on two pegs resting on a tall wooden easel. The pegs could be placed at different heights in the two legs of the easel so that the board could be raised and lowered with some difficulty as it was quite heavy. Chalk was used for writing or drawing on the board by the teacher who was the only person allowed to use it. Coloured chalks were available, but often in short supply. Another monitor's job was to remove the chalk from the boards at playtimes, lunchtime and after school.

Each desk in Class 2 to 5 seated two persons. It consisted of a cast iron metal frame at each end with a single wooden seat which folded upwards when you both stood up. The wooden desktop was fixed and sloped slightly with a grooved ledge at the front to take a pen or pencil, and it had a hole in which the inkwell sat. The pens consisted of a thin round wooden stem with a metal end in which a curved nib could be slotted in. The nib was split at the pointed end and was very scratchy to write with. If too much pressure was applied to the nib, the two parts of the split end would snap off leaving two nasty short points. If a cruciform split was made in the wooden stem at the opposite end to the broken nib and card or paper was inserted to make flights, then the resulting implement made an excellent dart. Unless of course you were caught defacing school equipment in this manner, then a visit to the Headmaster's office was inevitable! In Class 1, the desks were very similar, except they were slightly larger and each one had a hinged top, under which exercise books could be kept. You did, however, have to be careful not to wedge too many books in, especially to the right-hand side, otherwise you would push the bottom of the inkwell up and it emptied its contents all over your desk, over whatever books you had on it and then it would drip onto you if you were seated.



Assemblies were held at least once a week and perhaps more. The large glass screens between the top three classes were folded back and the other two classes were brought in and wedged standing between. The infants, I believe, did not participate. The only memory of these is my feeling ill on a very cold day during one of them and being sick all over the person next to me. There were also similar screens between Classes 3 and 4, and 4 and 5, but I cannot recall these ever being drawn back.

Towards the end of my time at St Paul's a small library was assembled and Mr Wareham managed to obtain the use of a cupboard to hold the books. This was another one of my duties during my time in Class 1, to act as librarian. But even this duty did not create my passion for books, which came much later. Another task given to various members of Class 1 was to help younger backward readers by allowing them to read to you. This was usually undertaken sitting on forms in the area where the infants hung their coats and I recall what a nuisance these garments were.

The corridor was also used for physical training (known as PT) when it was wet outside. The dust raised from the bare floorboards choked all in the corridor, while the clumping feet and crashing of children vaulting over the box or horse, disturbed everyone in the adjoining classrooms, not to mention the splinters gained from the worn floorboards. This activity also blocked anyone wishing to use the corridor, so as you can tell it never lasted the full time allotted to it. When Mr Wareham persuaded the School Managers to purchase this equipment, it was necessary to find somewhere to house it when not in use. Eventually it was agreed to acquire a shed that was erected in the boys' playground against the boundary leading to the Glory Woods. This must have been around 1938/39 and I was amazed to see on returning to the school reunion in September 1993 what appears to be the original shed still standing. I recall finding a coin dated in the 1700s when we were digging out the bank in the playground to make way for the shed.

The door at the western end of the corridor was used by boys only. Just inside to the right were two tall and constantly dirty sinks, and the line of pegs for boys' coats. At the far side of this area was the Headmaster's Office. To the left of the entrance was a glass cabinet like a large fish tank. It was set out like a model harbour and contained small model ships, many of which came from the Dinky Toy series. As another large vessel came into service, so the Headmaster would purchase its scale model and place it in the cabinet. I recall the French ship named the "Normandie" had pride of place as she won the "Blue Riband" around 1932 and then the "Queen Mary" was added when she regained the Riband for England in 1938. I have an idea that Mr Hibberd started this. Immediately above this was another cabinet for cups and trophies that the school had won and above that a

board, where everyone who had gained a scholarship had their name and year painted in gold letters. If one's name appeared on this, you thought that you had attained the ultimate at and for the school.

### **Playtime games**

Like all school children, we played certain games that came and went, like they do today, only then there were few new or original ones, we just repeated playing the same ones over again. The wooden hoop (about 2'6" diameter) would often be dusted down and the skill of its owner in controlling it with a short stick was sometimes a joy to watch, as were the colourful wooden tops. They were brought into play by winding a leather thong around the cylindrical part of the top and holding the stick to which the other end of the thong was attached. When the stick was removed quickly, the thong would rapidly unwind and rotate the top. Then you could keep the top spinning by virtually whipping it.

Glass marbles, or alleys, was another game frequently played, either attempting to knock them out of a marked circle (almost as still played in championships today at the Greyhound public house at Tinsley Green, close to Gatwick Airport), or just trying to hit your opponent's marble with yours, and if you did you acquired it. The large blood alleys were particularly sought after and might cost at least one old penny (£1/240 today).

Several different ball games were played and probably the favourite was "Five Stones". This number of stones was placed in a marked out circle close to a wall and, by throwing the ball at the stones so that it would bounce first on the ground and then hit the wall to return to the thrower, the object of the game was to remove a stone from the circle, yet still catch the ball.

Cigarette or fag cards were not only collected and used as swaps to gain your full set, usually of 50, but also to play with. Known as playing "Flicks" (not to be confused with the slang term of the day for cinema pictures or movies) a card would be flicked horizontally and if the next flicker landed his card on yours then it became his. When several persons played this together you could win or lose a great many cards very quickly. Beside the normal cards, several tobacco companies issued series' of nation's flags and flowers that were produced in various fancy materials, but as they appeared in the more expensive packets of cigarettes, they were rarely seen at St Paul's.

There was one other boys' playground game named "Diggy Diggy Dag Tail". It consisted of two sides whose numbers were not fixed, although it was usually played with at least six or eight. One person would stand upright against the iron railings between the boys' and girls' playgrounds, whose only purpose that I can see now was to cushion the head of the first boy who was to bend down in front of

him. This first boy placed each hand on one of the railings and his head into the stomach of the one standing upright, then the remainder of their team bent down holding the one in front to make a long line of bent over backs. The opposing team would then run, one at a time, to leap onto the line of bent backs. When all were on, they would sing, as I recall, something which included the words “Diggy Diggy Dag Tail”, several times. If the team bent over did not collapse then they won and the teams changed position, but if they collapsed then the team on top had another go. This was an extremely rough game, as those on top had various ways of making sure those underneath collapsed. The use of hands, boots and knees were all fair play. It could also be very unpleasant as the playground was hard-packed earth, hard and dusty in summer and wet in winter when one could get very dirty indeed, besides injured.

The other school activity in the playground was the swapping of comics, of which there were a great many published in those days. They included: Beano, Dandy, Triumph, Wizard, Hotspur, Boy’s Own, Film Fun, to name but a few, and no doubt there were a similar number of titles for the girls, but I cannot recall their names. Comics such as the Wizard and the Hotspur contained stories about famous footballers, while the Triumph had air stories from WWI. Film Fun had all the characters then popular at the cinema, including Laurel and Hardy, Joe E Brown, Buster Keaton and George Formby. They usually cost 2d (less than 1p).

### **Dress**

Until I was in Class 2 I believe I always wore a long-sleeved woolen top garment that buttoned up at the neck, with a similar material tie. Short trousers were always worn. I hated the sight of the ankle-laced boots that most boys wore and had this constant fear that my parents might insist that I also should wear them. Luckily this never took place, so I was able to wear a normal pair of shoes in winter and brown buckled-up sandals with white crepe soles in summer. It did not take long for the soles to become dirty. I can only assume an open-neck shirt of some kind was worn in the summer, but I can’t recall what they looked like.

### **St Paul’s in WWII**

Although I was only at St Paul’s for the first 16 months of the war, I probably witnessed the most marked changes from peacetime to wartime from a youngster’s viewpoint as well as experiencing schooling during the daylight air raids. On returning to school from the summer holidays in 1939 we all had to carry our gas masks in the cardboard boxes provided. These were slung over our shoulders with string. Most of these boxes quickly disintegrated and more substantial containers had to be purchased, one being a metal canister. We had regular gas mask drills and inspections as well as instructions in what to do in the event of an air raid. The rather rude noise that could be made when breathing out rather heavily, was always demonstrated by someone during the drill, despite the order not to. The large

windows in the school were taped over in a criss-cross pattern in an attempt to reduce the glass from flying if they were to be shattered by bomb blast.

I am told but do not remember that attendance during the autumn term of 1939 was not compulsory. Also, school hours were not as in peacetime, though everything returned to normal in January 1940.

In the spring of 1940, six air raid shelters were built in the school field. Three were just above the running track some 100 feet from the woods at the top end and three were just inside the field from the playgrounds. Each was constructed in a similar manner with reinforced concrete. They were partly below ground and partly above, that above being covered with earth. At one end there was an entrance at ground level at a right angle to the shelter itself. After descending three or four steps you turned into the main part of the shelter, which was wide enough to hold wooden forms on each side. Each shelter could hold about 50 people and at the far end there was an emergency escape hatch in the roof which hinged outward. Class 1 was allocated the shelter at the southeast corner of the field, with Classes 2 and 3 the other two at the top of the field. The remainder of the school occupied the other three at the bottom with the infants having the least distance to walk from their classrooms.

In the space between the top three shelters and the woods it was decided to dig all the field up and plant potatoes. All the boys in Class 1 spend week after week digging this not inconsiderable area of land, remembering that we were between 13 and 14 years of age. Two incidents during this marathon dig come to mind. The first was when one of the boys stuck a fork right through his foot, but I cannot recall who it was, and the other was to do with a rather cheeky character. This was young Nobby Bennett. Mr Wareham, being the man he was, had his coat off and would dig as long as he expected us to do so. After many days slogging away, the conversation or discussions went the way which few of us had ever experienced in class before and the atmosphere became relaxed and at times very enjoyable. During one of these, the topic of nicknames came up and young Nobby was leading forth on how teachers were given these. "Of course", he said, "we call Mr Downing Dicky and we call you Wiggy because..." and he was pulled up abruptly by Mr Wareham with a "That's enough thank you, Bennett", as in those days it was the rule to give proper respect to all teachers – well, to their face. Of course us boys thought this to be extremely funny at the time.

By June and July 1940 we all expected the invasion to take place at any time and all the shops displayed posters of silhouettes of large German aircraft that were likely to land parachutists. Most of us boys had by this time acquired aircraft recognition books and were completely aware of what to expect. The first I acquired was published by Hutchins for 1/- (5p) followed by a small 3d book

called "Spot them in the Air" published by the Daily Mirror newspaper. Then in August 1940 the Aeroplane magazine published the first in an excellent series called "Aircraft Identification, Friend of Foe?" for for 2/- (10p), which was a large sum of money for a schoolboy. Presumably my errand boy earnings paid for this. It did, however, set the standard for silhouettes of aircraft throughout the war. For obvious reasons, this first publication covered British and German troop carriers and seaplanes as well as some British trainers, but they called it Part Two.

One morning during this period I had cause to leave school during late morning, I believe to go to the dentist. I took my normal route home, over Cotmandene. Just as I reached the highest point I was aware of an aircraft noise that I could not recognise and furthermore it sounded low. I looked behind me to the south and to my sheer horror just above the trees came two German Ju 52 troop transports, resplendent with their black crosses on their wings and swastikas on their fins. "O my God, it's started", I thought, but as I looked I noticed a short-nosed Bristol Blenheim to one side accompanying them. They must have been captured in France and were being escorted back to England. I rushed back to school at 2pm to discuss what I had seen with my like-minded friends, only to find that no-one had seen them as all were still in class. What was more infuriating, no-one believed me either.

Shortly after the summer holidays in 1940, which I believe was only some two weeks instead of the normal four, the day-time air raids started in earnest and a great many hours were spent in the shelters. As I was one of the more senior members of Class 1 at this time, I was given yet another duty by Mr Wareham. I had to be first in the shelter and to test the emergency escape hatch and then be responsible for the occupants of that end of the shelter. Also, should we need to evacuate the shelter via the escape hatch, I had to help everyone out through the hatch and leave myself when either Mr Wareham arrived at my end or I was ordered to do so from outside. Lessons were carried on when it was quiet outside, but like me, Mr Wareham always wanted to know what was happening and spent most of the time at the entrance to the shelter looking. He also knew how much I hankered to see for myself and on a number of occasions he would call me to the entrance to let me see the dog-fighting. However, he would never allow this if it was near or overhead as it took me a little time to pass everyone seated on the forms.

Luckily nothing fell anywhere near the school during the day. However, during the night of 28 October 1940, a 250kg bomb landed on the path to the Glory Wood just to one side of the school field almost at the top south-west end. It blew the school allotment tool shed to smithereens and everything inside was destroyed, but I don't recall any school windows being broken. I remember that a large chunk of earth from the crater landed in St Paul's Road near the church. For many hours the

authorities believed this to be an un-exploded bomb and the road was closed and nearby residents were evacuated until someone, presumably the Bomb Disposal Squad, decided to look underneath and found the road surface intact. The crater left by the single bomb can still be seen to this day alongside the public allotments, but now there is a tree growing in it.

The school also helped to raise money for the various War Weapons and Wings for Victory weeks. As I was an avid modeler of ships and aircraft and my colleague Peter Johnson collected bomb fragments and bits of aircraft, etc, Mr Wareham suggested that we hold our own exhibition at school and charge a small admission. This we did and raised quite a sum of money. I was in the process of packing my models away at the end of this when Miss Tyler asked me to come to her class after school. When I went in she said she realized what effort we must have expended not only to make the models but also to show our exhibits and so she would like to contribute in her own way and handed me three £1 notes. Now this was most likely equivalent to the majority of her weekly income at this time and I might add it increased our takings by almost 50%. I am afraid I smarted quite badly as I accepted it, when all I could think of was the time when we made her life unbearable.

I left St Paul's in December 1940 to start next term at Redhill Technical School. The manner in which this came about was pure chance, yet it was to determine what I was to be in later life. Peter Johnson, who lived at 7 Barrington Court, wished to sit the examination for entrance to this school during the autumn of 1940. Mr Wareham was concerned about him sitting the exam alone at Redhill during the period of intense daylight air raids. One Monday morning he approached me at my desk and said, "I would like you to keep Peter company when he does this, so will you ask your parents if they would allow you to sit the exam?" On arriving home at lunchtime I recall repeating his request to my Mother hanging out the washing. As neither of my parents had any firm ideas as to my future education, it was left to me. My only dream at that time was to be associated with aircraft in one way or another, but I had no idea how I could achieve this, or who could help me. I could not see then that if I passed the exam this would set me on that path. Even if I could have, I knew that Mr Wareham didn't really hold out any hope that I would or could pass, and neither did I. I think my only thought on returning to school that afternoon was that I had nothing to lose, and anyway it may get me out of a few lessons, so I said "Yes". As it turned out, the authorities considered it unwise to hold the exams at Redhill because of the raids, so they were held at each candidate's school. So really I was not needed. However, by that time my name had gone forward, I took the exam and to everyone's amazement including mine, I passed, and I was on the road towards my dream.

## **In retrospect**

And so my time at St Paul's came to an end, but in a way, I still remained in contact with it via keeping in touch with Mr Wareham. When later in the war he took up the post of Headmaster at Albury School he asked if I would help him as he was concerned that the boys there had no real interest in doing anything with their hands. He requested that I loan him my collection of models, which had grown somewhat by then, so that he could encourage 12 and 13 year olds to copy them. This I did without hesitation as small recompense for all that he had done for me, and many a Saturday tea in the schoolhouse at Albury was enjoyed in the company of him and his family. When eventually he returned to St Paul's as Headmaster, I thought at last he had gained his rightful place in the scheme of things.

I consider that I was lucky to have remained at St Paul's for those nine continuous years as this provided a certain degree of stability to this early part of my life. Despite the last 16 months being wartime, there was only one change of teacher during my school days, which again adds to a stable life. Without a shadow of a doubt it was the teacher in Class 1 that made my school life so enjoyable. Even though I was no good at sport or had little interest in it, he never held this against me, but just sought my other interests and developed those whenever and however he could. I have appreciated his method of teaching ever since and I tried to emulate it when eventually I was in a position to do so. After all, that's what I believe is the hallmark of a good teacher, if his pupil wants to pass on what he has learned."

BB 1993