

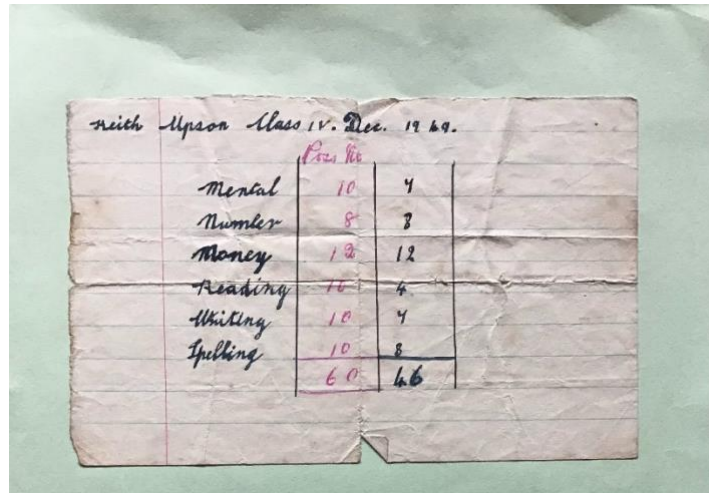
## MY PRIMARY SCHOOLDAYS

I started school in September 1947 just a few days after my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. St. James' Church of England Primary School, situated in the village of West End, 5 miles to the north-east of Southampton was a lofty Edwardian edifice built in 1905 to replace the schoolrooms in the centre of the village. It 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 classrooms and even a belfry to summon 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 40 and 45 children in each class and a desperate lack of books and materials, teaching methods were necessarily formal, remote and disciplined. The reception teacher was, from a child's perspective at least, an ogre of a woman of the old school – stern and unforgiving. I have seen children wet themselves under her scrutiny. 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 the front. Hours were spent chanting tables, copying letters, practising handwriting, and learning things by heart.

By today's standards the curriculum was narrow. A hand written report for 1949 lists the subjects 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 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 under-trained 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 and had perfected the art of differentiation. 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



Miss Upton Class 1V. Dec. 19 49.		
	Pro	Per
Mental	10	4
Number	8	3
Money	12	12
Reading	10	4
Writing	10	4
Spelling	10	8
	60	46

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 6 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, 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. Hands together and eyes closed signalled much corporate chanting of prayers. Hymn singing was more often than not unaccompanied or avoided altogether since there was neither the instruments nor teachers with the ability to play. 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 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 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 7 up, 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 replaceable 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 4 inches by 3 to mop up the inevitable blobs and blotches that overloaded pens and shaky hands produce. Such was the intensiveness of training, however, that even by the age of 7 I had achieved some mastery of both 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.

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. Most class readers were pre-war and tended to be dull, uninteresting, and totally without illustration. There were never enough, and more often than not, books had to be shared. I cannot recall any one-to-one reading coaching. It was clearly impossible with such pupil numbers. There was no school library and no facility to borrow books to take home. Each classroom had its own collection

of books for reference but these were limited and scope for free reading time was limited by the need to keep order. Finally, then as now, the day finished with a story. The last act of the day was common in every classroom. 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 the curriculum. Clearly reception infants must have spent time on freer, more creative activities though I do not remember them and the curriculum did expand 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 most 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 Ten 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 bean-bags, hoops, ropes and balls. Afternoon Games usually entailed football, 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 8 or 9 crayons and pastels were the order of the day with a lot of colouring in and cutting out and pasting.

Compared to the 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 studies in History and Geography. Not only were there no computers or calculators but the means of reproduction was also limited so teachers had no means of manufacturing worksheets or printed material of any kind. They were limited to textbooks and blackboard and chalk. Needless to say I did not succeed under this regime. I was one of the youngest in the class and therefore nearly always behind the rest, a distinct disadvantage when the measure of ability is measured by your 'position in class'. 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 the home environment lacked stimulation. There were few books. My father sometimes settled to a paper back on high days and holidays, but I cannot ever remember my mother reading and I have little 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 parent's evenings, parent's 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 stage 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 Head teachers in my time at the school. Both were remote figures seldom, if ever seen in the classrooms who occupied a tin hut apart from the main building who's only task seemed to be to mete out corporal punishment. Thus it was that several times I stood before them 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 of 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' – Just! Out of the classroom I enjoyed some success at sport. I was selected as a member of the school football team and played in the local schools league most Saturday mornings. 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

HAMPSHIRE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
SCHOOL REPORT ST. JAMES' PRIMARY SCHOOL  
WEST END, ST. CROFTON, SCHOOL

NAME *Keith Upson* Class or Standard *V*  
Age *9* years *0* months Position in Class *18*  
Average Age of Class *8.9* Number in Class *42*

SUBJECT	Max. Marks	Marks Gained	Teacher's Remarks
MATHEMATICS <i>Arithmetic 1</i>	100	90	
<i>2</i>	100	40	
<i>Mental</i>	100	85	
ENGLISH: READING	100	63	
COMPOSITION	100	60	
RECITATION	100	63	
WRITING	100	90	
<i>English</i>	100	90	
<i>Spelling</i>	100	25	
GEOGRAPHY	100	40	
HISTORY			
DRAWING			
NEEDLEWORK			
NATURE STUDY			
PHYSICAL TRAINING			
MUSIC			
TOTAL	1,000	676	

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

Conduct .....

Head Teacher's Remarks: *[Signature]*

Date *11/11/51* Head Teacher *[Signature]*



left in 1953 there was a teacher on the staff with considerable interest and expertise in this



activity. Using a wind-up gramophone 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, in the final years of my stay at the school, the Headmaster, George Hodkin, developed a choir. He 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 the Musical Director of both the West End Choral Society and the Eastleigh Operatic Society. 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. I therefore found myself singing with the newly formed school choir at the local music festival and for the first time singing solo at an entertainment put on in a local children's home.

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 emotions of acceptance or rejection associated with them, they tend to live on in the memory. Amongst the boys, knock-about 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. 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 mid-way down the field of this pecking order though I can remember the shame of being near the end wondering whether I was 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. Log ropes would be 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 or, chain tag where, when caught you joined 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 skip-running all the way to school from home, a distance of about 1 ¼ miles, day after day. Dibs, or five stones, was another which I became addicted to in the summer of 1952. I remember practicing 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 competitions. 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 Heads 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. 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. That meant I was walking 3 miles a day to and from school. It is little wonder that my mother insisted on making me wear hob-nailed boots.

1947 and 1949 were exceptionally harsh winters when there were considerable snowfalls. At such times the school regularly closed. This was because the school toilets were outside in the centre of the playground in a building with no heating. So when they froze the school was forced to close. We therefore benefitted from more holidays during our time at school. We were also allowed an extra day's holiday to celebrate Ascension Day. This was a gift from 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 film 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 have been carol and other services held at Church, but I can only remember this happening once. As far as other school events are 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 village football pitch and we were all presented with a Coronation Mug 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 several large Council Estates were built. A succession of temporary classrooms was squeezed on to the school site to accommodate the growing flood. A boost in school income and the economies of size 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 underway. Nationally the mood was encapsulated in 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 in 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 on a tripod-like structure, and the 'Dome' which looked like a large flying saucer which housed the main exhibition. The school organised its first outing there, thereby establishing a precedent for school outings in the following years. The most notable was to Windsor Castle in 1953, which included a boat trip up the Thames. It was a beautiful summers day and I remember the luxury of nearly new Colliseum Coaches, canoodling with my first girlfriend on the back seat, and of losing my school cap overboard on the river!

Reflections on events over 60 years 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 at school a cardboard 'push out and assemble' sugar cube man. I guess it was an advertising promotion on the part of Tate and Lyle but it was then so unusual to be given anything 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 upon 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. Different colours reflected varying degrees of excellence with gold representing the pinnacle of achievement. I didn't get very 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 in my last year. These involved distributing milk crates, collecting registers and assisting in the movement of younger children from playground to classroom by keeping them in orderly lines. For a small chap like me I enjoyed this feeling of power. There was also a time when tragedy struck and the whole village went into shock and mourning. One of our number was killed when a tunnel he was digging in a local disused sand pit collapsed and buried him. I remember being deeply affected by his loss.

Outside school I shared interests and challenges with a number of close friends, my cousin and brother. I particularly recall writing and performing little play-lets with one friend whose father was much involved with the local Theatre Club. They performed some magnificent farces in the local Church hall. The Poltergeist and Sailor Beware - plays that brought the house down and were talked about in the village for weeks were particularly memorable. 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. Encouraged by the adults, costumes and props were cobbled together, extra lights were installed in one half of the lounge/dining room, and stage make-up, including moustaches and beards, were applied. Seats were laid out in the other half of the room and all the parents assembled. These were our first 'public' appearances and the nervous excitement was extreme. I can remember almost wetting myself with anticipation waiting in the hall-way for my cue for entry. We also constructed a den together in an out-of-the-way corner of the garden using galvanised iron sheets we had managed to cadge. Hide-aways were very much part of our culture. We spent hours organising bits and bobs like orange boxes for furniture, and of creating secret hidey-holes to conceal our valuables.

I also befriended the son of my piano teacher. We developed a common interest in train-spotting and we regularly cycled to Eastleigh Loco. Works, about 4 miles distant, 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 every one we saw. To this end we would spend hours creeping around the sidings near the engine sheds to see and record as many as possible. One highlight was to wait near a signal box on the mainline to watch the Bournemouth Belle come thundering through with its Pacific Class locomotive and brown and cream Pullman carriages. I also remember the novelty and exhilaration of buying a return ticket and travelling from one station to the next on our own. The daring and excitement made a lasting impression on our young minds. As for the piano lessons, unfortunately they were anything but exciting. My teacher was the Headmaster of the local Secondary Modern School – an accomplished pianist and a charismatic man. I revered him. As far as I know I was his only pupil. It was a pity that 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 interest were enough to carry me into his good books.

The chief playmates of my Primary School years were my cousin and my elder brother. 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'. On our doorstep was a large area of woodland known locally as the 'Wilderness'. It was our playground. I remember my brother and his friend had their own den and 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, we collected conkers, chestnuts and blackberries. We also succumbed to fads and fashions. Collecting car numbers was one. The main A27 passed the bottom of our 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 remember being offered a ride by the Vicar in his Standard Vanguard. He took us to the Crematorium 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 some immunity to. I remember my mother having to pay the Doctor a shilling for him to visit me. 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 Doctor's visit. He gave me a course for 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 state of disintegration. They smelt! They were amongst the children weeded out by the 'nit' nurse on her regular visits to school and who, no doubt, took note of their neglected condition. 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 winter by using supplements. The one I loved, which she used to buy in huge jars from the local child clinic was Cod Liver oil in Malt. This seemed to fortify me sufficiently to maintain my good health.

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 I was destined for the Secondary Modern School. I still got the bike but it was a Christmas present!