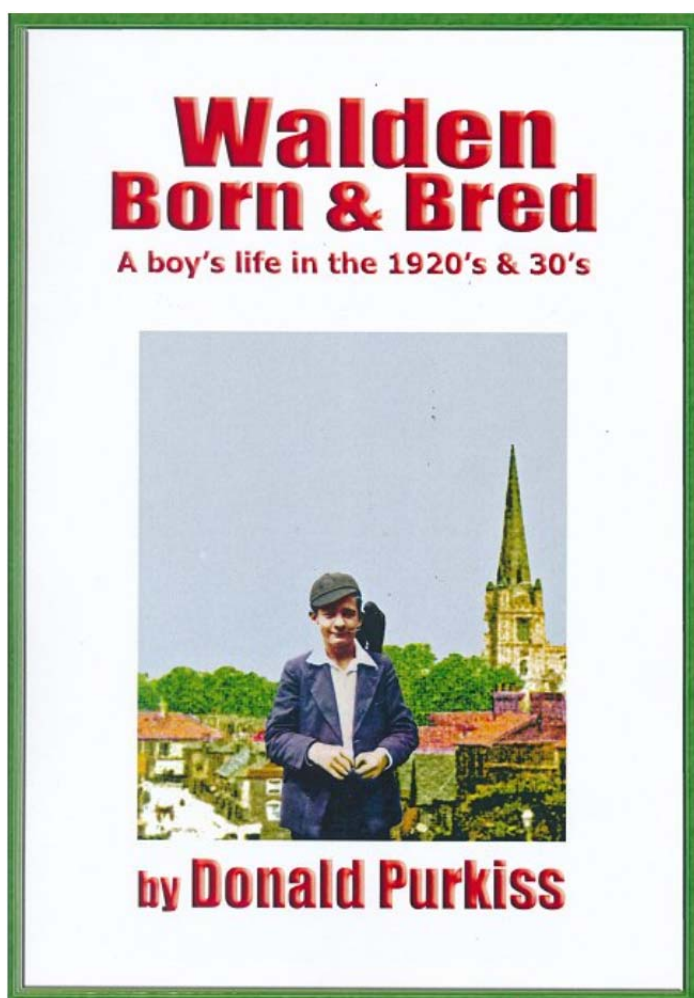


“Walden Born & Bred - A boy's life in the 1920's & 30's”

An extract from this unpublished book by **Donald Purkiss** who was a pupil at FSSW from 1931 to 1937 by kind permission of the author.

FRIENDS' SCHOOL – a personal reflection of life at Friends' School in the 1930s.



Starting at Friends' School was undoubtedly a very thrilling experience. There were not a great many surprises because Joyce had been there for two years and so I knew roughly what to expect. The fact that it was a boarding school made it especially exciting. Some of my Sunday school prize books had been school stories, with tales of tuck boxes and midnight feasts in the 'dorm'.

I had to have new clothes and they had to be bought at a particular shop. Gray Palmer was not good enough and my blazer had to come from Joshua Taylor of Cambridge, much to my mother's annoyance. Football shirts were specially made in the school colours of red and green. All clothes including underwear

had to be labelled. A red and green segmented cap was also required. (My first school cap blew off on a ferry in Plymouth). New boarders would have been sent a very comprehensive clothing list. It was quite an expensive business.

We had no lessons on the first day, but we were shown our classroom, allocated a desk, shown the boot room and toilets, the library, the gym and changing rooms, and best of all the swimming bath. There was a matron, mostly for the benefit of the boarders, who was a sharp little Irish woman with a squeaky voice. We were given a

number for use in the boot room and changing room. My number was 92. We were also allocated to 'houses'. These had nothing to do with location, but were divisions for competitive purposes, mainly for games and sports. The three 'houses' were named after prominent Quakers and were 'Moorland, 'Crosfield' and 'Godley'. I was in 'Godley' (of course!).

My first impression was that all the boys at playtime were on roller-skates and having a lot of fun. Not only were they skating on the asphalt playgrounds, but also in the playroom where the boarders' trunks were kept. My parents had no peace until they had bought me a pair of skates. The first pair was cheap and pretty useless, but at Christmas I had a 'Rolls Royce' pair on which I became quite proficient. The roller-skating craze had been introduced by an American brother and sister named Heaton. The Heaton boy also tried to introduce other less healthy activities such as 'blubbing' new boys. Luckily this form of bullying never really caught on.

On my first day a curly haired boy with very bright blue eyes came bouncing up to me and said, "My name's Tommy, what's yours?". He seemed so naive I couldn't believe it! I expect he had been told to make friends. His name was Marsh and his father was a very tall man who lived in a very modern flat-roofed house in Landscape View. (In 1956 I designed a house for his widow, which Albert Reynolds built in Mandeville Road). Tommy had come up from the Friends Junior School which was so different from the Boys British School. He didn't stay at the school for long.

There were only a few new day boys that year (1931). In my class, as well as Dick Jossaume, there was Kenneth Dunscomb (son of the Borough Treasurer), William (Billy) Emson, a farmer's son from Strethall Hall, and Percy Kent, also a farmer's son from Chrishall. Percy was usually brought to school by car, but sometimes he rode to school on his horse. This he described as a 'winded' hunter. He would tether it to the hockey pavilion and let it graze all day. Percy had had polio when he was younger and walked with a limp. This, and his broad Essex accent, led some of the older boys to regard him as a country bumpkin and Percy used to play up to this saying things like, "You can't prove to me that the world is round" in a thick Essex brogue. Actually he was very clever and always got top marks. His limp didn'tstop him playing football and he eventually played for the first eleven. His father bred 'heavy horses' for the Crown. One of the Kent farmhouses had a moat, so Percy made himself a canoe in the carpentry class and he used to paddle it on the moat. His hunter was the first horse I ever rode.

Billy Emson and his sister came to school on bicycles, but one day there was a terrible tragedy and she was knocked down by a car when riding over the 'Adam' bridge at Audley End. (Later, Billy Emson had a career working for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries at Chelmsford).

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Co-education was new to almost all of us and seemed very strange. Some of the staff insisted that we sat next to a girl and at ten years of age we were not keen on this. However, all the girls were healthy looking, well-spoken and smelled only of soap, unlike some local girls I encountered. For some classes I sat next to Jill Southall, a day girl who is now the widow of Jack Griffiths, the former golf professional. She lives in Gibson Close (her lovely garden can be admired from the Battles Ditches footpath). In another class I was put next to Hazel Tinney who was a boarder, although her farming family came from Clavering.

We were all lucky to be at the school at this time because the staffs were of the highest calibre, and among them were a number of exceptional people who could be described as 'characters'. The headmaster was CB Rowntree, a member of the Quaker chocolate family. He was a rather stern upright character in every sense of the word and was an excellent traditional headmaster. Unlike his successors he was not adverse to corporal punishment, but only in extreme circumstances. I remember an instance of his use of the cane which happened at the beginning of my second year. There was a new boy whose name was, I think, Mortimer and he had an obsession about running away. He thought it would be "a heck of a laugh". On a Wednesday afternoon, which was always a holiday, he went missing. Somebody must have given him away because a search was organised. He was soon found by the games master, Mr Edmundson, on the road to Newport. (I think 'Eddy' had a motorbike). Mortimer ran into a cornfield to hide, but he was no match for the games master and was taken straight to the headmaster's study. After a severe lecture he was caned. When he left the study he found that he was still in time for the 'general bathe' in the swimming baths, so he came into the changing rooms as large as life and proudly showed us his bottom!

Rowntree retired soon after I went to the school and soon became much involved in affairs of the town. He became Borough Councillor, Alderman and Mayor, but is best remembered for his book on local history called 'Saffron Walden Then and Now'. He was a Rotarian and may have been a founder member. He had his roots in the town and as a young man had played football for the town.

The senior master at the school was Arnold Brereton who was another high-minded Quaker and a splendid maths teacher. He also had the responsibility of the boys' moral welfare, or so it seemed. Occasionally, usually on Saturday mornings, he would address the boys on moral issues and it was from him that we learned the dangers of masturbation. He was known as AB or sometimes as 'The Great Man'. I'm not sure why this was. Maybe it was because he was frequently philosophising and talking of great men. We were being educated at the time of the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany and the distinct possibility of a war with Germany. In this context AB had stated that "Never would he cringe under the earth for fear of his fellow

man". A bold statement indeed, but he was as good as his word. I may be the only person who heard him make this declaration and who knows that he was true to his word. When war broke out AB became an Air Raid Warden. One night when he was patrolling on the road to Debden with a man named Perry there was a massive air raid on Debden Airfield in which two hundred bombs were dropped in twenty minutes. When it started Perry dived into the nearest ditch and yelled to AB to do the same, but AB continued walking and would not take cover. Perry was amazed and spread this story in the town. Like CB Rowntree, Arnold Brereton became a Borough Councillor after his retirement. He was also a Rotarian.

Teachers at Friends' in the 1930s



Rhoda Jones, Albert Lindley, Badger, Norma Wright, Mr Skurr, David Pearson.
Stanley Pumphrey, Salley Waites, Helen Radley, Annie Murray, D.Y. Pugh, Edna Clark, Gladys Bird.
Mrs Graham, Jock Smiley, Florence Priestman, Gerald Littleboy, Elizabeth Sparkes, Arnold Brereton, Margaret Yapp.
Mr. Heap, Jenny Waites, Walter Baldwin, Dorothea Waring, Henrietta Beechham, Stanley King Beer, San Nurse.

Mention must be made of two other extraordinary characters and really good teachers. Our history master was a man named Stanley King-Beer. He was a wonderful actor and acted out history in an unforgettable way. No wonder history was my best subject. The youngest boys called him 'Uncle Booze' to his face as a term of affection, but this privilege was only for the new boys for underneath he was a man of steel. His appearance was rather striking. He had long greyish hair, not quite shoulder length, but on top his head was bald and shiny. He always wore a

corduroy jacket with leather patches at the elbows. He was a Devon man, born in Plymouth, and he knew Dartmoor very well indeed. Every year in the summer holidays he organised and lead a party of older pupils on a hiking holiday in Dartmoor. This was known as 'The Tramp' and became a school tradition. He was a man of strong convictions and high moral principles. As a young man he had left home with only a shilling in his pocket and became a tramp for a year to really experience poverty and hunger. When the First World War came he was a conscientious objector, and was imprisoned and given hard labour. Not being physically robust this was particularly hard for him. He survived partly by having toilet breaks every fifteen minutes. He told us that after the war it took him two years to get back to a normal toilet regime. He had a son named Michael who was born deaf and dumb. He was sent to a special school when he was very young and when I knew him as a teenager he had overcome these handicaps amazingly well. He was a nice chap.

King-Beer and Arnold Brereton were not resident at the school, but lived next door to each other in Edwardian brick houses in Peaslands Road.

The other extraordinary character on the staff was David Pearson, known as DP. He taught German and French and was very good at it, but he was special because of his wit and dry humour. His anecdotes broke the tension of an intense language lesson. One gathered that he had been some sort of religious student in Germany before the First World War. When the class was distracted by an aeroplane going by he would say, "Don't worry, it's one of ours". At the time we all thought it was funny, but not so a few years later. In his spare time, DP could always be found walking in the 'Avenue' with a ponderous gait as if the 'Avenue' was a cloister.

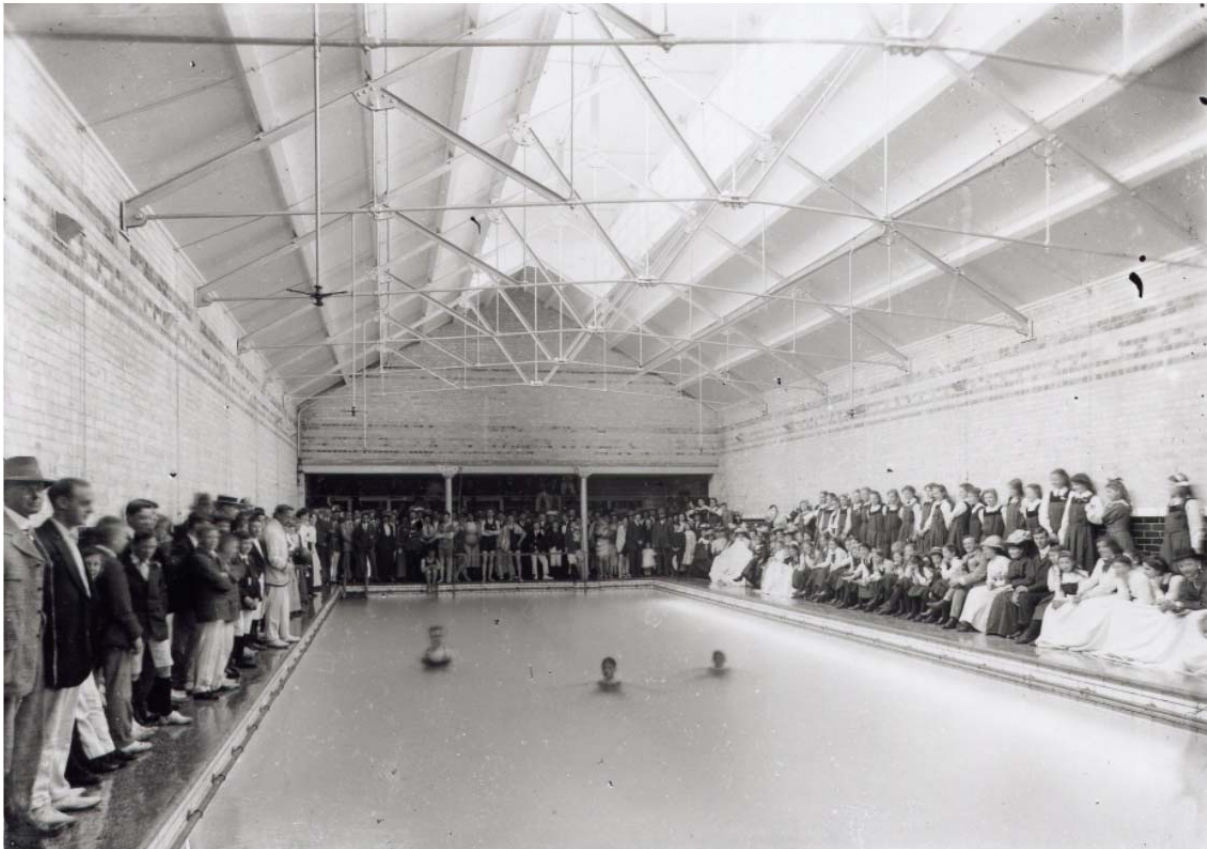
(NB: The 'Avenue' of lime trees was a central feature at the rear of the school separating the 'boys side' from the 'girls side' The school magazine was named after it.)

DP was also a group master and on rare occasions administered the slipper to persistent offenders. He did this in his study and afterwards sent the sometimes tearful offender away with an orange.

Not all the staff were admirable. We had a carpentry master named Smiley who was a bad tempered Scot. My father had high hopes of him teaching me carpentry skills, but he was to be disappointed. If one went to him in class and asked what to do next, the chances were high that he would respond with "Ooch! Away to ye kennel and boil ye heed!". One thing he was good at was acting. He was great in the school play 'The Crimson Coconut'. He was a keen gardener and had a special piece of land at the back of the school fields for his use. In it he made a pond and a rockery. It was known as Jock's Pond and was officially out of bounds, but this was generally ignored. A music teacher named Miss Noreen Wright and he were said to be 'good friends'. Jock's teaching career came to an abrupt end when he won a lot of money

in some sort of sweepstake. I don't think he did much work at all after that. Little was said about it at school because gambling in any form was much frowned upon. Years later he employed me as his architect.

At break time we used to kick a football around on the gravelled playground on the boys' side of the 'Avenue', but after the first term the builders came and built a biology lab and a geography room. This severely limited the space we had for football. I wondered who would be the first to break a window and, sure enough, it was Dick Jossaume. It cost him half-a-crown.



The swimming pool in 1902 – at or soon after its opening.

The thing I enjoyed most about the school was the swimming bath. There was a 'general bathe' every day, and often a gym class would end with a short swim. I was intrigued by the diving boards and spent most of my time diving. To my surprise I was picked out to dive for the school to compete against local swimming clubs and schools. At the time I was small and slim, and entered the water with hardly a splash. Later on when I entered for a life-saving medal I found that I lacked stamina for swimming. We had to swim four lengths Breaststroke and then, without a break, two lengths on our backs with our arms folded. I struggled to finish my four lengths and was so relieved to turn on my back.

My father was the very first person to swim in the swimming bath when he was an apprentice with the firm William Bell and sons which built the swimming bath in 1902.

When work was all but finished, the swimming bath was filled with cold water for the first time for testing. There were just two men left on site and father was one of them. I can just imagine the excitement created by that bath full of water, cold though it was. One must remember how rare swimming baths were then. The man in charge of building maintenance at the school at that time was Nathan Turner and my father sought him out and said "How about a quick dip, Mr Turner?" He considered for a moment or two and then said "In at ten past one and out at twenty past. No longer!" This was lunch time for the school when the grounds would be deserted. So it was that father had such a privilege.

At the school we were made aware of what was going on in the world politically and internationally. For older scholars there was in fact a lesson called 'Civics'. During my first year there was a mock election. This caused no end of fun. Candidates were selected from the senior pupils to represent the parties and they swooped down to our classroom chanting their slogans and giving out leaflets. In the end it was the Liberal Party that won.

There was great poverty in the country at that time, particularly among the Welsh miners. The school tried to help and held a fete to raise money for them. I was surprised to see Stanley King-Beer in charge of a gambling stall, but found he was shouting, "It's a mug's game - come and prove it!".

Punishments at the school were rather odd in that instead of being given 'lines' one was given 'words'. Every half-day holiday on Wednesdays and Saturdays a classroom was allocated as the 'punishment room' and the master or mistress on duty for the day would be there. If one were given, say, twenty words, perhaps for not doing your homework (or 'prep' as we called it) one would have to attend the punishment room on the next half-day holiday and carefully copy out twenty words from a special book. A doddle, you might say, but the number of words you were given was cumulative so that if you had more than so many words in a week you would be 'gated'.

Other punishments included 'standing practice'. One might be given half-an-hour or an hour and have to stand in the punishment room for that period. I found that the worst punishment and the one I was given most frequently was 'changing practice'. This was given if one was late for games. Twice a week we had games in the afternoon starting at two o'clock. In the morning, lessons ended at one o'clock and the boarders finished lunch at half past one, so they had plenty of time to get changed and on the field by two o'clock. As a day boy I had to go home for lunch which was our main meal of the day and get back to school and changed within an hour. This was not always possible, even when I was cycling. Having lunch at school was the answer, but that was expensive. Our 'changing practice' consisted of getting into, say, football gear, boots and all, and reporting to the master on duty and then changing back and reporting again. Usually one was given six to do so it took up most of the afternoon. Some of the time was taken just finding the master on duty if

there was no-one in the punishment room. That's a long-standing grievance off my chest!

I was once given 'lines'. This was for walking off with a pencil from the art room. Several boys had taken the art pencils with them to the next class, so the art mistress noticed their absence and came storming down to the science lab where we were in class with Mr Pumphrey. It was he who gave us the punishment and I had to write two hundred lines saying, "Taking pencils from the art room is as bad as taking bricks from a building site". The other boys had similarly appropriate words to write.



This group photo was, I think, taken in 1934. On the front row, from the left are Tommy March, Betty Allen, me, Jill Southall (now Mrs. Griffiths) Percy Kent, unknown, Michael King Beer, Michael Pawsey, unknown, Mark Headley.

While I was at Friends' School I came to really appreciate the Quaker Meeting. Every morning assembly was a short meeting and every Thursday morning there would be a full religious meeting. These meetings were characterised by long periods of silence. Not just periods when nobody said anything, but non-shuffling, non-coughing silences. When a school of about 200 pupils aged from ten to seventeen stay that quiet and still for so long, to be part of it is quite an experience. Imagine the two minutes' silence on Armistice Day going on and on. Just occasionally somebody,

anybody, might be moved to share their thoughts or read a passage from a book. Usually it would not be the bible, for the Quakers believe that people have been inspired in their writing long after the books of the bible were written, right up to the present day, and today's books were often more relevant to us. When the time came to end the silence, the headmaster would shuffle and everyone would relax. That was how it was, but I wonder if there is still the same self-discipline.

Every day except Saturday and Sunday there was an assembly, but first there would be 'collect' in the boys' and girls' playrooms. We lined up in height order irrespective of age, and there was a roll-call. We then filed into the tiered lecture room for assembly. Later, when the school hall was built, we had to trail across to the hall in the open in all weathers. Getting to school in the mornings was always a rush for me, and I really appreciated the ten minutes or so of complete silence to gather my thoughts and prepare for the day.

During my first year, academically I 'held my own' having had a good grounding in the 'three Rs' at the Boys British School. There was only one really new subject and that was French. Our teacher was Miss Waites and she taught us to pronounce French phonetically which made it easier, but I'm not sure that it was a good idea in the long run. In the second year, one almost had to start again. Miss Waites had bad teeth and watching her teaching us pronunciation was most unpleasant. I suspect that she smoked a lot. Our class discovered that she loved Paris and if we could get her onto that subject there would be little serious work done for the rest of the lesson. I remember waiting for the world to end in one of her classes. There had been a huge amount of publicity about this prediction, not only in England, and so the staff were also aware of its significance. We were more pleased when the lesson ended!

In this first year we had a strange lesson called 'texts'. We had to write and learn wise sayings. For example, I remember learning, "I said to the man who stood at the gate of another year, 'Give me a light that I may see my way into the unknown' ..."etc. All very well, but I think we could have spent our time more profitably!

After the first year we were given the choice of taking Latin or German, and also between taking chemistry or biology. I was pleased that my parents wanted me to learn German rather than Latin, and biology. The only Latin I learned was by accident. Some of the classrooms were divided by light removable partitions so one could hear something of the next-door class. We used to hear the Latin class chanting the conjugation of verbs such as 'amo, amas, amat' etc. Latin was taught by a mistress named Miss Yap - a name we thought very appropriate. Some years after I had left school my parents met a couple from Bristol who lived next door to Miss Yap. They said that she was in fact married, but had to conceal this to keep her job. I think the law changed during the war.

On Saturday mornings we had no serious lessons, but we met in groups under our group master. In these sessions we were counselled about social and personal matters as previously mentioned, and we also dealt with our accounts. Each term we deposited a sum of money for petty cash. As a day boy my requirements were modest and I usually put in 10/- a term. One could buy fruit at certain times. A prefect would stand in the playroom with a basket of fruit for sale. One could buy quite a variety of fruits including pomegranates which I had never seen before. They were surprisingly popular, but they had to be eaten outside so that one could spit out the pips.

There was one other time when extra food was available and was intended only for boarders. After prep in the evenings, the kitchen staff would put out a basket of bread which was often quite stale, but the boarders would scramble for it. The bread was known as 'bricks'. Many boys (and perhaps girls) had a pot of Marmite in their trunks and would eat the dry bread spread with Marmite. Having had tea once or twice at school I could understand their hunger.

A few years later the school had a tuck shop run by stage 5 economics class. The class also sold ice lollies made in the science lab. Every member of stage 5 was a director of a company, and the tuck shop was run like a business with dividends to be had at the end of the year.

The boys' side and the girls' side of the school were fairly strictly segregated except during class times, but outside there was only voluntary separation. If a boy wanted to get to know a girl and ask her out, or sometimes vice versa, he would ask her to 'walk round' with him. To walk round meant walking round the perimeter of the playing fields. This practice was tolerated by the staff. The headmistress, Miss Priestman, a typically severe looking Quaker lady, once referred to "Jolly little friendships developing". She didn't know of the disused and overgrown lane which ran along the eastern side of the playing fields and provided wonderful places for the younger boys to make secret 'dens', and for the older couples to disappear for a while.

'Walking round' was something I only did once and that was in my first year. I did it to please my sister who had a friend who wanted to walk round with me. Appropriately her name was Una Forward! I didn't repeat the experience.

Of course there were some who went beyond the boundary of the rules and incidents did occur. Two boys were suspended for a term after they had been discovered in one of the girls' dormitories. Appropriately their names were Young and Long!

Young was a communist and once tried to spout his propaganda in a Quaker meeting. After I had left school I would sometimes meet him distributing communist leaflets on the streets of Cambridge.

There was quite a craze for shouting communist slogans at one time. Some day girls who came to school by train from Audley End chalked a slogan on the black tarred boarded fencing in Station Road. It read:

"RED FRONT RED FRONT RED UNITED FIGHTING FRONT"

It was not difficult to identify the culprits, and they had to take buckets and scrubbing brushes and clean it all off. All the girls' families were really true blue Tories! I wrote 'RED FRONT' on a bog door and had to do likewise but in greater privacy. One did daft things at school.

Sport at the school was traditional. Football (soccer) and cricket for the boys, and netball and hockey for the girls. There were tennis courts, but tennis was not taught. Tennis tournaments were arranged, however, between the houses and at one time I played for Godley. Once a year there was a hockey match between the girls and the boys, but this was just a bit of fun. The ref's whistle was constantly blowing.

In my last year at school I was sometimes selected to play football for the first eleven, but more often captained the second eleven. They were useless. I remember losing to a Newport Grammar School team 16-0. This must be a record! I loved cricket, but I was not good at it. The problem was with my eyes. The realisation that I needed glasses only came in my last year and I avoided wearing them whenever I could.

If you were particularly good at a sport you could win your 'colours'. I'm not sure how it all worked, but I think a badge was sewn on your blazer. There was also a tradition that the collar of one's blazer could only be folded down if you had your 'colours'. Or was it the other way round?

One year the school held an open day for parents and friends, and put on a gymnastics display and a tableau of 'People of the World'. I think this happened in my second year. I was selected to take part in the gymnastics which took place on the girls' playground. The tableau was really a dressing-up exercise for the girls who were displaying national costumes. One very beautiful girl was draped in a gown and had one breast exposed. I had never seen anything so lovely. In fact most probably I had never seen a bare breast before. I believe the girl was one of an American family named Heaton.

Biology was a subject that I was looking forward to, but in fact I didn't really enjoy it. This was partly because we had a master named Hindle who was a bit of a bully and most unpopular, and partly because we did quite a lot of dissecting of creatures and I was a bit squeamish. Percy Kent sometimes supplied rabbits for dissecting and once he brought one which surprised Mr Hindle when he cut it open because it had young. Percy had a cunning look on his face that morning because he knew perfectly well what to expect but he didn't say a word.

One day Dick Jossaume told me that he thought he knew where there was a jackdaw's nest. He took me to an elm tree in Thaxted Road, just at the back of where the Leisure Centre is now, and sure enough in a hollow left from a broken bough were some jackdaw fledglings. Dick wanted to keep two of them so he improvised a scoop from his cycle mud flap attached to the end of his pump and scooped them out unharmed. We took them to the school's pet shed and put them in a hutch intended for rabbits. After a while Dick tired of them and became rough with them, so I took them home to look after. I kidnapped them, or more accurately hijacked them!. One of them had been scared and was very nervous, but the other became very tame. They had the run of my father's workshop during the day and were put in the hutch at night. When they were fully fledged they didn't fly away and the tamest one would stay on my shoulder while I walked round the town. It made an awful mess of my blazer. I have a photograph of the bird on my shoulder and I look just like a scruffy 'Just William' character.



When we went on holiday in the summer I let the jackdaws fly free, but left the hutch open so they could roost there as usual. When we returned from holiday the tame jackdaw was missing. We looked everywhere for it. After about a week it was returned to us by Mrs Green who lived a few doors away and had a large family, mostly of boys, the youngest of them being Russell, later to be Mayor and Freeman of the town. They had found the jackdaw and had looked after it, and fed it rather too well. It seemed to be completely stuffed and wouldn't eat or move. The other jackdaw was most concerned and kept nudging it with its beak. That night it died. The other bird was not the only one who was upset. The wilder bird soon flew away and could fend for itself, but it would often return to see us. It loved anything shiny and we could tempt it down with glace cherries. It would peck at the metal tags on our shoe laces.

The only thing I was interested in at this age was nature. I spent my spare time birds nesting and pond dipping. I frequently went to the 'gault hole' where there were a series of ponds. This was down Cement Works Lane, off Thaxted Road, and was where gault clay had been extracted for us at the cement works. The ponds were full of interesting creatures including crested newts. There were voles, water-rats and tadpoles galore.

At this time a weekly magazine was published called 'Outline of Nature' and it cost 7d. Although my pocket money was only 6d, I managed to buy it every week and I did this for two years. If one saved every copy for a year the publishers would bind them into one volume at no cost. I did this and still have both volumes. The publisher was Sir John Hammerton. One of the ways I got extra pocket money was to collect and sell sweet chestnuts to the boarders. One of the older boys who came from London wanted to muscle in on my enterprise and bulled me into showing him where they came from. We cycled to the woods on Audley End Estate and on the way I told him how there were gamekeepers who were inclined to shoot first if they saw a trespasser and talk afterwards. When we got to the woods I crept along very secretively, and when the first pheasant flew up making its usual squawking sound the boarder turned white and was soon off back to his bicycle. He lost interest in the project.

I had been taking photographs since I was seven years old, following in my father's footsteps, and the photographs of birds' nests in the weekly nature magazine inspired me to have a go. I had never collected birds' eggs, although it was not illegal in those days, but I liked to see them and identify them. I had a box camera and a tripod, and it was great fun. Most of the results were not very good, but one or two were rewarding. Moorhens' nests were the easiest because they were often quite exposed. One of my most treasured things is an enlarged photograph of a garden warbler on its nest with its chicks. It was taken by Eric J. Hoskings FRPS, and is bound into Volume I of my 'Outline of Nature'. Hoskings was a celebrated wildlife photographer of that time. I had never met him, but he was a friend of a man who stayed with us one weekend. He was a visiting missionary who had come to preach at the Baptist Church and we were giving him hospitality as part of my mother's duty as a church deacon. He heard of my enthusiasm for bird photography and got his friend Hosking to arrange with the bookbinders for the insertion of his photograph into my copy of volume I. It was a wonderful surprise for me and a great gesture on his part.

Mr Hindle, our biology master, took advantage of my enthusiasm for birds and got me involved in a national survey of rookeries in which he was taking part. On my half-day holidays he would send me off on my bicycle with the appropriate ordnance sheets to plot the rookeries and count the nests. After cycling home from one of these expeditions against a cold strong head wind I became ill and was away from school for many weeks. My schooling in some subjects never really recovered. However, on the plus side I did get to read 'David Copperfield' and other books that I wouldn't otherwise have found time to read. (People now tell me that my illness was probably glandular fever).

Music played a large part in the life of the school and there were some excellent music teachers. Mrs Radley who played and taught the cello had won a national award. She was quite a character and was known as 'Ma' Radley because her son was a school prefect. She was quite a character and I am reminded of Margaret

Rutherford. Miss Noreen Wright, who was much younger, taught the violin and led the school orchestra. She was a pleasure to watch. Miss Bird, a chirpy little lady, taught the piano. I was one of her pupils for a while. Concerts by the school orchestra were frequent and of a high standard. That could not be said for the school choir of which I was a member. The choir once performed 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' and I was in the chorus among the altos. The principal part of the Piper was taken by our new headmaster, Mr Littleboy. My parents came to the performance and my father latched onto a particular phrase that the Piper sang ... "No trifling! I can't wait". From then on when he needed to go to the toilet that was what he sang.

There was a boy in my class named Mark Headley, a farmer's son, and we were good friends. He was known as 'Es' because he never pronounced the 'y' in yes. He used to get boils, whereas I got spots. One day I met him in the playground with his arm in a sling. He told me that he had a boil on the end of his elbow which had gone septic. The next day he was in the san (sanatorium). We were told in assembly that the septicaemia was spreading and he might have to lose his arm. The school was trying to contact his parents to get permission for an amputation, but it seemed that they were abroad and could not be contacted. The headmaster could, however, act on their behalf and give his permission. Unfortunately, he debated the issue too long and Mark died. In assembly the next day the Head expressed the agony of his grief and remorse.

Every class was weighed and measured at the beginning and end of term. This was done in the gym by the games master. He once remarked to me that I was the only boy who lost weight during the holidays. After having school food I'm sure the boarders would have made up for it in the holidays. On the other hand I was having the same food, but doing hard physical labour from 8 o'clock until 5 o'clock on the houses my father was building. I remember using the pick and shovel on the service trenches at 30 Borough Lane and slating the roof on a bitterly cold day during the Christmas holidays. I did all sorts of jobs on the houses, the favourite being making slatted shelves for the airing cupboards. One of the 'perks' I was allowed, was to collect all the lead off-cuts from the lead aprons and flashings around the chimneys. A bag of these would fetch anything from half-a-crown to 10/- at the scrap yard. One summer holiday when I was about 14 I told my father that I was fed up with doing odd jobs and would like to build something from start to finish. He said I could build a detached garage for a house in Peaslands Road. I managed everything quite well except the rendering (plastering) which I could not get to stay on the walls.

It was becoming clear to me that my future after leaving school would be a life of doing this sort of work for my father, and I found this prospect most depressing and had little incentive to work hard at school. But then my father heard about the London School of Building. He heard about it through a building hardware salesman named Tom Ward who was going to night-school there and studying to be a heating engineer. My father decided that I should go there after I left school. This was great news for it opened up the possibility of my becoming a surveyor or even an architect,

and so escaping the perceived tyranny of working for my father. Not that my father was really a tyrant. This meant that I had to pass my exams so I started working hard. (Incidentally, Tom Ward succeeded in becoming a heating engineer and his firm of T B Ward Ltd based in Letchworth was very prosperous).

Now I knew where I was heading my school curriculum had to be changed. I had to drop some subjects, like biology, and take physics which was actually called mechanics. I also had to go down a class to catch up on algebra and geometry. My favourite subjects, however, were still history and English literature. During the first years at school we had a young English master named Walter Baldwin on whom many of the girls, including my sister, had a crush. He was fond of Wordsworth and romantic poetry generally. Now our English teacher was the headmistress, Miss Priestman, who liked to deal with sterner stuff so we studied John Milton and Spenser. I really enjoyed 'Paradise Lost' and I can still quote some passages of it. Not the same could be said for Spenser's 'Faerie Queene' which I thought unsuitable for study with a mixed class.

Every year the Houses had a summer outing and each House went to a different venue. Godley always went to Little Chesterford Manor, but the others went further afield. The Manor was obviously occupied by a Quaker friend of the school. A river runs through the grounds and we were able to paddle or even bathe in it. One was soon aware that the river was full of leeches.

The day of the summer outing was the one day of the year when there was a mixed bathe. This was the highlight of the day, but it was also the only day of the year when trunks or costumes had to be worn, and this caused a problem for some as normally everyone bathed in the nude.

The majority of pupils at the school were British, but there were a few from other countries. During my first year there was an older Russian boy who was very popular. He was already called by a nickname, probably because his real name was hard to pronounce! There was a handsome West Indian boy of my age named Mendes who was a great athlete and sportsman.

There were a number of German Jewish refugees. My sister was friendly with a girl named Ana-Maria Goldschmit. In my class was a boy named Fleishman with whom I used to wrestle. The wrestling, which took place either in the gym or in the changing rooms, was supposed to be in fun, but we were both very determined, almost as if we were wrestling for our country. We were evenly matched which meant that the bouts were repeated.

There was a German boy named Hans Gyer who came from Dresden and was a keen Nazi who behaved in an almost stereo-type fashion. He wore nailed boots and his footsteps resounded around the school corridors. He was generally disliked, a fact that didn't worry him at all. When the results of an important exam were posted on the notice board and people were thronging around to see the results, a boy

named Timmy Evans was shocked to find he had failed in one subject. He was a popular boy and people were saying, "Bad luck, Timmy". Hans Gyer was heard to comment, "Bad luck my foot. He should have worked harder".

In my class there was a girl named Judith Lockspicer whose father was a renowned research professor. She was very attractive, as she knew, but in spite of this I can't remember anyone dating her. Perhaps she was above and beyond mere schoolboys.

One of my friends was Roger Browning. He was a farmer's son from somewhere near Coggeshall. I kept in touch with him after leaving school. He had become an auctioneer. I last wrote to him as Captain Browning of the Royal Engineers, care of a bank in India. In contrast, another friend of mine, Brian Stanger, met up with me in Saffron Walden after release from prison for being a conscientious objector. He had come back to the school as a cleaner, but eventually joined the teaching staff.

In 1933 my friend Jack Turnbull joined the school for a couple of years before going on to college in London. Later he became involved with the Old Scholars Association and was president one year. He had what I think was a distinguished war-time career driving an ambulance in the East End of London during the blitz.

Some of the boys' nicknames were memorable. In my class was 'Boots' Wellington and 'Bugs' Woodhouse. Woodhouse played the violin and became a professional musician. He married 'Snippy' Francis who was in the same class. I was called 'Perky' by most people, but 'Peak' by a few. I have no idea where the 'Peak' came from. One box named Wily was known as 'Tripod'. I leave you to guess why! He is said to have eaten 14 Mars Bars in one afternoon. Perhaps that was the secret.

There was not much bullying at the school, but a day-boy named Snape was teased a lot. He was a highly strung boy who was a brilliant violinist and he lived in a musical world of his own. He lived in Bridge House in Bridge Street and even his mother thought he was rather strange. He was in love with a girl named Enid Shiner and it was about this that he was teased. He had a good career as a professional musician.

During the last two years I spent most of my time at school. After tea, Joyce would go to Auntie Kate's next door to do her homework and I would return to school to join the boarders for prep which was always supervised. Some days I would have music practice before prep as I was now having piano lessons with a new master named Thome. He was known as 'Sissy' Thome because he was a rather camp and excitable man. He would go wild when he heard me attempting to play jazz after my practice. There was another boy named Keeble who liked to play popular music and jazz, and he was very good. I remember his rendering of 'Small Hotel'. It was from a London show that was on at the time. After prep I would stay at school to read or socialise.

There was always a master on duty at this time, but only one master took the job seriously. He was a new master and I think his name was Douglas. He used to patrol like a warder between the library and the classrooms, noting where everyone was. The library was used like a common room for both boys and girls. Everyone found his frequent inspections most irritating. One night when I was in the library and was sure Mr Douglas had noted this, as soon as he closed the library door I climbed out of the window (quite a big drop) and ran down the playground and in at the playroom door. When he reached my classroom he looked astonished to see me sitting at my desk, but he made no comment. Other boys took delight in baiting him too. A senior boy named Shiner set off a firework on a long fuse out of the window just as he approached the classroom, and when he opened the door Shiner was sitting at the master's desk reading the papers. Douglas asked, "Who did that, Shiner?". He replied, "I wouldn't like to say, Sir".

That reminds me that each group was allowed a newspaper every day and always the Manchester Guardian was the popular choice.

During the time my sister first attended Friends' School, probably 1929 or 1930, my father was building houses in Landscape View. When building No.22, the house above the drive to the Water Works site, he made an interesting discovery while excavating for the foundations. He came upon an area paved with ornamental tiles. My father thought they were ancient, possibly Roman, so he went to see Mr Collar, the museum curator. Incidentally, his daughter Dorothy was attending Friends' School at the time. Mr Collar wasn't the slightest bit interested and wouldn't visit the site, dismissing the idea that they could be Roman. My father was cross about this, but was not going to give up his investigation. He had heard of a master at Friends' School named Morris who was knowledgeable about archaeological matters. (I remember that Mr Morris had a daughter who was in my class and was known as Mona Moke for some reason). When told about the find, he came and examined the tiles and confirmed that they were Roman. Still Mr Collar took no interest. To this day the museum has no record of this discovery.

There were two after school societies which one was encouraged to join. The Literary Society, known as 'Lit', and the Natural History Society, known as 'Natch'. The Literary Society kept a weekly diary of school happenings which members took turns to write. Every week without fail there would be an entry "Miss Midgley spoke in meeting". I guess she always did.

I joined Natch, for this was where my real interests lay, but also because a girl I liked the look of was a member. She was known as Angus because she was Scottish and she sometimes wore a kilt. In the summer there were quite frequent outings on bicycles to places of some special interest such as woods and ponds. Members would be asked to do a report on the results of a pond dipping exercise or something similar.

The last Natch outing I went on was undoubtedly the best. We cycled on a round-about route to Little Easton Manor, stopping at various sites on the way. This was 1937 so of course the manor house was still standing and occupied by the Countess of Warwick. She was not there when we arrived, but we were shown her 'doggery' if that's the right name. There were at least twenty dogs and they had been trained to do all manner of tricks including sitting at school desks!

There was an aviary on her estate a short way away which was very special and open for us to see. Unfortunately, I didn't get to see it because a chap named Johnson, an American from Oregon got a puncture in his borrowed bicycle and hadn't a clue how to mend it, so I stayed behind to do it for him. We were mending the puncture in the courtyard when a chauffeur-driven Daimler drove up. The chauffeur opened the gates and drove in. In the back of the car was a haughty-looking lady gazing down at us through her pince-nez. We took no notice and carried on with the job. Shortly afterwards the chauffeur walked over to us and said, "Her ladyship wishes to know who you are, what you are doing here, and why you didn't acknowledge her". We told him and apologised, of course.

Cycling home from this expedition I rode ahead of the pack, and to my delight Angus caught me up and we cycled home together. That made my year! The next day I was baptised and the day after that was my sixteenth birthday. It was a weekend I have never forgotten.

At the end of that term I left the school. **Paradise lost.**