

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

**INTERVIEW WITH ENA CONSTABLE
BY JOHN HEATHFIELD AND PERCY REBOUL
ON THE HISTORY OF ALL SAINTS SCHOOL
RECORDED ON 5 AUGUST 1991
Tape is labelled Ena Constable Part 2**

- JH Now different teachers have different ways of explaining. Some teachers talk a lot and some teachers use the blackboard a lot. Can you remember anything about the techniques that the teachers used?
- EC They all used blackboards quite a lot.
- JH In history and geography lessons, for instance, would they draw maps and diagrams?
- EC They would draw maps for the geography lessons but the history was verbal, of course and so was the literature. They'd sometimes have pictures of Elizabethan costumes, that kind of thing, to help them along but literature stuck out in my mind as a very formidable subject and one which they addressed quite hard, and self-expression in the way of playlets, drama.
- JH What about reading round the class? Can you remember all having the same book and reading bits?
- EC Yes, and then one of you would be called up to read to the rest of the class to see if you got on alright.
- JH Now supposing a child did it badly. What would Mrs. Andrews do?
- EC Give them a whack.
- JH Oh I see? Right, thank you. Percy?
- PR You mentioned literature and I think I'm somewhat surprised that that had any role in the school curriculum. I don't know why but poetry was quite important. You learned a lot of poetry?
- EC Yes we did.
- PR Does it still stick with you, some of the poems which you learned at school? I'm not going to ask you to quote any but just occasionally one sees a poem that reminds you of learning it at school.
- EC Yes. I find it difficult to differentiate between All Saints School and Southgate County, just where I heard this or that. Gray's Elegy I can remember as one. Another thing you might be interested in – from time to time we had inspectors in the school and we had visitors on certain topics. We had, very occasionally, what would now be called a project and the one I remember most vividly was the talk on Australia. It was quite an informative talk and the class afterwards had to write an essay on what had been said. This was

someone who came into the school gave this talk on Australia. Very very interesting. That was in the morning and then in the afternoon we all had to write an essay and, for some reason, I wasn't able to go to school that afternoon and I was allowed to write my essay at home and of course I won the prize which was a book on Australia and I treasured that a lot but can't say that I still have it. I remember that very very clearly because it was a real introduction to the ways of the Australian people, the living standards, the economy and all that.

PR Was there any kind of Prize Day or Speech Day in those days?

EC Yes, on a very limited scale there was a Prize Day. Mostly certificates rather than books.

PR Of competence in certain subjects?

EC That's right, yes.

PR Did your parents take an active interest in the school?

EC There was nothing on the level of a Parents' Association. The parents' influence came, I thought, from the home and was carried into the school. Obviously the parents knew the teachers but there wasn't the same amount of communication as there is now. The teachers were in charge and I think it would have been looked upon as interference.

PR It still is by some teachers.

JH Can I talk to you about knitting? Because one of my notes is this. "The girls were taught knitting but the squares had to be undone at the end of the lesson ready for the next lesson. A new headmistress allowed the girls to bring their own wool and actually to take home what they had made". Can you recall knitting and undoing it at the end of lesson?

EC I always say I was born with knitting needles in my hands. I've never stopped from that day to this.

JH Yes but they taught you knitting as school?

EC I think I knew how to knit before I went to school.

JH So had periods at school when you could practice knitting?

EC That's right.

JH When you finished, what happened?

EC I can't remember unravelling it.

JH So you have been one of the good girls that was actually out to finish it and take it home. Presumably, if they had said bring some wool to knit a cardigan or dolly's dress or something you would have brought the wool in.

- EC I'd have had a job to get it because my parents hadn't that kind of money to send me out to buy an ounce of wool. I do remember going into Stonnell's (*spelling?*) which was a fancy shop and buying a tangled skein of wool and I got it for a ha'penny instead of a penny. That was a great bargain. It took me about three hours to sort it all out.
- PR It happens, quite by chance, that you were there during the First World War. How did the war affect school life, if at all? There was a bit of bombing wasn't there?
- EC Oh there was. On the morning when the bomb dropped in Totteridge Lane on Harry Vardon's house we all went to school pretty shattered.
- PR It dropped on a Sunday, didn't it?
- EC It must have been the following day then. We all chased home in our lunch hour to go down and see the effects of it. My father was the first man to be called out if there was an air raid. He was a Special Constable, but I mustn't digress.
- PR It is interesting but, getting back to school, were you given any instructions like if there is an air raid you get under your desk. Was there anything like that that you remember?
- EC I can't remember
- PR I don't think they were too concerned. There were no shelters or anything like that
- EC No.
- PR So it hardly affected you other than perhaps shortages of food and things
- EC Yes. I remember the war years more from my father's activities in it.
- PR How did you get to school?
- EC Walked. There were no other means.
- JH Can you remember what the surface of the road was like? It would have been gravelled and then asphalted.
- EC Very rough, yes. And the playground was rough too. If you fell on the playground you really damaged your knees. It was sort of gravelly and of course Myddelton Park was the same.
- PR One of the things that we all remember about school is certainly injustices and any bullying that we are subjected to. Can you remember anything like that or did you ever see anything like that going on? It was a mixed school wasn't it?

- EC Yes, it was. I remember one very unpleasant incident that still sticks with me. There was a young girl named May Bristow and she was ill. She was sent to school and crossing the classroom floor to get to her desk she misbehaved and when the teacher came, it would have been Mrs. Andrews, came into the class she said “Who did that?” and the whole class said “May Bristow” and the poor girl was ill and she disgraced herself and a cleaner woman was brought in to clean up the mess and she was sent home. I always felt how demoralised that poor child must have been. It was dreadful.
- PR In that connection we have heard from other people but you may confirm this that they do have outside lavatories? But I believe, we were told, you had to call in on the school to get toilet paper before you went in.
- EC Yes, that’s true.
- PR It seems quite unbelievable. Are there any pupils that you particularly remember from school?
- EC Well I was in love with one of the boys. I can’t remember his name. What a pity. I do remember two boys from the church and when I was all of 5 years old I decided it was going to be one of those two boys and one of them I still remind him. I said “You know when I was 5 I was going to marry you”. My father was a sidesman and we sat beyond the centre isle and these two boys were in the main part of the nave and I used to look at them. They both escaped.
- PR Are there any other anecdotes that remind us of school?
- EC I do remember being allowed to make the tea for Mrs. ??? (Forts?) and I remember the day she left. Someone had given her a bunch of lovely carnations and of course I always had to dance attendance on her if there was any special favour that came my way and she asked me to wrap these carnations up. I got a piece of string and I pulled it and snapped them all off. That was a black mark.
- PR Oh dear! You did mention sitting for the 11+, as it would have been then. Tell us your memories of that. What was the situation then? You went to the school until you were aged 11?
- EC Yes, then you were put forward as a candidate for secondary education. My sister was already there. She’d been there a year and the first pupil ever to get a scholarship and I was to follow in her footsteps and the notice summoning me to the interview at the school never reached me and when enquiries were made they said “Well, she didn’t show up for the interview so end of story”. However, the headmaster at the school was persuaded to see me individually which was a very very traumatic experience.
- PR You had to go to Southgate County?
- EC Yes. My sister took me along with her and then I was summoned to the head’s room and he asked me some questions and then he asked me to read a passage from a book, which I did, and then he put the book down (it was a passage

where there was a bit of violence in it and a woman swooned and I was so concentrating on reading this correctly that I really didn't get the impact of the story) and he said to me "Why was she lying on the floor?" I couldn't for the life of me think what had flaked her out. He said "Didn't the follow intimidate her?" I said "yes, sir, yes". Anyway, I passed and I got in but I was not examined with the rest of them.

PR You didn't have to sit a written paper?

EC This was the oral part. I'd done the written part. That was done at Southgate County. You had a written exam and an oral exam and it was the oral exam that I missed out on because I wasn't notified that I'd passed the first hurdle.

PR I see. Now you did mention the importance of Empire Day. Were there things like May Day celebrated then? They were mainly religious holidays weren't they?

EC Yes they were. Ascension Day was an important day. We had a service in church. We all paraded and went into church for a service and then we had the rest of the day off. They were real church festivals. It was a church school very very much.

PR But Empire Day was also tied up with the church.

EC Yes. We had play and real flag waving things. The staff had thought up some ways of helping us to remember the significance of that day. I do regret that we don't now have it but then we haven't an Empire.

PR Did they do anything on May Day then? Did you dance round the Maypole?

EC Yes, I remember dancing round the Maypole.

PR What about sport in the school. What did they call it then?

EC Drill. We had marching drill. There was nothing very much in the way of sport. We were too junior really to do things like tennis. That all came later, in the secondary school. We had running and what would now be called athletics.

PR Where did that take place?

EC In the field and in the Spinney.

PR You could run in the Spinney could you?

EC You could run in the Spinney.

PR So that was before Queens Avenue was built then?

EC Yes. And in the playground we'd have races.

PR Was there any kind of extra-curriculum activity like music, for example? Were you encouraged to play musical instruments?

EC No, I don't remember anything like that at all and I don't remember anybody staying for extra activities at all. You started at 9 and you finished at quarter to four in the top class and about quarter past three in the Infants.

PR And you had a break mid-morning and mid-afternoon?

EC Yes.

JH In 1903 Jessie Blackborough won a prize. Is that a relation of yours?
EC Yes, that's my eldest sister, the first of the family. I didn't know she was ever clever enough to win a prize.

JH According to my notes she won a prize in the Infants school in 1903 and what she did was she made some artificial flowers out of paper and sang a flower song.

EC I must have notes of this. Her daughter is absolutely mad on family history. She lives in Wales.

JH Just one other thing. I've got here a list of teachers in 1907 and I wonder how many of them were still there when you were there. It says Miss Ward

EC Yes, I remember Miss Ward

JH Miss Hoddy

EC No, I don't remember her

JH Miss Goodship

EC Yes, Winnie Goodship

JH And Mrs. Wallace

EC Yes, Mrs. Wallace. She had the babies and Winnie Goodship was in the middle one.

JH There was Miss Hoddy. She had class two, Standard 3 and Standard 4 and Miss Ward had the top class. Now Miss Ward was the headmistress

PR It's not Mrs. Andrews under her maiden name is it?

JH No, Mrs. Andrews joined the school in 1912 and I know her maiden name but I can't remember it off hand.

PR Finally, Mrs. Constable, you became a governor of the school.

EC In those days they were called managers, school managers.

PR What year are we talking about now?

EC Well it was when I was serving on the London Borough of Barnet which pins it down between '64 and '74 and I was an authority representative appointed

by the authority to represent them on the managing body and then when education altered its course and state schools who had governors and church schools who had managers all came under the one umbrella and we were all governors.

PR So went there how many managers were there?

EC There would have been 7 or 8. I think there were two from the church, two from the authority then I think there were two independent representatives.

PR Educational specialists?

EC Not necessarily but people interested.

PR Who chaired?

EC The vicar.

PR How often did you meet?

EC We had to meet once a term

PR What kind of things would go on the agenda?

EC The progress of the school, numbers on the roll....

PR Did the head attend?

EC The head attended, yes. Now you mentioned Miss Ranson. Here I must probably disappoint you. I was never connected with Miss Ransom in anything to do with the school because when I was a manager or governor she had already retired so I never came across her in connection with the school. I knew her as a parishioner and as a leader of one of the women's groups and subsequently as an invalid because she lived opposite my doors in Queens Avenue but that was a very tenuous connection but I do remember her but I can't give you any information about her connection with the school.

PR When we're talking about the governors how do we define the school? Would that be the All Saints Girls' School? Did the Infants School next door come under the same umbrella?

EC Well I don't think they had managers in those very early days. Not in my young days. I don't remember any managing body at all.

PR No but when you were on the managing team did that team of managers embrace just All Saints Girls' schools or did it also take care of the infants?

EC The set up is as is now.

PR So the three locations.

EC I think I may have been in on the appointment of Mr. Anderson's successor. Miss Sarto. She's still alive.

- JH She retired early because she was ill.
- PR She's still alive is she? Would she live in the area?
- EC No, she lived in Finchington
- PR Is there anything you remember, traumatic or otherwise, when you were a manager? Any particular subject which you can remember now being discussed?
- EC Well the big debate was, and probably still is and was one reason for my leaving eventually, as to whether the school was the vicar's prerogative or the headmaster's and there was a great deal of conflict on this front and with Vicar Miles you never had anything of that kind. There was no authoritarian approach.
- PR He was an amazing man. Everyone said it.
- EC Oh yes. He had a great influence on my life and my family's life. He used to come to tea every Friday afternoon, go up into my father's workroom and sit and have a chat and a cup of tea. Now I'm digressing completely but I think it's very interesting. He brought in his long cloak one day to my father and said "Harry, this is getting very ragged. Can you turn it for me?" So my father turned it. Three years later he came back and said "Harry, this isn't

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- PR You were saying there was never any trouble but what about later?
- EC Friction got very bad at times, it really did. I doesn't now, I think, with Mr. Elgar and Adrian but certainly with Fred Davis there were tremendous arguments and friction as to whose school it was. Adrian would go in to give an address one morning a week and he would take over and run the class as he thought (and I don't think this should go on the record as people concerned are still alive). He went into a class one day and he left something at the vicarage so he called a boy and said "Go down to the vicarage and get this". Fred Davis looked out of his window and saw this child going down so he went off and said "Where do you think you're going?" He said "Father Adrian has asked me to go to the vicarage". He said "You don't do that. You're in class. You go back to your class". And there was this kind of attitude and friction the whole time. Adrian thinking it was his school and Fred saying "I'm headmaster, I run the school and I say what happens". With a great deal of truth and authority, I thought, but they never worked amicably and Fred Davis's predecessor was also at crossroads with the then vicar, but I think now relationships are very good indeed. Probably because Mr. Elgar isn't such a....
- PR Not a pedant, is he. He insists on co-operation.

- EC Yes. I think he went for the quiet life.
- PR John, is there anything else you like finally to ask?
- JH It just want to confirm, actually, there were group managers in 1965 weren't there? Group 4?
- EC Yes, that's right.
- JH Can you just remind us which schools were in Group 4. One was Oakleigh Infants School.
- EC Yes, Oakleigh Infants; All Saints Girls.
- JH St. James's?
- EC There wasn't the nursery school. It hadn't been formed then.
- JH And Queenswell, were they part of Group 4 as well?
- EC Yes. An of course the grouping was determined by the number of pupils involved.
- JH That's right. And then eventually Queenswell expanded and eventually what is All Saints School moved into the Oakleigh Infants building. One of the confusions that Elgar has is that when Percy and I talk about All Saints we mean the old All Saints Girls and Infants school and when we talk about Oakleigh Infants School we know what me mean but Philip is lost because to him, what we think of as Oakleigh Infants School is All Saints School.
- EC On the same premises, pretty well, wasn't it and alongside you see? I can remember when I was Chairman of Friern Barnet Council going to an end of term thing and ending up at the wrong school.
- JH If you would do that, knowing the district as you do, it's very easy for other people to be confused.
- EC Yes. I thought I was supposed to be receiving some money at one school and they looked very surprised when I turned up at the staff room and said "Are you in the right place?" I said "I hope so". They said "I think you need the other school" by which time the school had given up the great pleasure of having my company and were about to go home. I disgraced myself on that occasion. It's really very easy to do.
- JH I'd just like to finish off with two questions before Percy does his.....
- PC John, can I just..... When you first went in it was slates that you used, was it?
- EC Yes, slates.
- PR I just wanted to confirm that. Sorry John.

- JH I want you to think back to your schooldays and tell me something that gave you great pleasure and something that made you very sad or disappointed.
- EC What made me very sad was such incidents as the May Bristow one when I felt injustice. That's really haunts me. The great pleasurable occasions were, I think, the days we looked forward to so much, Empire Day, May Day, you know, the highlights of the year. They were things we looked forward to so much and enjoyed so much.
- JH Empire Day. This is a note I've got from 1952. Incidentally the first note I've got of Empire Day is 1905 and it doesn't seem to have happened in the schools before 1905 but in 1952 I've got "Empire Day was held with the children marching round the playground behind the flag", and that's something we all remember, isn't it?
- PR & EC Yes.
- JH And my last questions is there was a Blackborough who was sexton in St. James's church. Now that is a relative of yours.
- EC It must be.
- JH Your father wasn't sexton, was he? He was sidesman.
- JH And churchwarden as well?
- EC No, he wasn't churchwarden, he was a sidesman for 36 years at All Saints.
- JH Thank you very much. Percy?
- PR No, I think that's it. Anything else you'd like to add?
- EC No, I don't think so.

