# MY PRIMARY SCHOOL DAYS

I started school in September 1947. St. James Church of England Primary School was a lofty Edwardian edifice built in 1905 next to the cemetery to replace the schoolrooms in the centre of the village which subsequently became the Parish Hall. The building was typical of its time. Fashioned out of red brick and slate it had huge windows set too high for little eyes to be distracted, ceilings to the rafters, concertina-type wooden partitions between some of the classrooms and even a little belfry to summon the children to school on time. It was heated with circular coke stoves, one in each classroom and I remember it as a cold and cavernous place.

There was not much more warmth in pupil-teacher relationships. With between 42 and 45 children in each class and a desperate lack of books and materials, teaching methods were necessarily formal and remote. The reception teacher, a Ms

Stutchbury, was, from a child's perspective at least, an ogre of a woman of the old school – stern and unforgiving. The majority of us were petrified of her. She did not seem to have an ounce of compassion in her. She started the rote learning which dominated my primary years. Her classroom was tiered in the manner of a lecture theatre and she seldom left her desk. Hours were spent chanting tables, learning by heart poems and passages from books and of practising handwriting and dictation.

By today's standards the curriculum was narrow. A hand-written Report for 1949 lists the subjects taken as :Arithmetic – Number, Mental and Money; Reading; Recitation; Dictation; Composition and Writing. By 1953 this had broadened slightly to include Mechanical and Problems in Maths and Geography and History. Other subjects were included but they appeared discretionary and depended upon the interests and inclinations of individual teachers. As always in Primary Schools the quality of the individual teacher was crucial. In the immediate post-war period there was a serious shortage of teaching staff and emergency arrangements had to be made to train virtually anyone who had an inclination to teach. The majority of teachers were therefore undertrained and under experienced. I can recall only one inspirational teacher throughout my time there. He was a Mr Maidment who took the top class, equivalent to Year 6. He introduced a previously unknown breadth to the curriculum including such activities as Art, Craft and Gardening. He also ran the School football team, but chiefly, he managed to deal with and befriend every one of the 43 pupils in his class. It is a sad indictment that, apart from some extra curricular activities, I do not recall being made to feel that I mattered and had a contribution to make at any other time during my six years at the school.

School routine varied very little. The day started at 9am with a religious assembly but this could never be organised on a whole school basis because of the lack of accommodation. Sometimes the infant classes were herded into one classroom together, and sometimes the perilous partitions were moved back to allow the juniors to come together or classes to co-operate. Mostly, however, stories were read and prayers said by class teachers in their own rooms. I cannot recall, at any stage, a piano being used or hymns sung although the command 'Hands together and eyes closed' signalled much corporate chanting of prayers. After prayers the real business of the day usually meant a good hour of arithmetic. This almost always involved mental arithmetic exercises and table chanting followed by 'sums' which the teacher would put up on the blackboard for the class to do whilst she marked from her desk. The sums were invariably concerned with the four rules with respect to the pre-metric tables of measurement, weights, money etc. and also 'problems' which I always found troublesome. At some stage during this milk crates would be delivered to the classroom by the milk monitors from the top class. These contained the one third pint glass bottles which were allocated and consumed before playtime. In winter these were invariably put on top of the coke stoves to warm through, a practice which I dreaded since I hated warm milk. After play order was usually restored by administering the daily spelling test from a list issued the previous day. Then followed handwriting practice in specially designed workbooks with three printed lines to accommodate upper and lower case letters. In the junior school, from the age of

Keith Upson Class IV. Dec. 19 49.

| | Poss Mc | |
|---|---|---|
| Mental | 10 | 4 |
| Number | 8 | 8 |
| Money | 12 | 12 |
| Reading | 10 | 4 |
| Writing | 10 | 4 |
| Spelling | 10 | 8 |
| | 60 | 46 |

| | Keith | | | Upson | Class IV | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number | 12 | out of | 12 | Dic: | 10 | out of 10 |
| Money | 18 | " | 18 | Comp: | 4 | " 10 |
| Mental | 8 | " | 10 | Writing | 8 | " 10 |
| Reading | 12 | " | 20 | | | |
| Recit: | 14 | " | 20 | | | |

89 out of 110. Pos. in Cl. 6.

HAMPSHIRE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

SCHOOL REPORT

Westend C. of E. Primary SCHOOL

NAME Keith Upson Class or Standard IV

Age ..... years ..... months Position in Class 16

Average Age of Class ..... Number in Class 46

| SUBJECT | Max. Marks | Marks Gained | Teacher's Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mathematics | 50 | 30 | |
| English: Reading | 20 | 10 | |
| Composition | 20 | 8 | |
| Recitation | 20 | 15 | |
| Writing | 10 | 8 | |
| Spelling | 10 | 2 | |
| Geography | | | |
| History | | | |
| Drawing | | | |
| Needlework | | | |
| Nature Study | | | |
| Physical Training | | | |
| Music | | | |
| TOTAL | 130 | 73 | |

Number of openings ..... Times absent ..... Times late .....

Conduct .....

Head Teacher's Remarks:

Date July 28th 1950. H. W. Harris Head Teacher

# School Photographs

1949

1950

seven upwards, pencils were banished in favour of the ink pen. There were no biro pens in those days and the standard issue pen was the dip pen with removable gold coloured nibs. Ink was made up from powder and delivered by an 'Ink Monitor' to the ink well built in on each desk. One of the pleasures of the beginning of term was to be issued with a new piece of blotting paper about four inches by three to mop up the inevitable blobs and blotches that overloaded pens and shaky young hands produce. Such was the intensiveness of training, however, that even by the age of seven I had achieved some mastery of both the pen and joined-up writing. The final instalment of morning school was either composition, where some stimulus for free expression was provided and we were encouraged to write stories of our own, or comprehension. I remember endless questions testing our understanding of passages and of always having to write answers in full sentences. It was boring!

Afternoon school usually started with a dictation exercise and gravitated to reading. This was taught phonetically. Reading round the class was by far the most common reading activity. With 40 odd pupils to the class you can imagine how tedious this was. I recall how furious teachers became when you were unable to pick up where the last reader left off and how painful it was listening to poor readers building almost every word syllable by syllable. No one book could ever satisfy the needs of a mixed ability group and the fact that they tended to be dull and uninteresting and totally without illustration simply exacerbated the problem. I cannot recall any one-to-one reading coaching. There was no school library and no facility to borrow books to take home. I guess each classroom must have had its own collection of books for reference but I cannot recall any. The atmosphere was too disciplined and controlled to allow any free reading activities to take place though you were encouraged to find something to read when wet weather precluded play-time. Finally, then, as now, the day finished with a story. The last act of the day was common in every classroom in the school. A prayer 'Lord keep us safe this night' was sung by everyone. Then followed dismissal, 3.30pm for infants and 4pm for juniors.

There were variations to this curriculum. Clearly reception infants must have spent time on freer, more creative activities, though I do not remember them. Similarly the curriculum expanded a little through the junior years. There were, however, three regular components which were fitted in. As a Church of England school Religious Education was part of the afternoon menu. Very occasionally Dr. Machin, the incumbent of St. James Church, would visit to tell Bible stories, but my memory fastens mostly upon the memorisation of large chunks of the Bible and doctrines of the Church of England. For example, I recall having to learn by heart the 10 Commandments, the Catechism and some of the 39 Articles of Faith. Another regular inclusion into the teaching week was P.T., though this was wholly dependent upon the weather since there were no indoor facilities for lessons. 20 or 30 minute lessons were timetabled for the playground twice a week during the morning whilst a longer period was reserved for Games once per week in the afternoon. P.T. lessons had much to owe to army training. Classes were organised into four ranks and the majority of exercises were 'on-the-spot'. There followed team games and free activities using beanbags, hoops, ropes and balls. Afternoon Games usually entailed foot-

ball, rounders and cricket for the boys and netball and rounders for the girls. The final subject practiced regularly was Art and Craft though I have no vivid recollection of serious Art work before Year 6. Certainly the use of paints was a privilege of the senior school. Up until the age of about eight or nine crayons and pastels were the order of the day. I particularly recall creating and shading geometrical patterns and of using milk bottle tops (then much wider than nowadays) and wool to make fluffy balls. In the final year, under the tutelage of Mr Maidment I remember a series of lessons on perspective and we were introduced to the wonders of 'scraper board'.

Compared to present day schooling at Key Stage 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum my Primary years were somewhat sterile. There was no Science or Technology apart from a sporadic dose of Nature Study, no drama, no classroom music that I can remember and by comparison only very rudimentary study in History and Geography. Not only were there no computers or calculators but the means of reproduction was also very limited so teachers had no means to manufacture worksheets or printed material of any kind. They were limited to textbooks and blackboard and chalk. In the austere world of the late forties most school books were pre-war in origin and sets were incomplete so there was much sharing, one book between two.

Needless to say, academically I did not succeed under this regime. I was one of the youngest in my class and therefore was nearly always behind the rest. I have always been the sort of person who responds to success and encouragement and I received precious little of either. My parents were generally supportive but my mother always compared me with my brother or my cousin David and found me lacking. The home environment also lacked stimulation. There were few books. My father sometimes settled to a paperback on high days and holidays, but I cannot ever remember my mother reading and I have no recollection of being read stories at home. Education was the schools' responsibility. It was then a secret garden. Teachers were rather more respected and revered in society. They were trusted to do the job and parent contact was not encouraged. Parents waited at the school gates. There were no parents' evenings, parents' association or open days and only one formal report per year to convey details of progress. Furthermore, apart from the run-up to the 11+ in the top class, there was no homework so parents had little real idea of what was happening. Few would have had the courage to question the school and interference or criticism would have been put down in such a way as to remind parents of their place.

My failure to be noticed for any academic prowess was offset, at a fairly early age, by my ability to attract attention by behaving 'inappropriately'! I was no little angel and plagued many a teacher with my excitability, incessant chatting and 'mucking about'. It often led to punishment and I was all too frequently stood in corners with my back to the class, or set countless lines of 'I must not…'. I was more than once sent to the Headmaster to be dealt with. There were two Headteachers in my time at the school. Mr Harris, affectionately referred to as 'Pop' held the reigns until 1950. He was succeeded by George Hodkin. Out of school both exerted a real influence on my life. In school, however, both were remote figures, seldom, if ever, seen in classrooms

who occupied a tin hut apart from the main building and whose only task seemed to be to mete out corporal punishment. Thus it was that on several occasions I stood before Hodkin with my hand held out to receive a caning across the palm. Regrettably even that, the ultimate deterrent, held little fear for me and I do not recall any consequent change in behaviour lasting more than a few minutes.

Despite all of this my early schooldays were carefree and very happy. I mixed well with other children, made friends easily and was never the victim of bullying or intimidation. As small as I was I always managed to stick up for myself and my behavioural exploits in the classroom were enough to keep me 'one of the boys'! Out of the classroom I enjoyed some success in sport. I was selected as a member of the school football team and played in a local schools' league most Saturday mornings. This took us to villages as far afield as Bishops Waltham, Durley, Curdridge and Fair Oak. As a team we were very successful, and whilst we never succeeded in knocking Hedge End School off the top spot we usually came second in the league. There were some teams though which we slaughtered every time. Poor little Durley School, for example, regularly lost to us by a margin of about twenty goals. My Dad was a keen supporter in this and was on the touchline on most occasions which raised my self-esteem no end. In the summer, being no good at Cricket, I represented the School at Rounders. This was less well organised and, after a few friendly matches, usually culminated in a tournament between local schools across one afternoon. I was also very successful at Country Dancing. Between 1951 and the time I left in 1953 there was a teacher on the staff with considerable interest and expertise in this activity. Using a wind-up record player as the source of music, we developed a small repertoire of dances which were displayed to a large audience of parents in the playground one summer afternoon in 1952. It was the only occasion of its kind I can remember. We also took part in a county wide festival of country dancing one Saturday in Winchester. Countless school troupes danced simultaneously to

'tannoyed' music on a large recreation ground which had been divided into squares. It was a huge event with a picnic between morning and afternoon sessions. Besides this, under George Hodkin, the school developed a choir. My ability to sing had already been spotted and I started singing with the Church choir as soon as I could read the ponderous words of the hymns and psalms. Membership of the school choir depended upon the ear of Mr Hodkin. Each class was set singing some well known song. Dear George would pass between the ranks holding his ear to the mouth of each individual child in turn to determine their worthiness and to weed out the 'grunters'. Once selected the honour of singing for the school at the Itchen Music Festival was bestowed upon the lucky winners. And lucky we were. Hodkin was a tall, no nonsense man with an ear for music and an aptitude for choral training which resulted in high quality, disciplined singing. At the time he was also Musical Director for West End Choral Society and Eastleigh Operatic Society. My dad belonged to both and it was the impact of school trips to see the Operatic Society's performances of The Cloches De Cornville and Merry England in 1952 and 1953 that led me into operatic singing. I was simply entranced, totally enthralled by what I saw on these occasions .They provided one of the most far reaching influences upon my early life.

Most of the social education in school took place in the playground. It is where relationships developed and were tried and tested sometimes to a violent breaking point. One of the vehicles of social interaction are playground games and because of the intensity of the emotions of acceptance or rejection associated with them, they tend to live on in the memory. Amongst the boys knockabout football was a twice-daily event during the season. The ritual of picking teams all too readily conveyed whether you were in or out of favour and whether you were valued both as a player and a person. It established a pecking order. The boys who emerged naturally as team captains, the 'pickers', were those widely regarded as the best players and their ability to pick reflected the ebb and flow of relationships within the group. I was usually midway down the field of this pecking order though I can remember the

shame of being near the end wondering whether you were wanted or not. These games dominated the playground and the girls in particular were pushed to the periphery. Their chief play activity was more akin to role play. The boundary between the cemetery and the school was marked by a number of tall pine trees. These were of the type that dropped an abundance of needles. The girls used to pile these in rows to make the outline of rooms and houses and then play a variety of make-believe activities. In our more mischievous moments we would career through the houses and scuff out the walls. The girls were also incessant skippers. Long ropes were wielded by two twirlers and groups of girls would run into the whirling rope, skip and then run out without impeding the motion of the rope. I remember chasing, or tag, also being a favourite activity of both sexes. This was of two types: single tag where, when caught, you became 'it' and chased the others, and chain tag where, when caught you joined with the person who was 'it' building up a long line of chasers as the game progressed. The games always started with the ritual of selecting the 'it' by chanting rhymes like 'Eanie, meanie, minie, mo!' Through the years there were a number of crazes which, for a short while, dominated all else. One was skipping and I can remember run-skipping all the way to school from home, a distance of about one and a quarter miles, day after day. Dibs, or five stones, was another which I became totally addicted to in the summer of 1952. I remember practising this so much that I wore a brown patch on the lawn. Every spare moment at school was taken up in competitions to determine the dibs champion. Previously hop-scotch had been a favourite and again many hours were expended trying to out-perform your friends. Marbles too came and went in fashion. I remember the fascination of collecting the large and pretty marbles and of swapping marbles for ball-bearings, the larger the better, for the use of these seemed to be the route to success in competitive games. There were other perennial games like conkers and Cat's Cradle which were also popular.

Many of these games flourished particularly through the dinner hour. School meals were available, initially at a cost of 3d each, or 1/3d per week. These meals were cooked on the premises and consumed in a dedicated dining room – a large tin hut next to the Head's office. The same degree of discipline existed here as in the classrooms and both teachers and dinner supervisors saw it as their duty to ensure that everybody ate everything they were given. Waste was a cardinal sin. My experience here turned me off some foods for the rest of my life. The quality of cooking was not high and there were some meals that turned my stomach over. Stumpy cabbage and tapioca puddings were particular aversions and I can recall retching and retching as I was made to eat every scrap. The result was that for a while, when Mum was not at work, I went home for lunch, a round trip of two and a half miles. That meant that I was walking five miles a day to and from school. It is little wonder that my mother insisted on making me wear hobnail boots!

1947 and 1949 were exceptionally harsh winters when there was considerable snowfall. At such times the school regularly closed. This was because the school toilets were outside, in the centre of the playground with no heating. So when they froze the school was forced to close. Winters seemed to be harsher then than they are

now. Hard white frosts were common and there was a show of snow most winters. We therefore benefited from more holidays during our time at school. We were also always allowed a day's extra holiday to celebrate Ascension Day. This was at the gift of the Governors and was always treated as a bonus.

Christmas is a magical time for children and there were, of course, class Christmas parties each year. These tended to be of the 'American Supper' type where each child brought from home something to eat and share. I can remember envying children given the task of making paper chains in preparation for these events and I can recall too the general level of excitement and anticipation. No parents were involved so the parties themselves were organised by the class teacher and were subject to her control. There was never sufficient opportunity therefore for me to let my hair down and enjoy myself thoroughly and, more often than not, I landed up being told off for 'going over the top'! For me therefore, the parties never lived up to expectation. By 1953 the school had acquired (or hired) a 16mm movie projector and comedy films and cartoons, then mostly confined to Mickey Mouse, were hired to augment the festivities. As a Church School you would have thought that there would be carol and other services held at the Church, but I can only remember this happening once. I assume the logistics of moving children ¾ mile was too much. As far as other school events were concerned I cannot recall anything that relates to a sports day with a variety of competitive races. The only major event I can remember was in June 1953 when the whole school assembled on the football pitch at Hatch Grange to celebrate the Queen's Coronation and we were all presented with a Coronation Mug, presumably financed by the Parish Council.

From 1950 the school grew at an enormous rate. The post-war baby boom coincided with a rapidly expanding village population as Council estates like Midlands, Barnsland and Harefield were built. A succession of temporary classrooms were added to the school to accommodate the growing flood. The economies of size and the leadership of George Hodkin undoubtedly brought improvements. Indeed, there was a growing sense of optimism as the country at large recovered slowly from the war. There was an easing of austerity. Bit by bit rationing was abandoned, there was more money about and massive reconstruction was well under way. Nationally the mood was encapsulated by the Festival of Britain in 1951, a large and impressive exhibition on the South Bank of the River Thames in London. Like the Great Exhibition of 1851 it was designed to show off the best of British ingenuity and inventiveness. The exhibition site was dominated by the 'Skylon'– a metal pinnacle balanced upon a tripod-like structure, and the 'Dome' which looked like a large flying saucer, which housed the main exhibition. I am almost certain that the school organised an outing there, thereby establishing a precedent for school outings in the following years. (My uncertainty is due to the fact that I know I was taken there by my parents and have a photograph to verify it.) Nonetheless there were outings in the succeeding two years, the most memorable of which was an outing to Windsor Castle in 1953 which included a boat trip up the Thames. It was a beautiful summer's day and I remember the luxury of nearly new Colliseum Coaches, canoodling with my first girlfriend, Valerie Baker, on the back seat and of losing my school cap overboard on the river.

In January 1953 we all attended Hedge End Secondary Modern School on two occasions, one week apart, to sit the 11+. Although I knew there was little chance for me, the glimmer of possibility and the promise of a new bike ensured that I tried my best. I recall that there were timed tests of mental agility, a standardised non-verbal intelligence test and, as usual, tests in English and Maths. I remember being disappointed that I failed to finish in the allotted time for most of them. Back at school, in the ensuing weeks, the pressure relaxed and we found ourselves doing a wide range of things both inside and outside the classroom, from gardening and doing odd jobs around the school to extra art. It must have been around Easter that the buff envelope arrived to confirm that I was destined for the Secondary Modern School. I still got the bike, but it was a Christmas present! My last act of charity for the school occurred on my birthday. Arrangements were made for the choir and country dancers to perform at Townhill Park – a large country mansion near Gaiter's Mill which was used as a home for disadvantaged children. I remember being so preoccupied with this that it detracted from my birthday and I was quite depressed because I guess I felt short-changed. I suspect that I must have sung solo at this event for it to have had such an anti-climactic effect.

Reflections on events 50 years or so ago tend to take the form of 'flashes' and there are a number of unrelated things which, for some reason, just stick in my mind. For example as an infant I can remember being given a cardboard 'push out and assemble' sugar cube man. I assume it was part of an advertising promotion. I guess it was so unusual in those days to be given anything as a gift that I have never forgotten it. Similarly I have never forgotten the initiatives for National Savings. The school sold 6d and 2/6d savings stamps every Monday at the time dinner money was collected by the class teacher. Everyone was urged to buy a stamp each week and stick it into a savings book. In my early years I do not recall having pocket money so the call to save relied on Mum supplying the money or gifts from passing relatives. Either way contributions were too erratic to maintain my interest. I can also remember being motivated by the use of stick-on stars which teachers awarded for good work. I recall that different colours reflected varying degrees of excellence with gold representing the pinnacle of achievement. I didn't get many of these but I remember the glow of pride when I did. Although my self-esteem was not high during these years and I was led to believe that there was little hope for me, I was trusted enough at school to be given monitorial and prefect duties. These involved distributing milk crates and collecting registers and assisting in the movement of younger children from playground to classroom by keeping them in orderly lines. I enjoyed this feeling of power and it was whilst performing this duty within earshot of parents at the school gate that I was first dubbed 'little Hitler'. For some strange and perverted reason I was flattered by this attention and I believe the first seeds of my teaching career were sown at this time. There was also a time when tragedy struck and the whole village went into shock and mourning. One of our number, a boy of about my brother's age, was killed when a tunnel he was digging in a local disused sand pit near the Sportsman's Arms collapsed and buried him. I remember being deeply affected by his loss.

At a distance of 50 years names are difficult to remember and I struggle to bring to mind more than a handful of associates. David Hallet was the football captain, then there was Redman and a Sidney somebody who my mother constantly warned me off because they lived in Orchards Way! There was also Noel Fray, Ann Moody, Clifford Lassam, Brian Truckle and a boy named Dunbar with whom I had a serious altercation. I remember a fight was set up with him one evening after tea down by the Belvedere Block Company where half the village turned up to watch. He was bigger (not difficult) and older than me and after the first couple of punches my courage and resolve deserted me and I made a run for it, much to the disappointment of the bystanders. For some strange reason, however, my nerve in standing against him was appreciated and the expected ridicule did not materialise. There were, of course a particular group of friends of whom I have fond memories. I shared some very happy times with Gary Edwards who moved to a house on the Midlands Estate from Lower New Road around 1950. I particularly recall performing plays which we had written ourselves to a group of assembled parents in the lounge/dining room of his house. Jim Edwards, Gary's Dad, was much involved with The West End Little Theatre Club at the time and they performed some magnificent farces at the Church Hall. I remember particularly The Poltergeist and Sailor Beware – plays that brought the house down and were talked about in the village for weeks. This stimulated our little group to try and emulate the adults. Our plays, of which there were at least two, were no more than a few pages long, but the preparations were intense. Costumes and props were cobbled together, extra lights were installed in one half of the lounge, and stage make-up, including moustaches and beards, was applied. These were our first public appearances and the nervous excitement was extreme. I can remember now almost wetting myself with anticipation waiting on the stairs for my cue for entry. It really was fun. We also constructed a den together in the garden at Chalk Hill using galvanised iron sheets which we wheeled from Thornhill on our bikes. Hideaways were very much part of our culture. We spent hours sitting in them and we would create little hidey-holes to conceal valuables and use orange boxes etc. for furniture. The construction of a shared den was the outcome of another friendship with a boy called David Houghton who lived way up on the Bursledon Road. His house had a long garden which backed on to an area of scrubland occupied primarily by ferns. Within this we created our little secret warren. At the age of eleven we all three went our separate ways and lost contact. Gary passed the 11+ and went to Peter Simmonds School in Winchester and when I last saw David he was seriously ill in hospital with kidney trouble and moved away to convalesce.

Another friend with whom I shared good times was Jeremy Simmonds who lived in Moorhill Road near the junction with Telegraph Road. His father, Harold Simmonds, was Headmaster of Hedge End Secondary Modern School and was, for about two and a half years, my piano teacher. He was an accomplished pianist and was closely connected with the Church. As far as I know I was his only pupil. It is a pity I could not have rewarded him by being more diligent and successful, but shutting myself away each day to practice was a trial and neither my aptitude nor my interest were

enough to carry me into his good books. Nevertheless, through this contact Jeremy and I struck up a friendship. (Jeremy attended St Mary's College as a private pupil.) Among other things we developed a common interest in train spotting and regularly cycled to Eastleigh Loco. Works in a bid to see as many different engines as possible. In those days a small book was available which listed the classes, names and numbers of all British Rail locomotives and we would underline everyone we saw. To this end we would spend hours creeping around the sidings near the engine sheds or waiting by a signal box in Southampton Road. To watch the Bournemouth Belle come thundering through with its brown and cream Pullman carriages pulled by a Pacific Class locomotive was a thrill we used to wait especially to see. I can also remember cycling to St. Deny's Station and getting a return ticket to Southampton Central. The novelty and exhilaration of travelling even that short distance by train on our own made a big impression on our young minds. Early in 1955 Mr Simmonds was appointed to the Headship of one of the first Comprehensive schools in the country and moved to Bristol and Jeremy and I lost contact.

The chief playmates of my Primary School years were cousin David and, to a lesser extent, brother Alan. We moped about and on impulse filled our time with a whole array of activities. There was seemingly no danger from traffic or perverts in those days and very little restriction was placed upon where we could go. We spent little time playing in our own gardens, we went 'out' to play. At that time most of the land between Chalk Hill, Church Hill and West end Road was woodland – part of it was referred to as the Wilderness, and it was our playground. I remember that Alan and his friend Keith Parker had their own den deep in the woods and a secret society to which I was sometimes admitted under sufferance. Apart from this we all played at army and cowboy games with bits of stick for guns or we pretended we were in the Foreign Legion, then much in vogue because it figured in the Eagle comic. We clambered up trees, made swings and played hide and seek and chase, and, in season, collected conkers, chestnuts and blackberries. We also spent time at Hatch Grange. Besides the village football pitch, which sloped away to the left of a grand avenue of beach trees, there was the remnants of the gardens of the mansion house which originally occupied the site. Chief amongst the attractions was an area of canes which we had great times hiding, chasing and rummaging in and also a flat, smooth and dusty area, originally a lawn but denuded of grass, which was well sheltered beneath giant fir trees. This provided an ideal surface for ball games of all kinds and for skidding about on bikes and on summer evenings quite a gang would gather there. We also succumbed to fads and fashions. Collecting car numbers was one. The main A27 passed the bottom of the road and you could be assured of a reasonable flow of traffic. Even so there was no difficulty in writing down every car number as it passed and there were sometimes quite long pauses. I recall that it was whilst David and I were collecting numbers that the Vicar pulled up and offered us a ride in his Standard Vanguard. He took us to the Crematorium in Swaythling and drove like a maniac.

My health throughout my Primary years was good. I seemed to have a fairly robust constitution. I suffered the usual childhood illnesses of measles and chicken pox soon after I started school but avoided mumps which I must have had some

immunity to. Beyond this I suffered a succession of nasty sties on the eye – huge, juicy red ones that nearly closed the eye before they burst. I remember regularly wearing an eye-patch to school. They were sufficiently menacing to warrant a Doctors visit. He gave me a course of five penicillin injections and I have not had one since! I seem to recall that personal hygiene was not a high priority as a little boy and I was not over zealous about washing. Even so I was a great deal cleaner than some of my contemporaries at school and I can well remember boys with filthy hands and necks, tatty clothes and shoes in an advanced stage of disintegration. They smelt! My mother's country origins meant that many home-made remedies were used especially to ease colds, coughs and flu. I can remember having goose fat rubbed on my chest and of drinking onion juice to ease the discomfort of winter coughs. She also saw the merits of building up resistance to germs during the winter by using supplements. The one I loved, and which she used to buy in huge jars from the Health Clinic, was Cod Liver Oil in Malt. This seemed to fortify me sufficiently to maintain my good health and I have sworn by it in of periods of vulnerability ever since.