

The School Year



Thursday in early September—school *always* starts on a Thursday—and the long summer break is over. School uniforms in pristine condition, shoe bags checked, pencil cases at the ready, some one hundred and twenty youngsters trudge, skip, saunter and scurry up the lane, back to the familiar rickety wooden desks and chairs and the distinctive smell of polish, pencil shavings and carbolic soap.

For most it is a day that brings mixed feelings. No more lying in bed if you want. No more playing all day in the sun. No more trips. No more fun and excitement. No more freedom. Today it's time to start the autumn graft. Homework. The nights drawing in. Winter is not far away.

But it's not all bad. Now is the chance to meet all your friends, catch up on tales of holiday escapades, run around in gangs at break time. And of course you are now a year older, a year more grown up, in a new

class with a new teacher. For some, of course, it is none of these. For the new boys and girls in Kindy it's a whole new world. There are tears from some, wild excitement from others. But under the kindly eyes of Mrs Ordoyno and Mrs Tann the 'babies' soon settle in.

For Trans it means you now go to school all day, not just the mornings. And you have homework to do as well. At least it's only drawing and colouring. When you get older you have to do spellings every night. And it gets harder the older you get. Spellings have to have antonyms and synonyms. Then they have to have sentences. Then there is the second homework subject every night—English on Monday, Geometry on Tuesday, the hated Test corrections on Wednesday, Intelligence on Thursday. The weekend is the worst. Weekends mean Compo, and that is real hard work. Makes spellings look a doddle. Happy the child who completes the work on Friday night or Saturday, because homework on a Sunday is a chore. It always seems to take twice as long on Sunday.

However, it is not all hard work. The Christmas play dominates the school day more and more as term goes on. Parts are given out, lines have to be learned. Rehearsals begin.

Then almost before you know it, half term is

here. A blessed week of freedom—except for one thing. The Wild Fruit collection. But come the Monday the plants have been gathered, the debates over names have finished, the collection is labelled and presented and it's up the lane again.

Now the pace is somewhat faster. Exams are nearly here and stress levels rise. For a whole week you have to sit and pour out all you know (or should know if only you had been listening). It's gruelling and demanding. But then the exams are over, except for the Special Book, and it's downhill all the way to Christmas. There's Bonfire Night and the Christmas Fair to look forward to. (In the 1980s the parents organised some spectacular bonfire and fireworks parties on the field). But most of all it's the Christmas play, in many ways the highlight of the year.

Every pupil past and present has their own vivid memories of this magical time of year. The nerves over whether you will forget your lines or make a mistake. The costume fittings, the last minute changes, the final chance to get it right at the dress rehearsal. Then the big day itself—the last day of term. No lessons, just the Table Battle (and the exam results). Reports are given out and it's off home early to get ready for the afternoon show.

Nothing can compare with the astonishment a



White Ballet and final ensemble from Sleeping Beauty



young child feels when finally on stage in full costume and make-up, the lights shining bright in your face and the audience a dim sea of faces across the footlights. Can you spot Mum out there and not miss your cue? Is that her at the side? Hard to tell. There's so many people!

Saturday is just as exciting. This time it's try-and-spot-Dad time. Then at last the play is over. Was it as good as yesterday? It seems a shame not to do it again and again, after all the hard work you have put in. But at least there's plenty to look forward to. The party next week—Little Ones on Tuesday, Big Ones on Wednesday—with games, egg sandwiches, jelly and cakes, rounded off with carols in the darkened Big Room. In the glow the poster of Father Christmas on the wall comes alive and the Christmas tree seems to stretch up to the rafters.

Home for Christmas—what will Santa bring?—and a blissful three weeks of fun and play. No Test, no compo, no work (except for the holiday reading book, and that can wait) until the New Year. And that seems an age away.

But all good things must come to an end, and with the cold dark days of January the routine starts up all over again and it's up the lane to start the Spring Term.



The entry of the coach and the final tableau from Cinderella



Thursday in early January and school is back. This term starts in a low key, as befits the dark and chilly days of mid-winter. The tempo builds up as Valentine's Day and Shrove Tuesday come and go, the days grow longer again. Nature revives, evidenced by the jam jars of tadpoles—did you know they like raw meat?—and work begins on preparing for the Drill Display at the end of term.

If the Spring Term is relatively quiet, The Summer Term is a buzz of activity. Before half term comes the event which rivals the Christmas Panto for memorability, the crowning of the May Queen.

Little boys have never been quite able to understand all the excitement that goes with the May Queen. But for little girls it is a different matter. There is no higher honour than to be chosen as May Queen. And no greater disappointment than to be passed over. To be chosen means that your name will be added to the scroll on the wall in the Big Room, adding another line to an unbroken succession that goes back to 1933. It means you are feted and fussed over, dressed in finery and garlanded with flowers, presented with gifts and poems from every child in the school as they bow and curtsy before you. But most of all it means recognition. Your friends—and those you hardly know—have declared you the kindest, most consid-



Father Salmon instructs the First Communion candidates, Trinity Sunday 1988.

erate, indeed the most attractive girl in the school. That is what really makes it so happy and glorious. You are truly Queen for a day.

At half term there is the wild flower collection (though the best specimens always seem to have passed by half term). About this time too the Catholics celebrate their First Communion. Miss Routledge has always had close links with St John the Baptist church in Dale Road, and many priests have made the trip up the lane for Catechism classes (described recently by one Kindy boy as “going in for cat licks”). It used to be that children would make their First Communion on Trinity Sunday at the 8 a.m. Mass at



Miss Routledge with Father Salmon during the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1982.

The School at the End of the Lane



Top left: Derek Read wins the sprint circa 1958.

Top Right: More Sports Day action. Above: The school soccer team about 1962. Left: Graham Dolan and Michael Winckless about 1960.

St John the Baptist, followed by breakfast in the church hall. But in latter years Miss Routledge has been keen where possible to have Mass celebrated at the school (remembering that the Big Room started life as a church), and at Christmas too there is usually a special service at the school.

The summer term is also the time of year when the annual Sports Day takes place and rival teams from Green and Orange vie for the title of champions. In days gone by that meant a trek up Burcott Road to the Higher Drive Rec. for a succession of contests involving eggs and spoons, sacks, obstacles and sticky buns. On the rare occasions when the weather was bad the sports were held in the Big Room. Nowadays the festivities take place on the field above the school,



The school soccer team from the 1970s.

though the contests themselves have changed little in sixty years. Rumours abound that Miss Routledge fudges the figures to make sure that the number of victories is always more or less even. With a total so far of 35 wins to Green and 25 to Orange, she clearly isn't making a very good job of it! However, her reputation for having a hotline to Heaven is regularly borne out as the weather, like a well-mannered child, always seems to behave perfectly on the big day.

After half term it is only a short time until the end-of-year exams and preparation for the concert and prize-giving. This last event is an emotional time, especially for Form 1 Upper as they sing *Little Lamb* for the last time and say farewell to friends they have known for more than half their lives.

It is also the time for speeches. In recent years one of the most memorable was given by Roger Lane in July 1989 when he donned a well-worn school cap and tried to sum up what Reedham Park School meant to those present, particularly the leavers and their parents. As one parent said afterwards, 'I'm sure all of us there felt that Roger had expressed exactly what we all felt.'

This is what Roger said:

I know you're all very hot, but we can't go through ten years of Routie's without saying

a little something. So please bear with me for just a little bit longer while this ‘Old Boy’ goes up to his big school.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been asked, and was proud to accept, to make a farewell speech on behalf of all the old parents who are going up to big school.

I’ve been at the school now for about ten years. I started off in Kindergarten, and slowly, and sometimes with great difficulty, I’ve made my way through the school. Now throughout that time, I, along with lots of you have done hundreds of hours of homework and lots of compos. I’ve drawn little pictures when I started here of the moon and the marathon, and the crocodile pulling the elephant’s trunk. I’ve written compos referring naturally to the notes in the back of the book. These notes have been rubbed out so many times it was difficult to tell the difference between Napoleon and Romeo and Juliet.

I moved on through this bewildering maze of knowledge, the maths and the geometry, the nummersets and the formulas which I still can’t remember. On to history—William and his Doomsday Book; the Hundred Year

War where I finally won my spurs—and there were times, believe me Miss Routledge, when I could have willingly stuck them somewhere—and heaven forbid I should forget John and the Magna Carta.

The geography—do you remember that little boat? I rounded the Cape of Good Hope in that little boat. I've visited exquisite places and collected all manner of things. And there were times late at night when I was still slaving away, and the children were fast asleep on the table, when I wished that boat could have sunk! I've crossed the Himalayas; I've been up Everest and down into India where we picked cotton and tea. Onto Australia with gold and dairy products. But Africa, that for me takes the biscuit! What did I do in Africa? Hang on, I've forgotten Canada—mustn't forget Canada. I trapped beavers, canned salmon, cut timber and searched for oil. And then Africa. We mined for diamonds, dug for gold and collected copper. And I wandered up the Zambesi to those waterfalls. What were they called? The Angel Falls? The Niagara? No, I've finally got it right—the Victoria Falls. And Africa, well it wouldn't be the same without Her Majesty's Tree House and those bloomin' ostrich feathers. And do you know, for all that work, I

don't think I ever got my fair share of VGIs and star sentences.

I've had ten years of berry collections and flower collections (illegal though it may be to collect them). I tore my arms searching for Robin's Pincushions, and finally yesterday, which is perhaps most significant, I realised that the Scarlet Pimpernel had nothing to do with the French Revolution.

I've learnt in my time here about inventors and inventions. I am now one of the few people to know that Mr Bell did not invent whisky. I am an expert on art and artists; and I can now tell the difference between a Holbein and a Holsten! The 'special' books—all those books. You remember Rudyard Kipling's famous book *Puck of Pook's Hill*—you try reading that when you've had a few Bells and Holstens.

The chairs, all those chairs you've had to endure after all those years; the Concerts, the Drill Displays and the Pantomimes. I don't think I ever got comfortable. And the Pantos—I've been to so many that I know the words to them all. And I still find, that no matter how loud that audience warbles, Miss Routledge—and today was no exception—



'And again, this time louder!'

never seems to forget her famous words: 'And again, this time louder!'

That was a quick flashback to the childhood of the school; and now I should like to say a little about the parents and the social events, without whose work this delightful little seat of learning would never have survived. The weekends mixing cement, cleaning windows, putting up the plastic roof upside down (only to find that the first time it rained the cloakroom was wetter than it had been to start with). The firework nights, humping all that timber, the ladies making all those hot drinks and hot dogs—I don't think they ever saw the fireworks.

And the year when everyone had gone home, and all of a sudden at 3 o'clock in the morning Miss Routledge decided to have her own private display when the shed caught fire.

The games nights and the wonderful race nights that came on later. The summer fairs and the Christmas fairs. The wonderful Jubilee Party and the fancy dress parties where we always had such a delightful spread of food from the ladies.

But for me, it was the New Year's Eve Parties and the themes of those parties. Do you remember the French night and the Twenties Night; and the Victorian Night where I came late dressed as a vicar and Miss Routledge was quite worried when she saw a vicar walk in and asked for the noise to be turned down. But whatever the theme, Miss Routledge was always Queen Victoria. All the songs that were sung, those wonderful English seaside songs, and I could just keep on going.

I haven't mentioned any names because it would be unfair to miss anybody out, and I'm sure as I've covered the certain functions of the school we all remember how much work we've put in to make them a success.

Anyway the most important name today is Miss Routledge, or Routie as she'll always be remembered. My daughter summed it all up yesterday. She rushed home and said, 'Isn't it wonderful, I've finally finished at Reedham.' A few minutes later she said, 'But isn't it a shame, because really I'm going to miss all my friends.' And I think that can be said for all of us.

And so finally, I say to all of you, as you move on now to your big school and later to your chosen careers: have a wonderful time; work hard and do well; and no matter where you go or what you do, don't ever forget where it all started.



Going up to big school, July 1991.