

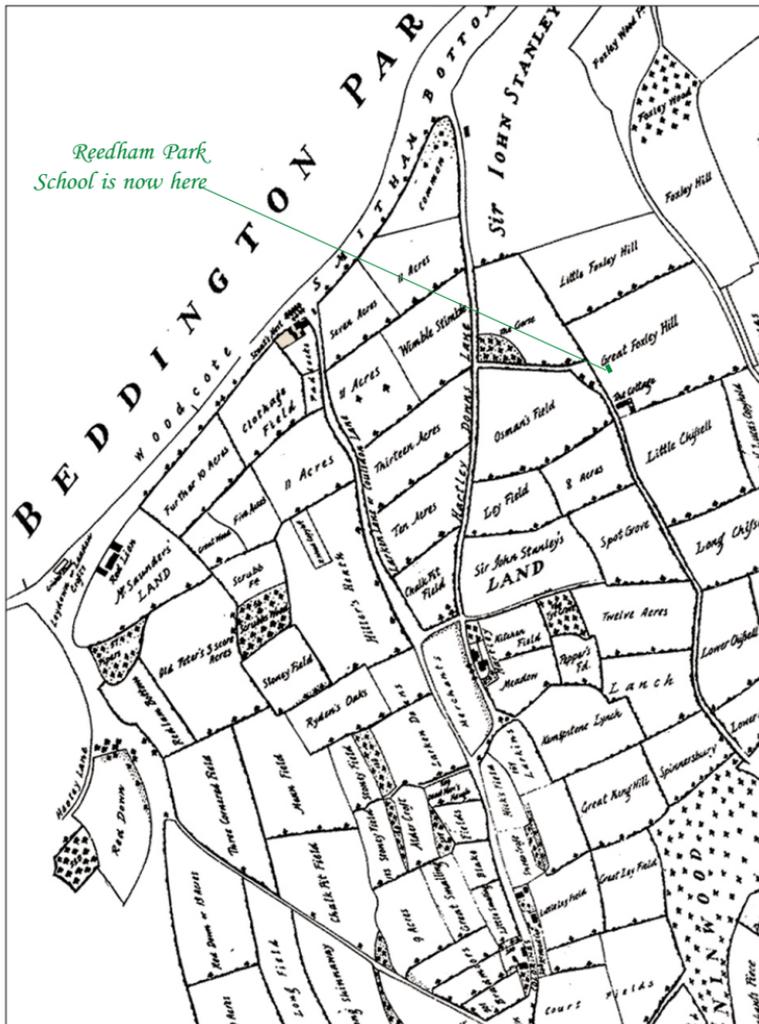
# The School



It is not possible to say precisely when a building first existed on the site of Reedham Park School. Early maps show nothing in the vicinity, and the first authoritative map of the district, by Thomas Bainbridge in 1785<sup>1</sup> shows only one building, known as Lodge Farm, between the Brighton Road and Wattendon. This stood on the site of the present Lodge Hill opposite the tennis courts.

The first building we know of on the school site was a stable, probably built in the nineteenth century to serve the farm. At that time there were no houses nearby. Purley expanded greatly in the

<sup>1</sup>Bainbridge was recording the Estate of Thomas Byron Esquire, Lord of the Manor of Coulsdon. Coulsdon and Wattendon were recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. The Byron family (Lord Byron the poet was a distant relative) were Lords of the Manor until 1922 when the land passed to the control of the Coulsdon and Purley Urban District Council.



*Part of Thomas Bainbridge's map of the Byron estate in 1785. The A23 Brighton Road, then called Smitham Bottom, is at the top. Old Lodge Lane followed a different course at that time, turning towards Hartley Down near to where Hartley Hill now runs.*

second half of the nineteenth century and the Reverend Andrew Reed built an orphanage on a site now occupied by Beaumont School and the Fairbriar Reedham Estate. But by 1906 the development of Old Lodge Lane reached only as far as no. 73, and even then there were houses only on the east side of the lane. Hartley Hill opposite was still open fields, as it had been since the Middle Ages when it was famous locally for its rabbit warrens.

The premises were used variously as a garage and a church before it was first used as a primary school in the 1920s. An interesting account of the ecclesiastical interlude is given in a 24-page booklet on the history of St. Barnabas Church entitled *Cradled in a Stable*. (The church which now stands in Higher Drive was originally established at 71a Old Lodge Lane). Appropriately for premises which had previously served as a stable, the first service was held on Christmas Day 1910.

The premises were first used as a preparatory school in the 1920s when the Principal was a Mrs Taylor. When she decided to give it up, interest was expressed by a Miss Pick, a dramatic teacher in Croydon with whom Miss Routledge had worked. The original plan was for Miss Pick to lease the property to run a drama school. Miss Pick was to

run the drama side while Miss Routledge would look after the academic side. However, when the solicitor heard the details of the buildings (the Big Room only—the Milk Room had not yet been built, and the flat, Kindy and Lower Prep were not included) he advised against taking the premises as there was no living accommodation. The deal appeared to have fallen through.

But then some friends suggested that Miss Routledge take the school on single-handed. Mr and Mrs Smith, the parents of a friend of Miss Routledge from her days at college, urged her to seriously consider the idea. She took the bull by the horns, made the legal and financial arrangements, and in the summer of 1932 found herself the slightly bemused Principal of a prep school with a roll of twelve pupils.

‘I was terrified,’ she said. ‘I remember going round to visit all the parents to introduce myself. I didn’t want to do it. I thought they would think I was too young, you see.’

Miss Routledge quickly established the principles and routines which have changed little in sixty years and the little school began to prosper and thrive. That first Christmas there was a small dance performance—it was the following year that the first production of *Cinderella* inaugurated



*Purley Centre about 1930. The fountain now outside Purley Library stood in its original position, and Russell Hill Road was still a residential road.*

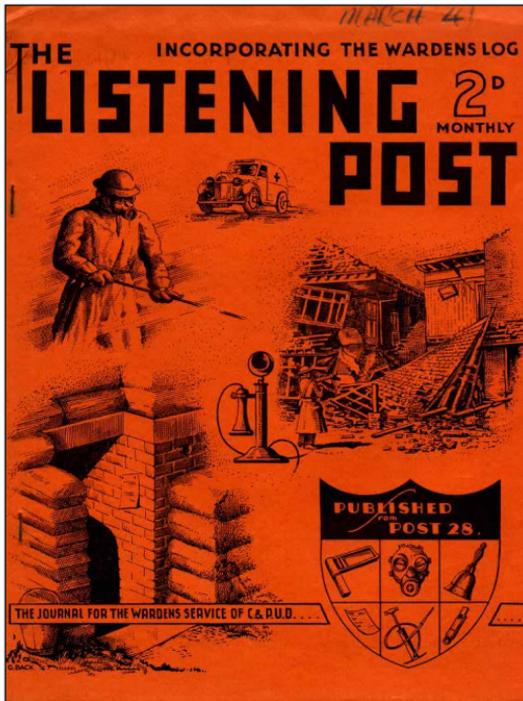
an event which has caused more hilarity down the years than any West End production could ever hope to achieve. In May 1933 the new maypole was brought out, resplendent with new ribbons, to celebrate the crowning of the first May Queen, Hazel Coppen. The maypole itself was replaced many years ago when the netball posts were put up, but the same ribbons have been twined and twirled in all sixty May dances. That same year the first Sports Day was held, won by Green (though Orange won the next year).

Numbers began to grow—first sixteen, then twenty four, then forty. Those were halcyon days, with a summer fortnight in a rented house at Hayling Island one of the highlights of the year.

But then came the war. Everyone's life was changed—though not at first. There was a long period of inactivity by both sides, so much so that the conflict began to be called the Phoney War. But in 1940 the Germans launched the full might of their air power against Britain, culminating in the Battle of Britain in September 1940. Kenley Aerodrome, at the top of Old Lodge Lane, was one of the Fighter Command posts whose job it was to stop the German bombers. It was also a prime German target. On 15th August the Germans set out to attack it, but succeeded only in bombing



*From the early 1930s: Miss Routledge and Mrs Smith on a day out on the River Thames. Mrs Smith and her husband were instrumental in Miss Routledge's decision to move to Reedham Park*



Left: The cover of *The Listening Post* (incorporating the Warden's Log) of March 1941, which contained an emotional tribute to Miss Routledge and her fellow Air Raid Wardens (below).

POST 45 Greet The New Year.

New Year's Eve saw many of the Wardens from the above Post at the School Room, Old Lodge Lane, by the kind invitation of Miss Routledge to spend a social evening and to greet the New Year in.

Miss Routledge proved herself a Host of Hosts, and it is still a wonder to all present how in these days of rations such a splendid feast had been prepared.

The evening started with a Dart throwing competition for which a prize had been offered. Where there's a prize there's a Scotsman, ask F/W Thompson. The fun then became fast and furious, games being intermingled with dancing. These Wardens, symbolic of the whole nation, threw aside all reserve and each and everyone thoroughly and wholeheartedly enjoyed themselves. I experienced a grand thrill to think how at one moment all these people so imbued with the seriousness of their tasks as Wardens, and the next moment could enter into the lighter side of life so heartedly. What chance has any Dictator against such a people.

The Grand Finale of the evening came with the Xmas Tree from which everyone received a small gift with a big thrill.

Wardens of Post 45 I salute you. Each and everyone of you are real personalities. May we enjoy many more similar gatherings with the dark war clouds all dissembled.

ANON.

Croydon Aerodrome by mistake. But from then on hardly a day passed without the air raid sirens sending out their eerie wail. Attacks on Biggin Hill, Kenley and other RAF airfields frequently turned into spectacular dogfights, visible on the ground for many miles around. There are still bomb craters visible in the woods beside the Coulsdon Court golf course—the same golf course where fighter pilots including Douglas Bader played in their hours of relaxation.

The Spitfires won the struggle for supremacy, inflicting the first defeat of the war on Hitler, but for most of the war the threat of an air raid was an ever-present reality. There were many tragedies, and one of the worst happened not far away at Catford at lunchtime on Wednesday 20th January 1943. A German Focke Wulf fighter-bomber dropped a 1,100lb high explosive bomb on Sandhurst Road school. Thirty eight children and six teachers were killed, and more than sixty others seriously injured.

Miss Routledge had a well-drilled routine for shepherding the children into the shelters when the air raid warning sounded—and for occupying them while inside, chanting tables all the way from two twos to twelve score, songs and running stories. She became an Air Raid Warden and gained a good deal of notoriety for some lively



*Miss  
Routledge  
and Mr  
Smith, who  
advised her  
to take on  
Reedham  
Park School  
single-  
handed.*

*Frolics in  
the sea at  
Hayling  
Island  
in the  
1930s.*



*Gordon  
Newman  
and  
Sleeping  
Beauty  
from  
about the  
same time.*

social events. Her New Year's Eve parties became legendary and many recall the morale boosting effect of Miss Routledge's unique contribution to the life of the community

After the war it was some time before things settled into a more even rhythm. It was 1951 before food rationing ended, but as the 1950s dawned the school was growing again. Then in 1956 came a crisis. The owner of the property, Mr Frederick Betts, a builder who lived in Haydn Avenue, died and the executors wanted to sell it. The estate agents had found an interested party. Miss Routledge would be able to stay, but she knew the rent would go up and up and that soon she would not be able to afford it. She went to see Mrs Betts and asked that as the sitting tenant she might have first refusal. Mrs Betts agreed and Miss Routledge went to see her bank manager.

'He said that it seemed like a good idea to bid for the school and that the bank would like to help me,' said Miss Routledge. 'He said "Before we talk about a mortgage let's see what savings you've got." So we added up all my savings and it came to exactly what they were asking. I can't remember how much it was, but I do remember that it was exactly the right amount. It was ever so extraordinary. I still can't get over it, even to this day.'



*Build-up to Bonfire Night on the field in the mid-1980s.*

Miss Routledge's offer was accepted, to the chagrin of the estate agents, and overnight the situation was transformed. From being the very unsettled tenant of the Milk Room (built by Mr Betts), the Big Room and the tiny kitchen (which had also served as bedroom for twenty years), Miss Routledge became the outright owner of all these and the buildings next door as well.

On April 13th 1956 Mr and Mrs Stan Casbon, who had lived in the flat, moved to a new house in Dale Road with their sons Ken and Keith, both pupils at the school. Miss Routledge finally enjoyed

the luxury of a choice of bedrooms, a living room and separate kitchen, as well as a large amount of ground floor space, for the moment choc-a-bloc with builders' materials.

The first big improvement meant removing the Hut, the outside classroom at the Burcott Road end of the school. It was a room with walls of thin asbestos cement, delightfully cool in summer, where Mrs Causley, a good friend of Miss Routledge's, took classes. A coloured map of the English Counties hung on the end wall. Also demolished was a smaller but more solid structure on the opposite side of the path which then ran up to the steps to the field. The prefabricated concrete coal bunker, built against the wall of the Big Room under the little window, had provided a handy vantage point at end of term concerts for those too late to find room in the hall. It had also provided tempting access to the rope attached to the bell above the school.

In their place was built a new classroom which now also served as the stage. This brought to an end a ritual which had lasted from time immemorial, putting up the stage for the end of term concert. This involved a lot of contortions on the part of the fathers and a lot of excitement on the part of the children.

Later the last classroom, now Upper Prep, was built and the netball court was tarmaced; Miss Routledge also acquired the upper field, which had been divided into two tennis courts. The one at the Burcott Road end had belonged to the Hendersons who lived in Haydn Avenue, while the other end was part of the land owned by Sir Eric and Lady Bowyer. The Bowyers' end had been used regularly by the schoolchildren for games and sports, and when Sir Eric died Lady Bowyer gave it to Miss Routledge as a memorial to her late husband. Several years later Miss Routledge bought the Hendersons' end and merged the two fields into one.

By then the Bowyers' end had seen some hard use from dozens of small boys in football boots and at times was better described as a flat piece of mud with occasional grass than a tennis court. The grass has been relaid a number of times, and for several years in the 1980s the field was used for a Bonfire Night spectacular around November 5th. Some of the bonfires were enormous, so much so that one year two of the sixty-foot trees beside the field nearly caught fire.

Gradually over the years the face of the school changed, though its spirit has remained unaltered. There has always been an air of harmony with



*Sports Day action on the field about 1987.*

# A Lesson from Miss Chips

REEDHAM PARK prep school in Purley, Surrey, is unique. It offers an 'old-fashioned' style of education that money alone cannot buy. The standard of learning by the age of eight would put most primary school children to shame.

When children apply for a kindergarten place at four-plus, it's the parents who have to pass the entry test... NOT the youngsters.

Fees are a mere £35 a term and the 120 pupil school has the charm and flavour of the very best village school.

First hurdle for parents, a probing evening interview with the grey-haired but sprightly proprietress and head, Mrs Inez Routledge, who's run the school for 45 years.

'Routy', or 'Miss Chips' as parents soon admiringly learn to call her, believes education has to be a 'winning partnership between teachers and parents. Morals and manners, she believes, are every bit as important in the making of man, as good teaching and dedication to study.

When I visited Reedham Park, five-



BY CHRISTOPHER ROWLANDS

EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

year-olds eagerly vied to read fluently to me about Cinderella, others were chanting tables and coping with multiplication and division.

The key to this success is the co-operation between home and school.

At weekends parents go off with their youngsters on nature walks — collecting wild flowers this term and nuts and berries next, which are all labelled and identified in class the following week.

Each night youngsters take home a list of ten words they must learn to spell — and be tested on next day. One six-year-old was already coping with 'opaque' 'observatory' and 'noticeable' and will have a vocabulary of 1,500 words by the end of the summer term.

At six, they start French and at eight the bright ones are starting Latin. Dads in particular 'must' be involved in the youngsters' schooling, Miss Routledge believes. And, at the weekend, they're enrolled to help cut the cricket pitch and keep the grounds tidy, deperate and chop logs.

That way the school is miraculously able to keep fees down to £35 a term. No child is denied the chance of an education at Miss Chips school because their parents cannot afford the fees.

There is a four-year waiting list to get local youngsters into the school.

'Please don't write about my school,' Miss Chips appealed to me. 'It is not that I'm not very proud of it... but I just hate to have to turn parents away when they beg me to let their children come here.'

That's understandable when eight year olds race through IQ tests for eleven year olds. And the school walks away with a high proportion of places at local independent schools. And those who go on, at eleven, to the State schools are always in the A-stream.

COMMENT IS IN CENTRE PAGE

17/6/79

The infamous Daily Mail article.

nature, whether it is the sight of a squirrel scampering up to an open window to see what he has been left for breakfast, or the profusion of wild and climbing plants (including the only known hop plant outside Kent). In this idyllic setting generations of children have been stimulated and stretched intellectually as well as being introduced to the wider world of arts, science and languages. Over the years they have consistently gained outstanding results, especially when it comes to gaining scholarships and awards.

Miss Routledge has never sought publicity for the school yet she is frequently oversubscribed for the 125 places available. (The figure used to be 160 but Education Authority regulations now restrict the number).

On one occasion in 1979 the *Daily Mail* Education Correspondent had the temerity to run an article on the school. Miss Routledge was furious. Not because of what the article said about the school—indeed, it was highly complimentary if a little fanciful in its choice of the ‘Miss Chips’ epithet. Miss Routledge’s ire was more to do with the prospect of a surge of applications for children to join the school. Despite protests to the newspaper, the fear became reality and for months Miss Routledge had to turn away a stream of parents seeking a place for their child.

Those who do find themselves drawn into the world of Reedham Park seldom regret it, either as children, parents or teachers. The ethos of the school has much to do with this, the idea that the whole family should be involved in the school. An extra bonus for hard-pressed parents is that the fees are low, though it does mean payment in kind with occasional help on the maintenance rota. No-one ever feels that the school is run primarily for profit, at least not in the financial sense. In a world dominated by money, there is a refreshing other-worldliness about Miss Routledge's attitude to finance. Clearly someone who is prepared to spend twenty years sleeping on a camp bed cannot be too concerned about a life of luxury.

There is a story, true as it happens, that one Sunday a few years ago a parent on maintenance duty asked Miss Routledge how much she thought the whole school was worth. 'I really don't know, my dear,' she replied. 'About a thousand pounds, I should think.'