

Selsdon School Days 1944 to 1951 – The Three Rs

In earlier chapters of my memories, I have already written about my very first year at Selsdon School in 1944, and lessons in the air raid shelters whilst flying bombs flew over, or on occasions fell on Selsdon. Also my second year, playing truant and being punished by Miss Smith in what must have been Class E. So I will continue, starting with Miss Smith who left an indelible mark on my first days at school.

Bear in mind that I am going back some 70 years ago, so some memories are now a bit dim and I might have got some of the teacher's rolls mixed up.

Like all schools, the day started with the Register. Next we filed out for Assembly in the school hall which doubled as the school gym. This hall was also where we had our inspections by the visiting school nurse, to check the health and nutrition of us children. Could we balance on a beam; did we have nits in our hair; were we being properly fed and cared for by our parents; did we show any indication of T.B. And worst of all, did we need a visit to the school dentist!

The morning assembly was led from the school stage by, was it Nutty Almond the Head Mistress, or perhaps the Deputy Head, either Miss Mead or Mrs Beach?

I obviously didn't pay much attention at school because the only teachers that I have clear memories of, other than Miss Smith, were Mrs Beach (Class B) and Miss Chubb (Class C) because they shared a house in Old Farleigh Rd and I often saw them walking home from school. The only other teacher was Mr Russell who joined Selsdon School much later, when I got to Class A, for which he became the class teacher.

But where was I? Ah, yes! The Assembly.

It started with us all saying the Lord's Prayer, and ended with us all singing a hymn, accompanied by one of the teachers playing the piano. The most oft sung hymn was "Onward Christian Soldiers", very appropriate as we were then still at war. However, now 70 years later in these multi-cultural times, it would probably result in the Head Teacher being arrested and charged with a hate crime!

Religious knowledge was an important part of our education in those times. And this was the first lesson when we went back into class. Each school day we were read a story, or part of a story from the Old Testament. I can clearly remember Miss Smith reading to us in my second year. In later years, as we learned to read, we children would practise by taking turns to read out loud, short sections of that day's story. This was not easy, because the version of the Bible then in common use was written in formal church language. For example: Thou shalt not kill; For thine is the kingdom; I say unto thee, etc. There were other bits, which we, in our young innocence, did not comprehend – Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife. And, Thou shalt not commit adultery. Nowadays the children see it every week on East Enders! Times have changed.

However I found the stories of the Old Testament; such as David and Goliath; the Pharaohs, the 7 year famines and plagues of locusts; the flight from Egypt and the opening of the waters of the Red Sea and much more, to be fascinating stories. So much so, that in my adulthood I went to the library to read again this history from ancient times. However it is

now written in modern English and no longer had its previous authority and authenticity. So it soon went back to the library virtually unread.

It was probably in Miss Smith's class that we progressed from writing with a pencil to writing with a scratchy pen. Our desks had inkwells and we had blotting paper to soak up the copious ink blobs as we tried to master this new writing tool. Hence my reference above to Miss Smith having left an indelible mark on my first days at school!

Do you remember trying to write with the cheap and nasty, standard school pen? The nib would tear into the paper of the exercise book, or bend because we were applying too much pressure. No wonder Mr Biro invented the ball point pen!

So that is the first 2 Rs, Reading and Riting, which only leaves Rithmatic, a subject at which we were far superior to the children of today. The reason for this is that today everything is "decimalised," multiples of 10. So 100 pence to a £1, and 1000 grams to a Kilo, etc.



We had to learn and contend with 12d = 1 shilling, and 8 half crowns = £1, or was it 240d = £1? No of course, it was 2 ten bob notes!



A ten bob note = 120d or today = 50p

Then there was 16 ozs = 1lb and 112 lbs = 1cwt, and if that was not enough, 12 inches = 1 foot and 36ins = 1yd and 1,760yds to a mile. And that is but a fraction of the numerical

quirks of the Imperial system. No wonder we were little Einsteins by the time we sat the 11+.

All this schooling was preparing us to take the scholarship exam, the 11+, in our last year of primary education. It was our gateway to a grammar school. I failed and as a result my Mum and I were called up to see Mrs Almond the Head Mistress. She advised us that the reason I had not passed was because I had fluncked the intelligence test paper. No I wasn't stupid, it was because we had no training for it at school, it not being part of the curriculum. Mrs Almond recommended that we get copies of past test papers (which could be purchased) so that I could familiarise myself with the types of questions, and practise them, which I did.

This was my last year in Primary and I then moved onto Selsdon Secondary, and a year later re-sat the scholarship, and now, having mastered the type of questions posed in the Intelligence Tests, this time passed the scholarship. So thus ended my years at Selsdon School, and in 1951, the year of the Festival of Britain, I started the next chapter of my life!