

HANWELL REMEMBERED

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Pauper Childhood – 1904-1910 by Henry Martin

C. Chaplin was at the Central London District Schools five years before my advent so I am unable to claim seeing him personally, but he, like me, remembered only too well the appalling discipline, work, drilling ad infinitum which the staff relished imposing on the boys. For in the late Victorian and Edwardian era, to be a pauper child rated you the lowest form of life.

Once a year all the big shots (Guardians etc.) came down to see and inspect the school, the lot - human livestock as well. Superintendent Hindrum gave we boys merry hell for three weeks learning intricate drills of countermarching, formation, pattern and floral design. The band and players became physically exhausted. We cursed the Fete, the Guardians, the cane in dressing rooms in daily use. Any boy slack at drill got the cane and still more cane. How we dreaded it all. Come the great day. drill perfect, more and better food, some prizes, flags bunting, jingoism a la Kipling.

The Matron was Miss Hall, a widow but we rabble had to call her Madam. Head Nurse Ayres had to be called Madam and Hindrum Sir. Nurse Ayres was the Terror of our Lives. I never found out why Matron Hall was referred to as Miss but it was so. She was white haired, low voiced with a lovely kindly face. Miss Hall always told each boy up before her for sentence how many strokes of the cane he was to receive. She was kindly and let many a boy off a very sore bottom, but her final word to those she sentenced was "Wretched Boy, you will receive so and so strokes of the punishment cane to be administered on the buttocks. Now don't let me see you here again." Ten days later the sentence was carried out - waiting for it was awful.

Our loud speakers of 1904-10 vintage were two lusty bugle boys. This went on all day and every day, the bane of our lives. Should anything untoward happen, Hindrum would bawl out to the boy on duty in stentorian voice, "Sound the Still, Boy", and we 600 boys in that flagstoned play and parade ground would instantly freeze and God help the boy who moved. This would mean the cane and also extra fatigue and drill before bed and prayers.

However it wasn't all austerity, work and discipline. We made our own happiness and altogether the CLDS was a good place to prepare for the battle of life with all its hazards and complexities.

I can tell nothing of the feminine side of CLDS. We were completely isolated from the girls. We only saw them in that huge dining room at meal times, both sexes facing each other and a gap of ten feet between us. I had a younger sister at the school and was allowed to talk to her for one hour once a week, on Sundays, but iron bars between us.

A good band and band master and good swimming baths lessened the austerity, plus a good cricket team. Beyond the end of the long drive facing the school was the farm with cows, pigs and poultry. The swill from the school fed the pigs; in due course those pigs fed us, ditto the milk. Need I add we kids never saw an egg.

The Army and Navy of those days found ready made recruits in all the boys, being well versed in drills, discipline and 'Yes Siring'. The training ship Exmouth was the be-all and end-all of all the maritime minded boys. I was pulled out of the CLDS to earn my living on a lovely sparkling Autumn morning, Saturday, October 8th 1910. A label tied on me, a tin box change of clothes, best suit and boots, a two inch thick Bible, a Primer on Thrift and a new sixpence all my worldly possessions, and so to Slough Station and so into the Unknown, a hallboy in Gentleman's Service.

The Old School, by A.F. Dickson

I was resident at Cuckoo School, full name Central London District School from 1909 to 1915. Starting from near the bottom of Greenford Avenue near Great Western Railway is a pub; I think it is called The Park Hotel with a theatre attached. Walking up Greenford Avenue the last turning on the right was Framfield Road. The last turning on the left was Studland Road. Past there was fields and hedges to Greenford, except for a house here and there. The main entrance to what is now the Hanwell Community Centre was opposite Studland Road, double gates for traffic and single gates for pedestrians. Just inside the gates was Mr. Holmes' house where he lived with his wife and daughter. On the corner of Framfield Road was a galvanised iron building, a religious building. From there up to opposite Studland Road was a wooden boundary fencing.

From Mr Holmes' house there was a long forked road. The right fork had two houses, one for the doctor, one for Mr Tiffin who was responsible for all food arrangements. In front of these houses about 100 yards across the fields was the education department, girls upstairs, boys down, separate building for infants. The left fork road led round to the main building. In front of the clock tower was a very long straight road which reached right down to the road by the river Brent. You could see from one end to the other, the trees being in a perfectly straight line. The boys called it the Unter den linden which is the German for avenue of lime trees. The field on the left was for cows to graze. The field on right (which went near to Castlebar station) was the sports field, first corner was croquet lawn for matron and friends, further over cricket and football pitch, about 50 yards along the tree road was an open water reservoir. Entering the building just left of the Clock Tower, was Mr Holmes' and night watchman's lodge where workmen and visitors had to call. Along the corridor to the left were clerks offices; across the end of the corridor was the parson's room (Rev. S.W. Allen). The door at the end led to girls and infants dormitories, in front of the dormitories was girls yard and day room for wet weather. Down the steps to left was the garden, very large, reached nearly to Castlebar, about six gardeners employed, Mr Wilkes in charge, with strawberries, cherries, apples, pears and some vegetables. The farm which reached to river Brent grew potatoes and vegetables. Back to the girls yard and up the slope was the infirmary, Sister Pearce, Nurse Wells and two other nurses (had my tonsils out there).

Headmaster education for boys Mr Gill, both himself and the parson lived in Shakespeare Road. Headmistress of Girls Miss Dukes later married as Mrs Fen.

Now back to main building; to the right of ground floor under clock tower was a long room where the board of management met each month. Mr T. Palister Young being the chairman, also a solicitor was supposed to be a descendant of William Pitt. Opposite was Matron's Office; further along the corridor and on the first floor were matron's quarters. Out through glass doors across boys dormitories A and B block. Myself and Sid Chaplin slept in A block, Nurse Radburn and three nurses. Charles Chaplin slept in B block, Nurse Eyre and three nurses. She later married Mr Martin Superintendent of Works.

Back to what was the dining hall. If the floor boards have not been replaced you will see where the steam pipes used to come through the floor for the four hot plates where dinner was served. The theatre stage must be about 100 years old. It used to be assembled before Xmas and dismantled about Easter and stored in one of the rooms under the dining hall. On the wall was large showcase, with cups and shields won for swimming and other sports. Further on same wall were honours boards with names of winning boys and girls. Outside the other end of dining room was a small lobby, with hand operated lift bringing food up including bread and cakes from bakeries, also a flight of stairs to basement. Past the lobby was a bread store on left, on right staff scullery. Further on were kitchens -staff on the left, on the right for children, two enormous steam boilers to make tea and cocoa, also enormous steam oven, where meat puddings were steamed. Outside stage end of dining room on left was a concrete passage about two yards wide. On the other side of the passage was a building the length of the dining hall. Most of this was the laundry except for a very small room where staff grocery and provisions were issued. At the end of this passage was a flight of steps to the infirmary.

To the right of dining hall was a row of cottages, the length of dining hall was a row of cottages, the length of dining hall, the first one, an office for superintendent (Mr Martin), the rest living quarters for female cook and assistants. The male cook for children, also the bakers did not live on premises, but arrived at 6 a.m. and departed 5 p.m.. Past this row of cottages was a gate to the boys' yard, then a long building, which was the children's scullery. Opposite this long building was another long building where the engineers pumped water and electricity was generated. At the end of this passage way was another entrance to the infirmary with a flight of steps. In front of A and B block dormitories was boys yard, the other side which is now a grassy slope were steps to the education department. Up the steps and path across field to the right of A block was a very long building, part occupied by Mr Drake, manual training (woodwork), then a very long room where boys undressed for bathing. Then another long room with about 30 baths.

Next was the room where the band instruments were stored and some practice took place, the other practice room was eight sided near the fence near Castlebar Park. After the band room was the drill master's room; George Hindrum, with three men assistants. He retired in 1916 or 1917 to Leigh-on-Sea. The opposite side of the yard was where boys used to clean their boots (no shoes) with Day & Martins Id skins of blacking. Next was the tailor's shop, then the boot shop, Tommy Abbot with leather apron he was a bit of a Tartar, kept cricket bat handy and if you wore your boots too low he would crack you across the knuckles with bat handle. Underneath the main building was known as the arches. All rubbish was stored there until carried away (plenty of rats). In the basement was the grocery store, then next store for fruit and vegetables, then butchers store, room to store theatrical stage, and at the farthest end, level with far end of dining hall was the bakers' kitchen where all the bread, rolls, cakes were made.

Thirteen Years at Hanwell by Stanley Pollard

Have I any memories of Hanwell school? Well yes. I should think so, as I believe I can claim to have been there longer than any child.

My father died when I was three, and as there was no widow's pensions or social security in 1910 - by brother Jack and myself were sent to Hanwell via The Workhouse, but I was too young to even remember that important episode. However I spent one year in D block then under supervision of Nurse Brown, and was then considered old enough to be transferred to Park School which was a part of Hanwell school but fenced off for privacy and safety from the other scholars.

At the age of seven, I was transferred back to Hanwell where I stayed until three weeks short of my sixteenth birthday, when I left to join an army band.

My earliest outstanding event I can remember concerned Mr. Hindrum, a twenty stone ex-naval man who was the drill master. One day at a swimming session under his supervision I was inattentive and in trying to give me a whack with his enormous long cane which he was an expert at using, he overbalanced and fell in fully dressed. Did all the other kids laugh, and I got away with it.

Another one? Mrs Hall, the Matron, retired and Mr & Mrs Collins were appointed superintendent and matron respectively. Were they unpopular!. That's an understatement. They were thoroughly disliked by the scholars and staff alike and finally left under a cloud after my time.

However, one day - a Monday, which was soup day, Mrs Collins came into the dining hall. Passing the table (I mess) where I was sitting at the head, as I was sergeant of I mess, she noticed my uneaten dinner of soup. " Why aren't 't you eating that soup boy? " she said, I replied I didn't 't relish it whereupon she ordered me to "eat it, and be quick". Well I just could not - and did not. So much to my indignation and fuming with rage I was made to stand up on the seat for the whole period of the meal, with all the boys and girls silently looking on and secretly sympathising with me. Mrs Collins also threatened to save the soup for my tea meal. But she never did come to the dining hall for tea. So I was saved another confrontation with her, and I was quite a hero to the boys for a week or so. By the way because of her ample bosom, she was given a rather rude nickname by all the boys and I'm sure that if any old boy reads this, he will chuckle and remember it.

Another old boy, Charlie Chaplin had arranged for the whole school to see one of his films at a picture palace at Shepherds Bush and what excitement as a fleet of buses arrived for the outing. At the entrance Charlie was supposed to greet us, but the huge crowd which had gathered prevented this, and Charlie (never one for public exhibition) refused to appear.

And so we had to make do with his generosity of a pork pie, bag of sweets and a shilling for every child. And the school band benefited by two new instruments. Talking of the school band, whilst it was a wonderful outlet for any boy with musical ambitions and ability, it also afforded us many outings by way of band engagements, which besides taking us into the outside world, also meant high teas on the job which we all looked forward to immensely.

Some boys - like myself - got to the top of the band world by way of bandmasters and/or musicians in the Guards Bands. I was principal Euphonium in the Scots Guards Band for fifteen years. And also with me was L. Capon (Principal Trombone) and A. Williams (Principal Cornet) so it was quite a Hanwell achievement. And in the Welsh Guards was A. Webb (Principal Flute) and W. Budd (Clarinet & violin) whilst the Life Guards had A.Cordery (Euphonium) and so the massed guards bands concerts, we all got together for a few reminiscences.

Incidentally, I remember how Mr Collins, the superintendent wanted musical accompaniment at

meal times, for grace, before and after. The result was, a quartet was formed from the school band consisting of cornet (Bob Hardaway) horn (Ernie Billot) baritone (?) and euphonium (myself). And it proved a great success and was still going strong when I left in 1922.

Another great innovation was the dressing of the school choir in surplices and cassocks. What I felt as I wended my way, singing lustily in the leading pair, the first time we appeared at Sunday service and then I tripped over my long dress and stumbled amidst giggles and stares -I recovered blushing but my pride was humbled!

I cannot let staff memories fade - with Nurse King blowing loudly on her whistle when she saw us boys at our special meeting place (the girls' loo) near the Infirmary. We awaited the opportunity to speak to our own special girlfriends, but talking to girls was expressly forbidden. Dear old Nurse Radband of A dormitory, making her final evening rounds, and shaking and dancing her bunch of keys to warn us of her approach to enable us to scuttle to our beds and feign sleep. I always remember what she said to me as she stood over me stripped to the waist and washed one evening:- "Stanley Pollard, when you are washed nice and clean, I always feel that I want to kiss you." I think I must have been a grubby urchin with a school girl's complexion hidden away.

She was strict and tough, but fair, with us boys and beloved by all, and oh! how she always welcomed us back on our visits to the school and her meagre rations were always placed at our disposal. Does any old boy remember those outings to Kew Gardens and Lyons for tea after? And pantomimes - about a dozen boys at a time and all paid for by her, what a personality!

Of course, I could go on and on, but what's the use. All we have now are memories. I'm 73 now. But Hanwell memories will always remain with me. Hanwell - A Poor Law School and super workhouse. But nothing to be ashamed of, indeed I'm proud to be able to claim Hanwell school as my childhood home, and my ambitions realised beyond my wildest dreams. And I think this goes for every Hanwell scholar I meet.

Ten Years at Hanwell by A. Bradley

What was life all about at Hanwell? I can only tell that though the ten years I spent there and even then I have to rely on one of our school managers for details of my early childhood.

My father died about three months before I was born, mother only lasted a few months after my birth. Both died of consumption, a common complaint with the poor of those days. Housing conditions, malnutrition, limited medical services, claimed many a victim with an illness that in these days is so easily curable. Most of the boys and girls lost their parents early in their lives. Some had aunts and uncles, but struggling to bring up their own families they were in no position to accept further responsibilities by taking them in.

I was born in Princess Street, Elephant and Castle Mum and Dad had just two rooms on the top floor of the house, one a kitchen, the other a bedroom but not big enough to be a bed sitter. The kitchen was small, the gas cooker being on the landing. When mother died I was sent to a foster mother who had a large house in the market street of Westmorland Road. She had several babies like myself under her care. At the age of four I left the foster mother and was sent to Hanwell.

For three weeks I lived in the isolation block, which was well away from the school's main buildings. The idea was that no disease was brought into the school. The doctor thoroughly examined you on arrival, and when you got the all clear, you were transferred to the main buildings and your life at Hanwell began.

Other orphanages at this time had dozens of cottages to house their children, but at Hanwell life was communal. The girls, about 300 of them, had two huge bedroom blocks, the boys, about the same number, also two blocks. In between were the main buildings, with the Superintendent's and Matron's living quarters and administrative offices, the chapel above them plus the school clock tower which could be seen many miles away. A row of buildings, including the dining hall separated the boys from the girls. They each had a large concrete playground, and a large room and gymnasium each in case of wet weather. There were two dormitories on each of four floors in each block. Each held 30 children with a nurse in charge of each ward. She had a cubicle for her sleeping quarter in the ward. The only lighting was gas, and being wartime all the windows were painted green. Beds were all iron with solid mattress. When any lads left school, you moved up a bed and eventually to the next block, so it could be said that thousands of lads had actually slept in the same bed. That way the age level was maintained in each dormitory.

Up at six in the morning, our first task was to make our own bed. Nurse inspected it, and if not up to her standard would strip the clothes off, and make you make it again. We then swept, polished the floor and dusted all round, leaving it in perfect condition. All the polishing was done on our hands and knees - no gadgets for easy cleaning in those days. Then a thorough wash, clean our boots, and inspection by our yardmaster. Then we were marched in orderly fashion to the dining hall. Breakfast consisted of a plate of porridge, two margarine rolls and a mug of cocoa. Eggs and bacon were something I did not taste until I left school. We used to sing a very innocent song when our superiors were not in sight:

There is a happy school not far away
Where we get rolls and marg
Three times a day.
Eggs and bacon we never see,
We get brick dust in our tea
And we are gradually
Fading away.

No china or crockery, the plates and mugs were all enamel. The girls sat on one side, and the boys

on the other in the dining hall, a long passage six feet wide separating us. There was a stage one end of the Hall, from which a member of the band played a cornet for our grace before and after meals. Meals were the same on each day of the week. For example on Mondays there was thick vegetable soup, followed by bread and cheese.

Tuesday toad-in-the-hole and so on. Potatoes were always steamed in their jackets. There was a war on, and waste of any description was not permitted. One cook did all the work for the children's meals. He had to rely on some older boys who were detailed to do such duties as cleaning spuds, washing up plates and utensils used by the cook. For this they got sixpence a week pocket money plus little titbits the cook made for them on the quiet.

There was plenty of rhubarb grown in the vegetable garden and when it was in season we were given stewed rhubarb with some very thin custard three times a week. Whether you fancied it or not, you were compelled to eat it. Can you blame me when I say I have never tasted it since?

Tea, which was our last meal of the day, consisted of two margarine rolls with a mug of tea. On Fridays we had a piece of fruit cake as well - just that little bit of bluff, you see, as the managers were about on that day. Still we had no room to complain. The war was on and the doctor agreed our rations were enough to sustain us, although I must admit 5.30 p.m. until breakfast next morning was a long time to the next meal for growing lads and lasses.

Christmas day meant the usual breakfast but there was a good dinner of roast beef, roast potatoes, brussels, Yorkshire pudding, followed by generous helping of Christmas pudding plus an orange and apple. The younger children received a clockwork toy, the elder ones a ball. These were the only toys one got during the year, through the generosity of the school managers who dipped in their own pockets to buy them. Local amateur concert parties entertained us during the Christmas period and we really enjoyed their concerts. The school children put on a play for the benefit of our managers. It took three months to rehearse, but was always a success and fully appreciated by our benefactors.

For Education there were three schools, infants, boys and girls. Once in school, the teachers had full charge of us all. Their devotion to their work on our behalf was of the highest order. One class was devoted to backward children, remembering the course that some children in the later stage of their life when coming to school could neither read nor write, but no one ever left Hanwell without these qualifications.

Canings were given just like at any other school at that time. I will admit I got my full quota, but in the main I deserved all I got. The cane was given in front of the class, but anything of a serious nature was dealt with by the Headmaster, and you made sure you gave no cause to pay him another visit.

The teachers lived outside the school. Not one of them left during my ten years at Hanwell. They seemed to be a part of the school and we were part of their family. We had our own chapel with morning and afternoon services on Sundays which we all attended. There was a choir and an hour a week was given for practice. A small monthly payment was given to the choir and there was always a waiting list for any vacancy that arose when a lad left school, the condition being that once chosen and trained, you never left the choir while at the school. Mr Van Stratton, the organist and choir master, wrote a school song:

We are London's girls, we are London's boys
Proud of city and our race.
We envy not the rich their joys,
Envy not the great their place.
Mid scenes as fair as nature knows,
Playing games or plying tasks,
From dawn of day till evening's close

A happier lot we could not ask.

Only two children died during my period at Hanwell, a girl and a boy. This was a marvellous achievement, remembering that many who came to the school were in poor physical condition due to circumstances of their poor upbringing in their babyhood. All children of suitable age went to chapel to pay their last respects to the children who died. They were buried at a cemetery near the school and one of the staff placed flowers on their graves at suitable times. They were never forgotten.

The health of the school inmates was priority number one. We had our own infirmary staffed with four nurses. The doctor who had a practice in Hanwell came for a couple of hours daily. He was Doctor Davison. What a good doctor he was! All the kids adored him. At one period an epidemic swept the country and was given the name 'Black Flu'. There were many deaths all over the country. During this time we were all lined up before going to school lessons; the nurses sprayed our throats with some kind of antiseptic, then gave us some cinnamon to chew. We were all banned from leaving the school grounds for a period of three months. All praise to the medical staff, all we knew of this killer flu was what we read in the papers.

Wet or fine, summer or winter, we all wore boots, navy blue knickers, navy blue jerseys and long socks that you turned down at the knee. The girls wore gym slips. We had a Sunday best suit, whose coat buttoned up to the neck with a stiff collar worn outside. We often wore out the seats of our knickers and it was comical to watch us in the tailor's shop waiting for our turn for the tailor to machine a ready cut new seat on our knickers. Our nickname for him was Mr Patch. At no time were we issued with long trousers which were reserved for the day of farewell.

Around the age of thirteen, one was expected to reach the highest standard of education at the school, and most did just that. Then for your last twelve months you became a part timer, which meant mornings at school with an allotted job in the afternoons. This could be working in the kitchen, tailor's shop, carpenter's shop, farm and other departments. The girls went either to the infirmary or the staff kitchen. About half a dozen did domestic work in the Matron's and Superintendent's quarters. These tasks had to be taken seriously as part of your training for the outside world. This meant a payment of sixpence per week and a pass to go out without supervision on a Saturday afternoon. Most of the lads went to a cinema 'The Grand' in the Uxbridge Road, Hanwell. Being orphans we were allowed in at half price, just one old penny. We soon learned the ropes on how to make our sixpence go its full value. One of us would call at the sweet shop which would oblige with a bag of broken or sticky sweets for a penny. Another to the grocer for a bag of broken biscuits. If the fish shop had chips over from its mid-day customers, we got all that were over. This way we were not only able to eke out our pocket money, but were able to save a copper or two for our fete day.

Fete Day was the big occasion for the school. The fete was always held on a Friday in June. For months beforehand we practised among ourselves for the various sporting events, running, jumping, three legged and sack races. Both the winners and runners up received prizes. When the prize giving was over the boys gave a gymnastic display for the benefit of our visitors. After the sports we had a fair, and a couple of tickets each were given for the swings and roundabouts. There were a couple of side-shows and coconut shies to spend your money on. This was our latest night of the year when the older boys and girls were allowed up until 8 p.m. This also was the only day of the year when boys and girls mixed together. Strange to relate, I cannot recall anything but good weather for our fete days.

Reminiscences of Cuckoo, 1915-1924 by S.G. Ball

I have no knowledge of how I arrived at Cuckoo, but one of my earliest memories was walking with about thirty other very small children along the pathways of the Park School. What age I was I have no idea but from a photograph still in my possession I can't possibly have been much more than five.

My next memories are from D block, the first infant's dormitories in the School proper. Whilst there we used to be bathed twice a week, and how I hated that! We were bathed in the girl's bathroom, in small white baths. This chore was undertaken by some of the older girls. They had no bath flannels with which to wash us, but were given rolls of brown stuff known as tow. This apparently was used once and then thrown away.

Eventually I was transferred over to the boys' half of the School to B block. Whilst there, I was in Mr. Goord's class in the day school. Often he would be there standing at his desk almost asleep. To us kids in the classroom that seemed a joke, but what none of us knew was that Mr Goord was very much involved with various aspects concerning the war, and got very little sleep when he left school for home. During those days it was quite common to see two or three balloons floating gracefully across the sky. One day we had the exciting experience of having a balloon come down in one of the fields very close to the day school. We were all out at play when the balloon came down. The occupants in the basket shouted that they wished us to hang on to the long rope dangling from the basket. The poor teacher on playground duty tried hard to get us kids organised, but gleefully we all grabbed the rope, pulling as if we were a tug-of-war team. The poor balloonists realised just how near to death they were, and shouted frantically for all to let go. Luckily the Duty Teacher managed to get a little order out of chaos and the balloon was finally brought down safely. The three balloonists had evidently lost their way and wanted to know where they were. Having obtained the desired information, they rose again into the blue and the balloon drifted in the mind to heaven knows where. So ended a very exciting day.

By now I was beginning to take interest in nearly all games, and apart from the usual organised games, took great pleasure in the various games that came round every season. Nobody notified us of what games were in vogue, but as regular as clockwork we'd all start playing peg-tops, then would follow cherry stones (cherry oggs), then conkers. Though some of the kids used to have jobs in their spare time that earned them a few pennies, the majority never had two halfpennies to rub together. Consequently most of us made our own toys. With so much countryside and trees around us, bows and arrows were a favourite toy, and some of the arrows made were really works of art. Rag balls, too, were a great favourite. We made rag balls that were not only nearly as hard as hockey balls but lasted just as long, perhaps longer, than rubber or tennis balls. With regard to organised games, the various teams, be it cricket, football, swimming, athletics, took great pride in playing for the school and the glass showcase in the dining hall was full of cups and shields won by the school.

The adults employed by the school powers-that-be could never have run the School without help from the children. Every morning after we had washed, cleaned our teeth, and dressed, each boy was delegated to a certain job, such as washing the stone corridor floor, getting coal for the dormitory fires, polishing the waxed dormitory floors, polishing brass taps. After these chores were finished, providing they passed muster, the boys were free to go into the playground to do whatever they felt like doing.

The girls' day school was situated over the top of the boys' school and the entrance was right round the back of the boys' entrance, so that even during playtime we never came into contact with the girls. One of my most beautiful memories, as silly as it may sound, was being in day school during the summer when all the windows were wide open. We would be trying to make sense of algebra when suddenly the air would be filled with female voices singing in beautiful harmony. No wonder I was never any good at algebra! Those singing lessons would last about half an hour, and to me they were something else – out of this world! I loved every one of those singers.

Christmas time was a magical time for us kids, and when the dining hall was decorated with huge Chinese lanterns and great coloured glass balls as big as footballs, the excitement of hundreds of boys and girls could be felt. Christmas Day itself seemed ages in arriving, but when it did, the plentiful supply of good food and the relaxing of dining-hall discipline ensured that we all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. While some of the boys laid rolls of caps on one of the hot-plates, and using a spoon made it sound more like a Chinese festival, the girls, as always, just sat demurely, no doubt envying the boys their freedom. Then in the evening we would have an extra treat by being able to watch one or two plays that were put on by day school pupils. Christmas was indeed a highlight in our lives at Cuckoo.

One day, on looking out of the window from the top floor of A block, to which I had by now graduated, we saw new white buildings beginning to rise in the direction of Harrow. More and more appeared to rise every week, and we were told they were buildings for the Great Empire Exhibition, and we were witnessing the birth of Wembley. Some of us were eventually taken there, and we all thought how marvellous it was to step on to a small tram-type vehicle with open platform seats, and ride round the grounds of the exhibition, which covered quite a huge area. No fares were charged, which in itself was a novelty.

No chronicle of Cuckoo would be complete without a few words concerning Miss Barlow. Here was a lady who, had she so wished, could have had a very comfortable and easy way of life. She counted among her friends many people who were high in society. She had offices in Wimpole Street, and all ex-pupils from the School were always made very welcome. My first contact with Miss Barlow was whilst I was very young - about ten She strode into the playground, red-headed with a tweed suit, looking very determined about something of which I knew nothing. It wasn't until I was long married with a family of my own that she realised I no longer needed help. This very gracious lady remained unmarried, but she numbered among her 'family' thousands of ex-Cuckoo Old Boys who could call upon her help at any time, and always received that help.

When one remembers just what life was like during and after the First World War, when very poor children were condemned to a life of misery, and often ended up in prison, the terrific value of the work done by Miss Barlow and her helpers becomes apparent. Many old boys have wondered why she was never honoured in the Birthday Honours List. From very good authority, I learnt that honours were indeed offered to her, but were politely refused. Her whole life was dedicated to helping poor children, and this she continued to do right up to the day of her death.

Cuckoo – 1917 -1920 by Mrs. M. Marchant

My short stay of two and a half years in the Cuckoo's nest, always to this day, fills me with nostalgic memories. My arrival at the probationary one hot August day, where I was housed for two weeks, before entering the large school. E block was my home for the next two years or so, under the watchful eye of Nurse Peach. Life seemed filled with exciting events, hectic practising for the Christmas play, which in those days was the Operetta Princess Ju Ju followed by the excitement of Christmas itself. The Spring brought intensive training for the sports to be run at Stanbridge, followed by physical training - Swedish clubs, dumbbells, dancing etc., in preparation for our display on prize giving day.

Our very special day was the Summer Fete, when overnight the fair arrived and we awoke to find swings, roundabouts, coconut shies etc., on our fields, everything ready for the great day. We were more or less completely free to do as we liked for that day, having saved up our pocket money for many weeks to spend on whatever took our fancy. The lovely hot summers during those years, meant many happy hours of swimming or in my case (trying to) in the reservoirs or swimming bath before bedtime. My medical history prevented me from taking part in some activities, but under the watchful eye of our dear Dr. Davison my health soon rapidly improved. He cared for nearly eight hundred children in those days, and to him we owed so much. My last year, I spent in the apartments of the Supt. and Matron, Mr. & Mrs. Collins, where I was thoroughly trained for domestic service, with several other girls. We shared our sleeping quarters in a dormitory, high up in the clock tower, where most nights were spent reading the School Friend and the delights of Bessie Bunter, until we heard the warning call of "lights out". The day I left Cuckoo for my first job which was at Greenford, I was taken in Matron's trap with pony and accompanied by Nana, down the long farm road. My friends and companions waved from the hall steps to speed me on my way - to my new life. Happy days!

Memories of Cuckoo school by Mrs. C. Smith (nee Connell)

I first went to Hanwell when it was called Central London District, with my elder sister Ruth and brother Tim, in the early 1920's.

As I was very young I went to what we called Park School, and from there went to the infants in 'D' block, later on I went up to the Juniors in 'F' block.

It was in the Juniors that I caught ringworm and had all my hair cut off, and had to wear a little white cap. It gave the boys a good laugh, and I was called "baldyhaha".

I finally went up to the Seniors in 'E' block and remember more when I was there than any other time of my stay at Hanwell.

When we got up in the morning us girls had to scrub the stone stairs and corridors, and polish the dormitories before breakfast. Breakfast was porridge every morning and it tasted horrible, I often refused to eat mine so as a punishment I had to stand on the form during the meal.

At school, one day, a week had been set aside for games, we played netball, rounders and stoolball, we really enjoyed it. During the summer we went swimming and the boys used to race against each other in practice for our matches against other schools in the area.

The girls won many cups and shields in these matches, but sorry to say the boys did not win any. I did pretty well myself during swimming races, altogether I won 4 silver medals, 3 against other schools and 1 against the girl guides. I joined the Brownies and later the Girl Guides, and had lots of fun while in the Guides.

We used to go camping at Sandy in Bedfordshire on Lady Delia Peel's estate called the Lodge. I have been there since and it has been turned into a bird sanctuary.

Once a year we had a Fete day, there were roundabouts, boat swings, and coconut shies what a lovely time we had. We also had sports days, I looked forward to anything like this as we were away from lessons and it made a nice break. Then there were the days we went for outings to Horsenden Hill near Perivale, always marching along in crocodile formation. I used to look forward to Sunday evenings in summer. After church we would go for a walk down Farm Avenue to the farm to see all the animals there, it rounded off the day.

In the 1930's the L.C.C., as it was then known, took over the running of the school and what a change it was. We had much better food and a greater variety of it, such as bacon and sausages, herrings etc. things that we never knew were obtainable. Life under the L.C.C. was more bearable now, I was one of the lucky ones chosen to go to see Peter Pan at the Coliseum and "Where the Rainbow ends" at the Holborn Empire. What a good time we had when new children came to join us at the school, they brought new games such as ball games and skipping.

I never liked Fridays because after dinner we had to line up in the washing rooms for our opening medicine and a sweet. After this we had to march around the playing grounds while the boys were playing their instruments in the band then off to school again.

I will always remember the day Charlie Chaplin came to see us. He came into the dining hall and showed us how a man behaved in the cinema. He put his bowler hat on his walking stick and it went higher and higher because he could not see past the man in front who was blocking Charlie's view. Then he went to the infirmary where the sick children were, and walked down the ward like he did in his pictures. Before he left the school he gave us all a shilling, a surprise packet and a custard tart. He also

paid for us to see the film "City Lights" at the Walpole cinema, we really enjoyed it.

It was a very sad day when we were told that the school was closing and we would all be split up. I myself went to Aveley School but I was never so happy there, as when I was at Hanwell.

Hanwell in the 1920's by Dudley L. Game, School Manager 1923-30

Following in my father's footsteps, I became a member of the City of London Board of Guardians in the early 1920's, and was immediately put on the Board of Managers of the Central London School District -otherwise, Cuckoo School, Hanwell.

This school cared for the children who came under the Guardians of the Board of Southwark and the City of London. As can be imagined, the number of children needing to be taken into care from Southwark was very large. The financial arrangement, however, was on a rates basis so that the City's share of the expense of running a boarding school of several London pupils was out of all proportion. It used to be said that Southwark provided the children and the City provided the money.

Although, I was one of the City representatives on the Board, I did not confine myself to the few City children there, and I spent many happy hours getting to know many of the boys and girls individually and sometimes taking parties out to visit places of interest and occasionally taking two or three home for the week-end. I always enjoyed my visits to the school. The managers' party on committee days (board meetings were held in London) met at Paddington and took the train to Hanwell, where there awaited a curious old bus drawn by one of the farm horses and driven to the school - that is if the horses were not urgently needed for work on the farm. I was always impressed with both the teaching staff and the domestic house staff - with their affection and interest in the children and the response they were able to get from them. Of course, there were a few exceptions on both sides!. The superintendent and the matrons varied too, but the school secretary was a good stabilising factor.

I recall many happy afternoons at the school - wandering around the play-yards, the Chapel, the Dormitories, the day-school, the swimming bath, the sports fields and meadows and then walking over the funny little Castle Bar Park Halt to catch a train back to London. Sometimes I had tea in the dining hall (cake on Fridays!).

I sometimes wondered how the staff viewed my prolonged visits. Were they pleased at my interest? or resented my interference? On the whole, I think they were pleased - at any rate they always appeared very welcoming.

During my time as a Manager, I was also invited to join the committee of the Southwark Boys Aid and to serve on that, under the immortal Miss Helen Barlow - a woman whom it was a pleasure and privilege to know.

The Southwark Boys Aid helped both boys and girls from both Southwark and the City to find jobs when leaving school and to keep in touch with a good number of them for years after they had gone out into the world. Miss Barlow and her associates spent much time not only in finding jobs but also in personally visiting former Hanwell pupils on farms and other places where they were employed.

It says more than anything else could, for the success of the school and its children and its happy atmosphere that re-unions should have been so well attended annually for over 40 years after the school closed, and that former scholars should bring their children to join in what was really a family party.

In their wisdom the London County Council took a dim view of large residential schools with hundreds of children and favoured the "cottage home" type of school as providing better "home" conditions - but I am very doubtful if these proved any more homely to the children who were transferred to them around 1930, than those they had known on Cuckoo Hill.

Turn the Clock Back by Mrs Sylvia Wilson

Cuckoo schools! What memories the name revives - some unpleasant and others bright and happy. It's odd when one turns the clock back, how the happy incidents stand out against the sad.

I remember the years of the Great Wembley Exhibition when groups of us were taken in turn to see that wonderful show. The excitement when the great day arrived and we were each given a parcel of food containing (if I remember correctly) some sandwiches, a piece of cake and an apple and - joy of joys - a sixpenny piece to spend! oh, the thrill of going out for the day and all the wonderful things, we saw at the exhibition, and how we spent our money (the whole sixpence) in the amusement park, riding on the big caterpillar and the roundabouts and finally coming back to the school tired and happy and with our hands full of pamphlets and samples. Of course, the pamphlets were of no use to us but the thrill of having something different gave us a satisfied feeling.

Then there were the times the rumour went round to everyone that there were eggs for breakfast! I think everyone that day finished their allotted jobs in record time and the stampede to the dining hall to be first to see the eggs was something to be seen, but alas, there were never any eggs and although this rumour occurred several times and we always thought the rumour might be true, on that occasion.

As a Girl Guide and patrol leader I enjoyed some happy camping holidays on the lovely estate of Lady Delia Peel in Sandy, Bedfordshire. She adopted our company as her own and we had her name written on a tab on our uniform shoulders - 24th BALING -LADY DELIA PEEL'S OWN ! We were very proud of that because our company had come top for several years running and we carried the colours at a big rally in Gunnersbury Park with Lady Baden Powell taking the salute.

There was always something going on. Amateur dramatics, swimming, cricket, football, athletics, band-practice, netball and our own fete in the summer. Reading back it sounds like one big holiday but unfortunately there was an unpleasant side. Rising at 6 a.m. and standing stripped to the waist in cold, very, very, cold wash rooms to do our ablutions. Polishing the dormitory floors, cleaning boots, washing floors, darning baskets - baskets full of stockings till one's eyes ached. Apart from the very young ones we each had a job to do. Sometimes some of us were slapped very hard if we didn't "toe the line". The large bleak dayrooms (as playroom) with wooden benches on each of the longest sides for us to sit, not much comfort on a cold wintry day but at least we were dry.

However, as I mentioned earlier, those sorts of things one pushed to the back of the memory box. On reflection no-one seemed to come to much harm and on average we were a healthy crowd. There's so much more one could write but I realise space is precious. In conclusion may I say that in my opinion the children on leaving the school became better citizens than many of the present day ones from foster homes.

Miss Barlow a former governor (but now deceased) played a great part in many of the ex-scholars lives. She also founded the old scholars reunion committee, of which I was a member for several years and we knew her well and loved her. Her life's work would fill another book - she really was a very great lady.

Bible Class and Other Tales

During one session of Bible lectures, one of my friends was looking across at me, making dreadful faces. I, of course, burst out laughing. I was the one who had to see the Vicar, the next morning at 9 a.m. for a reprimand.

Again I was always following behind the vicar imitating his walk, and more than once, he turned round and caught me at it.

Every time, I took one of our Sport's Mistress's (Miss Lawrence) little dog "Curly" down the Farm Road, there was always a chicken missing. Our chief sports mistress (Miss Dawe), was always breaking out in French and singing "Ta, ra ra, boom de ah" and she looked so funny with her turned up toes of her shoes.

When Miss Dawe taught you to swim, she threw a life line (rope) into the water, after you jumped in, and you prayed that you caught hold of it. One of our girls who was taught by Miss Dawe was, I think, the champion swimmer of the World and had she been young enough then, she would have beaten them all at the "Olympics".

A Big Splash by Mrs. C. Johnston (nee Richards)

Miss Dawe was our physical training teacher. She used to teach us to swim by pulling a rope and letting go before you got to the side and always kept a stern face watching you go under. She once fell in the pool fully clothed and just floated. None of us could swim, so we had to fetch help. I'm thankful to say she survived.

Later under Miss Auty's teaching and guidance, I swam and ran for the school many times and was so proud to represent the school in my last few years.

The Tall Orchard

My sister and I are standing beside the orchard one day, "Would you like some fruit" says I, "Yes please", says my sister. I began rocking the branches and so helping the apples and pears to fall to the ground. Very quickly did I pick them up and put them into my sister's tunic. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves, when a voice said "And what do you think you're doing?" Well we simply dropped most everything, except that my sister ran, and was not caught, but I, who was still standing there, looking in amazement at one of the form mistresses who stood there. My punishment was to stand in front of a big oak tree for one hour, without moving. My sister of course, was turning up to see me periodically, during that hour and tormenting me, but at the end of that hour, when I caught my sister, I will not tell you what I did to her.

The Tale of the Syringa

Another time my sister was pulling some flowers from the bushes of the vicar's garden, with an attaché case ready to receive them. She was having a lovely time breaking each small bunch of flowers and putting them in the case. All of a sudden a voice said "Have you finished?" There the Vicar stood, confronting my sister, who dropped everything and ran.

A Treasured Memory by A J Bournes

One warm night in July 1928 (aged 14, going on 15) myself and a friend whose name I cannot now recall, but sufficient to say (although we had been in many scrapes together) it was not my best friend Johnny Keefe, so Johnny you can breathe again.

This was a beautiful night when my friend and I decided to take a midnight walk over to the girls' blocks E & F. Away we went over the iron bridges connecting the blocks down into the yard, passing the chapel and matron's quarters, up into the first girls' block and I believe it was E. Not being very tall we had to take turns lifting each other up to look in the windows. What we hoped to find, we did not know, (we know now). But at 14 it was a rather exciting adventure, but the return was a nightmare.

As we left the far block who should be over the other side of the girls' yard? None other than the night watchman with his lamp. He spotted us so it was shirts up and run. Have you ever had to run in your stockinged feet across flagstones for a couple of hundred yards? If so, you'll know how painful it can be.

This was one of the many adventures I had in a very happy school life at Hanwell along with scrumping apples along Greenford Avenue and many others too numerous to mention here.

Unforgettable Memories by Bill Everett

I came to the Cuckoo Schools in the same way as most people did. My mother died in 1918 and my younger brother came here straight away. He was three at the time. Then my father coped as much as he could till 1924 when me and my next brother had to come down here as well because father went into hospital with silicosis from dust in the Dalton factory at Lambeth. My father had been here as well in 1887 or thereabouts. When you lost your homes, you went into the workhouse. All the families went into the workhouse; the mothers were kept in, the fathers had to go and work and the children were farmed out for three weeks in case of measles or whatever. Then after three weeks in a cottage in Walworth, I was put in an old ambulance affair and driven out to these Schools here. The horses took a good few hours to get here. There were about seven of us arrived together. I wasn't frightened or anything but the dormitories looked vast to me. We had no possessions, only what we stood up in.

They put us into probation, again for another three weeks. The Isolation Block they called it, I believe. I had my thirteenth birthday there. From there they'd take you over to the main School. The first couple of days I was a bit upset but I soon mixed in with it.

I was in A Block: L24 my number was. You got up around six or just after. You had to make your own bed and all your beds had to be in a line just like in the army. You had a good wash. They had steam so the water was warm. They used to have jets all along a trough and you put your head under one – dunked your head – and the jet ran down into this trough. If you could afford toothpaste, you had some but often you didn't just in case somebody else took it! You had to do a job in the morning. That was before School before breakfast. Either help to polish the dormitories or wash the passages or clean the wash-house up. I got a job with Mr. Sutton who was the boilerman. He used to give me ninepence a week. Because of that, Nurse Radband who was at A Block, used to let me off my School job.

After that you went to breakfast. But I used to go over to take the children's food to Park Schools. They used those for the 3-5 year olds. I don't remember any children having bad eyes when I was here. That had all cleared up by then.

We wore shorts, blue socks, and we had a blue jersey. That was our ordinary knockabout wear. On Sunday though we had what you call a Norfolk jacket and a collar of white starch, Eton collar, and that was our Sunday best for church or for when we were taken out.

There's one thing about it: you did get three meals a day. For breakfast we had rolls, a roll and a half we used to have, with margarine. In the kitchen there were two coppers, one for cocoa, one for porridge. The porridge was cold by the time we got it. That's all we got. The meal at dinner time was good. As you filed past the serving tables with your plate, the Nurse would give out the helpings. You had greens, meat, soup, currant pudding. Everything was steamed. For tea we'd have roll again, sometimes with jam. On Fridays we had cake, on Sundays a roast dinner. It was really good to me who had known want. I didn't know what dessert was until we came here. At dinner time you got dessert, say sponge and custard, or trifle or something. It wasn't fancy but it was stable.

That's how it was here: you had your own bed and a good pair of boots; whereas before I remember a time when I couldn't go to school because I had no boots. When we were youngsters us boys slept two or three to a bed. That's how it was in those days. People have got to remember how poor things were.

After breakfast the boys had to clean their shoes and get ready for school. You were all lined up and the superintendent used to come along the boys for inspection and Matron did the girls. He'd walk along the back of the line to see if you had any holes in your trousers and to see if your boots were clean. Well, if you played football, your boots were going to get dirty. So there was a blacking house where you could clean them. You had to take pains or if you had a hole in your trousers they'd send you

down to the tailors shop and they'd put a patch in and repair it. | Well, if you were playing football and didn't get your trousers repaired or clean your boots you got a little tap of the cane but you were late for school then weren't you? So being late for school you got a wallop for that didn't you? You would only win by being goody-goody.

When you got to school it was really funny. All those that were late were in one room. The Superintendent used to tell the first boy to hold the door open and he used to say "One, two, three!" and you had to run for that door to get out and you can imagine what it was like! Him with his cane at the door – wack, wack, wack!

During the time I was there, Mr. Gill was headmaster. There was a Mr. Gould and he was a J.P. We called him Judge Gould. If there was anything wrong he'd have the boys up in front of him just like a magistrate. There was Mr. Mapp and Mr. Richardson who'd never cane you. Actually, in the classroom there wasn't much need for discipline because you were disciplined already.

We went to school just like ordinary schoolchildren. That was from nine o'clock till twelve but you had a break in the middle. They had a syllabus just the same as any other school. You started off with Assembly, then maths or geography or history or whatever. I remember I wasn't very good at singing. I think the standard of education was excellent. The Headmaster took the scholarship class and some went for the Borough Polytechnic or the Boys Technical Schools in the Army. The Headmaster taught the boys who were interested how to make a wireless set with an old cat's whisker – crystal sets. Of an evening you could go to such classes or you could go and sit in the library. I went to motor repair classes to learn about the internal combustion engine.

You didn't go to school on Wednesday afternoon. That was Visiting Day for the mothers from the workhouse to come and see their children. But to make up for that you went to school on Saturday morning. You could always tell the visitors from the workhouse. They had the old blue-stripe dress. My father came down to see us once. He could come down whenever he liked because he was an ex-scholar. The only upsetting part was the first Sunday of the month. That was general visiting day, two o'clock till four. You could see a lot of the boys looking to see if their parents were coming, you could see the look on their faces. Well, my brother and I knew how impossible it was for anyone to turn up for us so we went for walks instead.

After lunch you went to school again. If not, say you were on holiday, you went what we called 'out the back' to the fields behind the building. The boys were on one side, the girls on the other. You passed your time away. We used to play cricket or kick a ball about. The girls used to play fivestones and things like that. Mr. Gould was a pretty good cricketer and if you got him out, he'd give you a penny. A team of boys played the Mercers' School and we beat them 10 - 1 ! Poor Law School beat a Public School. And the reunions first started when the boys who'd left used to come down a year and play a football match with the youngsters that were still here.

One thing about the boys: at 12 you went twice a week at a trade. There was carpentry, engineering, brick-laying, tailoring and shoemaking. When you were 13, you went what they called half-time, that's morning at school, afternoon at your trade. Then when you were 14, you went full-time. I wanted to be in the band although I didn't make it my trade. My trade was engineering. Every three months you went up before the Committee and they asked the Instructor how you were getting on. The engineers, we used to like Christmas time – used to get all the broken toys to mend.

I'll tell you the reason I joined the band. Our day room had hot water pipes with wooden seats on top, but the bandsmen had a fire. So two of us joined the band to get warm in the winter. Also, you know what they call skinheads now? That's how your hair was then, that was for cleanliness. But if you were in the band or a choirboy, you had a proper short back'n'sides. That's the honest reason I joined. First of all I was on the clarinet. Then as I'd been there the least time, they picked me to bang the big

bass drum. I played the same drum that's in that old photo of the band. It must have been well over 20 years old. We were only little boys and this is the way we used to play it: I used to have it on a proper brace with a boy in front to hold it. So there were two of us who used to march along, him holding the drum ropes, me banging it. When we played standing still, I had it on a stand.

At the beginning of 1925 we had a new band master, a band sergeant from the Warwickshire Regiment. Directly he got here he says, "I guess I'll kinda make a band of this". It was only a brass band then and he made it into a military band. We all got new uniforms. Instead of the old pillbox hats we got proper peaked cap and our badge was an eight pointed star with a cuckoo on top.

I went very many places with the band. We played at Brentford Cottage Hospital, kiddies outings, the Chiswick Sports and Hanwell Hospital Carnival. We didn't get paid but we used to have a good tea. When we played at Harrow we got a shilling and a meat pie. When the band played at Brentford Football Ground or Chiswick we used to march down to Hanwell and get a tram. The bass drum had to be chained on to the front. When we used to come back late, all the others were in bed and we came in with all our cakes and that.

Everybody was in bed by 7 o'clock, no matter what age. In the dormitories you didn't have to get down to sleep but you could read a book – none of this pillow bashing or larking about. It was strict. They picked a senior boy, most likely a big boy, and he was called the corporal. He was in charge and about half past 8 or 9 all of a sudden he'd say, "Right, that's enough!" and that's when you had to sleep.

In the summer you had your six weeks holiday. Being in the Scouts I used to go to camp for two weeks, sometimes to Cook ham or Windsor or Eastbourne. The rest of the time you could just wander about. As long as you were back in time for your meals you weren't missed. Often we'd go down to Ealing; we used to call that 'Town'. We never talked to other children. That used to develop into more or less a fight. They used to call us the Workhouse Boys although we were better off than them because we learnt a trade and they didn't.

Christmas was good. The dining hall was all done out and we had the usual Christmas dinner with Christmas pudding same as anybody else. Then on Boxing Day we used to have a play by the children themselves. The girls put on a play called 'Jan in Windmill Lane*' and they were all dressed up as fairies. It was a real good show. Everybody got a present, mine was an engine.

One day a year stands out. That was Fete Day in the middle of July. That's when William Beech's fun fair used to come down from Uxbridge with their roundabouts and swings. There were no visitors; it was just for the boys and girls. On Fete Day we could meet our girl-friends and anything that we had made that was good was laid out on a table for the Managers to have a look at.

To take it all in all, it was a pretty good, happy atmosphere. Only 3 or 4 boys ran away while I was there. I was only punished once, for the usual: scrumping. That's stealing apples from the farm. The crime was getting caught. "What do you want to get caught for?" said the drill master.

And think how self-supporting this place was. Your boots were repaired by boys learning to be shoemakers, your tailoring done by boys in the tailor's shop. There was farming and gardening, so boys weren't wasted. We grew our own garden produce and everything was repaired by the different trades. We had orchards and a piggery. This was our village.

When it was getting near time for you to leave, the chief drill master, he'd teach you a bit of judo. He wasn't supposed to but it was for our own benefit. Some of the girls were upset when they left; they'd got so attached to the teachers and nurses. But to me leaving was just going to something new. I was taught to be hard and brought up strict. Same as when you went from here into the Army, you were already disciplined. This little school was my home right until they found me a job. That job went broke

in the General Strike and so I went to join the army. And that was the result: I finished up in the Army.

The Probationary by Sylvia Wilson

It was December 1923, I was eleven years old and being taken with several others in the Poor Law school bus to Cuckoo Schools. The snow lay like a white mantle over the fields and long drive of the school and I remember thinking how lovely the countryside looked in its white gown.

There were ten of us. Seven girls and three boys and being newcomers we weren't allowed to mix into the school proper until we had spent three weeks in the Probationary, a gaunt looking building set well away from the main school. This was the home of the new arrivals until they were given a clean bill of health from the school doctor. Three weeks apparently was considered a long enough incubation period for any disease and it so happened in our case that we had an outbreak of measles thus causing us to stay for a further three weeks.

The food was good and slightly more 'Cordon bleu' than in the main building, and was brought to us from the main kitchens by a ruddy-faced jolly man named Mr. Raynor. We all liked him and clustered together to watch him bring the food in, our young stomachs ever ready to receive!

It was my first Christmas away from home and in all fairness I must say I had more Christmas presents that year than I'd had for a long, long time. In fact Christmas day was a very jolly day for the ten of us.

The boys slept in the same dormitory as the girls and our ages ranged from eleven years down to six, with the older girls looking after the younger at the request of the staff. The staff consisted, if my memory serves me correctly, of two female nurses. They were not nurses in the medical sense but substitutes in a sense for children's nannies. In our young eyes they seemed elderly but I realise now that they were probably in their middle twenties. If you were liked by either of them your life was comparatively smooth but woe betide the poor child who evinced dislike!

The building originally catered for many more new arrivals because there were at least two dormitories and some side rooms and another day room but as there were only ten of us we were confined to one dormitory and a room where we ate and played.

The doctor called about twice a week. He was another very likeable man who would bring us sweets and laugh and joke and if we were very good gave us a short ride in his car – a wonderful treat.

Alas our probationary period at last came to an end and we were allocated to different sections in the big school. The boys going to their side, the little ones between five and seven into D block and I and the other two girls into F block. Life from then on was to be tougher, educational and sometimes exciting, but that makes another story for another time.

Hanwell Remembered, 1920 - 1923 by Barney Benstock

I often travel by train from Gloucester to Paddington and when approaching Hanwell and Elthorne Station, I look through the trees for a very special building, and there it is – the Cuckoo School clock. A lump in my throat certainly, memories come flooding back. For something like twelve years, I and my three sisters were resident at Cuckoo Schools.

I can't remember much of my first year at Hanwell, I was only about three years old, except for one special occasion when someone came towards me and gently said to me "Don't cry, and I don't want to see you crying again." I don't think I did. I mention that because taking everything into consideration it was a happy school. Of course there were times when things got rough, but I don't think it has done any harm.

I remember my elder sister Elsie as a very good swimmer. She won plenty of prizes. I showed her a brand new box of cigarette cards which she was given to me by a gentleman visitor from Australia. She thought I meant her to keep them (not likely!).

I remember Mr. House, the Head Cook, who used to give us kids who helped in the kitchens a great big chunk of ginger pudding or duff which he specially cooked for us every Thursday – or was it Fridays. Yes, and I remember shaking hands with Charlie Chaplin and his brother Sid. And finally I remember my sweetheart from school. Whatever became of her? Who was she? That's a secret between just us. Happy days!

So Many Memories – 1915-18 by Beatrice Crawley

You ask for memories for your book. There are so many. The party and play we had in the dormitory F2, when our staff nurse (Nurse King) was on holiday. We thought we were so safe. There were rolls and cakes hidden in an empty bed. Fairies, elves and the fairy queen were round the ward, the fairy queen draped on the floor with fairies dancing all round. Two girls were on watch, one on the light, another on the door. All of a sudden a deep voice said "Very nice too", the voice of a nurse coming in unexpectedly through another door. Pandemonium reigned. Children all shapes and sizes dived under beds. She sent for E block staff nurse and while waiting turned out to the toilet all wet beds, which was done every night. By the time the E block nurse arrived, anybody not in bed was assumed to be in the toilet – fortunately for us that were still hiding under the beds.

Another incident. We went to school Saturday mornings because there was no school on Wednesday as it was visiting day. I had left school but had to go and pick up a little girl who had to go to the dentist. On our way back, a warning had gone for an air raid. Looking up, there were the German planes overhead. I didn't know what to do, having visions of bombs falling straight down on top of us. So I did what we had been taught – lay face down with the little girl, feeling so stupid as needless to say no bombs were dropped.

The incident that stands out in my mind more than any other could have had serious consequences. I worked for Matron Collins not just as a home girl but as a replacement for Jane, a nursemaid who had left. I worked with Nana the Children's nurse. They were happy days. I earned the princely sum of one shilling a week – untold riches. The Matron's department was on the middle corridor, up the steps. At the foot of the steps was a storeroom and a toilet. I used that toilet unknown to Matron.

While the school was at breakfast one day, I went to the toilet. Hearing a noise above my head, I looked up and saw what looked like a red hot cinder. I thought, "Good heavens! that's dangerous. I must go up and move it." Up I went to the needle room which was above, opened the door and to my horror the whole corner was in very bright flames. I didn't know what to do, so I dashed down the spiral staircase to the ground floor lodge and said to one of the masters who was there, "Quick, there's a fire in the needle room." He thought I was pulling his leg and said, "Where, in the grate?" When I convinced him I was serious, he asked if the fire buckets were full. Back I rushed upstairs – buckets were empty. He came up with bigger boys from the yard and they formed a chain and I filled the buckets until the fire was eventually put out. When I went back to Matron's department and told them what had been happening, Matron said "My God! My Storeroom." When she opened the door of the storeroom, there were our straw boaters (which we wore in those days) floating around the floor. Actually there was quite a lot of damage done to the contents of the rooms with water.

The cause of the fire was discovered to be one of the girls who had been cleaning the needle room had been drawing the fire with her apron, which caught alight. The bugle went for breakfast. The girl thought she had put the flame out and put the apron in the cupboard amongst beeswax. Hence back to the beginning and the red hot cinder.

Some Memories of Hanwell, 1919-1933 by Madeline Wellman

The first thing I can remember is being given the most delicious piece of bread and golden syrup by one of the older girls, and I looked for it most afternoons. This girl looked after me and took an interest in my doings for many years.

Other memories are sleeping in the dormitory of about fifty beds. We were at that time sleeping in a big girl - little girl system, and at night the older girls came to be a good hour after us, and then the fun would start quietly of course. Then a story would be told which lulled us off to sleep. When I was older I took part and became a regular teller of stories, and often fell asleep before the end and continued the tale the next night! Now and again we got caught. No one owned up, feigning sleep, and the loyalty was terrific.

Miss King who was the nurse in charge at that time used to rattle her keys and warn us of her approach. We responded by being quiet on her nights on. Alas she retired, and then the trouble started. The new Head was tough on us and many a good hiding was given. Many a night she used to get girls up, first the big girls then us. We had to strip our beds sometimes, then go down into the yard for half an hour or more. Then she would let us go back to bed in age groups. When Miss Fulcher came, things altered and the person concerned was nicer to us.

Miss Fulcher changed our clothing and we had our own lockers. It was great fun watching the lockers being put in. We at last had our own clothes. Before that we would run to the corridor and, scramble to get the best stockings and underwear. The stockings then were black wool and often too tight so it was the thing to rush to be first in the queue.

One afternoon a week we used to march to the band in the yard before going to school. We liked this. It taught me to love brass bands and to this day I like them.

Another memory is the wonderful summers when the hay was around the fields, we were allowed to play in it while turning it for the farmer. We spent a lot of time in the summer in the fields and played all sorts of games; rounders and a sort of cricket were our favourites. When the conkers came we had fun, trying to keep one on a string for as long as possible by breaking all other people's.

I was a Brownie, and then a Guide. The Brownies used to be taken in the summer to places of interest and often had a picnic. Brown Owl was wonderful to us and taught us to love the countryside and the flowers. We picked flowers and she knew all their names. Kew Gardens was a favourite place. We used to be sent a beautiful card by her each year, always with fairies on it.

Another thing I remember when very small is the smell of real coffee that came from the Head Teacher's room. I crept up once and was given a sip by the newest teacher. She told me later on that she loved the way I looked at the jug and then at her, and started to walk sadly away!

We were mixed until we were seven and I remember standing on a stool at bath times naked ready to jump in the next vacant one, and it suddenly hit me that girls and boys were different! I always kept it to myself thinking for a long time that I was the only one who knew. One evening I was on the stool and was suddenly rushed out as I was covered with spots. An ambulance came and I was carried away over a man's shoulder – I had scarlet fever.

We loved dolls – black dolls and white dolls. We did everything to get one of each and dress them all the same.

Mr McKinley was the Chaplain and Mr Van Dam the organist. The latter taught us to sing psalms and hymns properly. On Sunday evenings we went to church and I loved the service. I used to go to bed as

soon as possible afterwards and go over what had been said by the chaplain. He was a good teacher of everyday happenings and how to cope. He also taught us how to understand the Bible. On leaving school, for many months I went to Bible classes, as he had sewn the seed of interest. At the time I wanted to become a missionary. Alas I could not. When I was old enough, I became a nurse.

Where Have All the Summers Gone? by Rose Hennell

I well remember when summers were hot and winters cold.

The playing fields at haymaking were a high-light of Summer, when we used to play Dumb Dolly.

I had a vivid imagination (and still have for that matter). Nearly every part of the school was a picture of the Bible. For example the playing fields were where Joseph's brothers sold his coat of many colours, and two people at school always reminded me of Esau and Jacob.

Coming back to winters. However did we survive in the bitter cold with no central heating or other creature comforts. I wonder if others have had these thoughts.

My Happiest Days by Miss D. Hemp

My happiest days at school were when we girls started to get together our Christmas play, and what fun it was! We started rehearsal in the first week in September of each year. Then with the help of the Matron, Mrs. Collins and the gym mistress, gradually the play took shape.

I was eight years old when in my first play, which was called "Fairy of the Glen". Then on to others, "The Magic Key", "Jan of Windmill Lane", "Zeenka", and the one I liked best which was "Princess Juju", a Japanese play, with such characters as the Emperor, the Lord High Executioner, the Mighty Magician and the Princess Juju. As well as having taken part in the plays, I remember being taught to recite as well.

The Bare Facts by Elsie Cousins

I don't know how old I was when I had my first swimming lesson but I do remember the event.

After jumping into the water, Miss Dawes threw me the rope which I missed, and in sheer panic I struck out and grabbed for the side of the pool and safety. From that day I was declared a "swimmer" and was never offered the life line again. Little did I realize how much happiness and humiliation would arise from this swimming start. I made rapid progress after this, and greatly enjoyed all swimming sessions. I was such an eager beaver to reach the swimming pool that Miss Dawes employed me as a runner to open up the swimming bath. I was sent to the little cottage across the girls' yard along the narrow corridor, then back to Miss Dawes with the key. Alas, one memorable day, I went for the key as usual and instead of placing it safely in Miss Dawes' hand, I by-passed her altogether and made straight for the swimming pool closely followed by the impatient crowd and strictly resembling the "Pied Piper of Hamelin".

By the time Miss Dawes had waddled along in her turned up toes and reached the pool we were all splashing around and having a wonderful time with no thought whatsoever to the apparently drowned.

I was severely reprimanded for this misbehaviour and quite rightly so. I was caned on my bare bottom in front of a large and sympathetic audience but I'm happy to say that this painful operation was not carried out by our beloved Miss Dawes. Oh no! I was marched off to the Block where it fell to the duty of the official in charge.

Gala Greats

In spite of Miss Dawes' primitive methods of teaching us to swim, it is only fair and true to say that her success rate was terrific. Literally hundreds or even thousands of girls passed through her capable hands and that terrifying life line, all eventually emerging as stalwart swimmers, even including the physically handicapped who learnt not only to swim but to dive as well.

The girls who showed particular prowess were singled out and labelled as "specials", and were then given extra coaching in preparation for the annual inter-schools Gala which took place the first Monday in October at Great Smith Street Baths, Westminster. In those far off days, sponsoring, body building, tranquilisers etc., for athletes were strictly taboo. The only body builder we ever received was an extra dollop of mashed potato. Almost as a penalty we were confined to barracks to rest the Sunday before the actual gala took place.

The galas were highly organised events with nothing left to chance. We set off from Hanwell by train to Westminster complete with swimmers, reserves, spectators, swimsuits, towels, and yes, even thermos flasks full of malted milk – truly VIP treatment for orphan athletes on this wonderful day. Not surprisingly, we gave of our very best and always won lots of cups and medals. Then as a grand finale we were all taken into Zeeta's fabulous teashop in Victoria Street, Westminster, where we enjoyed a truly gorgeous tea of shrimps, thin bread and butter, jam, and plates and plates of "fancies", a mixed assortment of iced and fancy cakes.

When we arrived back at school there was no emotional kissing and hugging for the victorious teams as one sees today; just a simple announcement in the dining hall followed by appreciative applause. Then a very special prize for the actual swimmers – we had a sumptuous tea in Matron's very own dining room with goodies galore including peaches and cream, so we enjoyed two unforgettable banqueting bonanzas.

Now in the twilight of my life when nostalgia tugs at the heart strings, I wend my wobbly way along memory lane for another glorious glimpse of that super swimming pool and Zeeta's sanctuary only to find to my utter dismay that they have both been caught up and demolished in the raucous redevelopment of the 'Wacky World of Westminster'.