

I came to Breakspear School from Coteford School in September 1968 as Head of the infant department. Mr Ettling was Head Teacher with at least 30 staff. Mrs Babs Browning (who is here tonight aged 97) was his secretary and Mr Bedford was the School keeper who knew every inch of the school building and organised the cleaners. It was at the time of the “ bulge” i.e. the children whose parents were born when the servicemen returned after the war in 1945/46. The number of children in the school was almost 800 and we had 42 children in a class. It was a large school for a primary school.

In the Infant Department we had 6 classrooms in school on the ground floor and two Terrapin huts beyond the green hut. There was no water access to the hutted classes or to two of the rooms in the main building. With 336 children we had 16 members of staff, including 8 full time teachers and 6 part-timers that worked alongside the full time ones. We also had voluntary help from many parents who helped with handwork, cooking, listening to reading and clearing up. There were so many children we were not able to take them into school until the term after they were five. There were two local nursery schools in the village, which many of the children had attended but often, new entrants could only scribble when they first joined us.

When Mr Ettling held a staff meeting there were about 30+ people in the staff room, which is where the Infant staff-room is now and which, was formerly the kitchen. The staff toilets were up in the Junior School so it was a bit of a rush if you were in the huts and needed the toilet at break time and had to get your coffee. The toilets for the children were in a concrete unheated blocks and in wet weather the hutted children would have to dash to the toilets through the rain.

The present Infant hall was the only hall and was used for dinners as well as for music and PE. The dinners were organised in shifts and anyone living within a mile of the school had to go home for dinner. The dinners were cooked on the premises and I thought they were very good, especially the cheese flans. In fact our cook catered for special functions put on by the Borough so she must have been good.

The old Head, Mr, Ward was always invited back to present the prizes on Junior sports day until he died.

It is funny some of the things you remember for instance, in February the children who were 11+ took the 11+ exam and all the staff would stay behind after school to do the marking. It was Mr Ettling's birthday in February so he always provided cakes for us when we marked. We continued to help mark until the demise of the exam in 1972/3.

In 1969 the authorities decided they would have to split the school so in September 1970 Breakspear became two separate schools and I became the Head of the Infant School.

We still shared the hall for sometime until the new hall was built but Mr Ettling moved to an office upstairs, as did the junior staff. The Infant staff had the old staff room and my husband and I decorated Mr Ettling's old office for me. My secretary had my little office. And the welfare assistant had an area in the cloakroom closed off as the medical room.

Both schools worked together agreeing things like the type of writing we should teach the infants to make the transition to Junior school easier. Because we used apparatus called “ Stern” with blocks of 100, 10s and 1's to show practically how to do e.g. 34-17 we agreed not to teach written down subtraction of large numbers as our way may have confused the children in the juniors. We also continued to insist that boys wear short trousers, as Mr Ettling would not have long trousers until a

boy was a certain height. We did permit infants to wear long ones to school in cold weather but they had to be taken off while in school.

We were lucky to have well behaved children whose parents cared. We held "Open Evenings" in March and we saw at least one parent for every child. At these evenings we put on a display of equipment and showed how we taught maths or reading and writing in alternate years.

We tried to teach the children that we should help less able people by raising money for charities. like breast cancer, the scanner or MS. This was done by sponsored spells, walks around the grounds and each year a sale for "Save The Children" where each class had a stall selling cakes, squash, flowers, old books or old toys, which was fun for all.

It was mainly a happy school where we had lovely children and parents, caring staff that worked as a team and who, though retired for many years, still keep in touch.

During my time at the school there were many improvements to the buildings. The air raid shelters were demolished to make way for the nursery, which I think, has since been enlarged. We were quite excited about having a nursery but once the frame went up there was some problem with the firm going broke or something and it was a few years before it was finished. Warm bright toilets were built as part of the building, the infant staff room was decorated and toilets for staff were put in, water was put into the huts and the Parent's Association paid for the hatch in the secretary's office so visitors could be easily seen and knew how to get attention.

Shortly after the start of the nursery build we had a tragedy when we lost the Orchard Family. They were so excited about their trip to Croatia that afternoon but their plane flew into a mountain near Zagreb and there were no survivors. Their memorial is a window in St. Giles Church.

There was more autonomy for Heads, which started to change in 1984. for example the teaching of phonics was not advised and in a great many schools it was stopped, but we continued to teach it together with "look and say" as children learn in different ways and phonics is the way to help dyslexics. Teaching of tables by wrote was another instance.

In 1985 any teacher in the Borough over 50 could apply for early retirement with some enhancement. Five teachers in the Infant school, Mrs Howells, Mrs Vivian, Mrs Sizer, Mrs Mitchel and I took up the offer and Mrs Devine became Head of Infants.