

Memories of Allerton Grange School.

© By Trevor and Margaret Plows and Rowena Smith

Trevor Plows, 1957-1962

I was born in July 1946 and went to Allerton Grange Secondary School in September 1957. That year was probably the leading edge of the post-war baby boom; certainly there were many of us, and I think it was a ten form entry that year. The original school was already too small, and my first classrooms were in new prefabricated accommodation behind the main school. Each day, many buses brought about two thirds of this first year from Moortown and Alwoodley. Living just off Scott Hall Road I either walked to Moortown Corner and caught a tram to Home Farm or walked the whole distance and spent the fare of 1½ d on sweets.

Coming from a small school, Allerton Grange School was exciting. There were hundreds of new people, some vaguely threatening. There were a number of older boys who dressed in the then fashionable teddy boy drapes going round in gangs who seemed to me exempt from the uniform and behaviour rules. Within a year we had a new headmaster (J Whitehead) and the teddy boys disappeared, either into uniform or out of the school.

As I went into the second year, construction started on the new blocks to become the middle and upper schools. I went into them as they opened for my third and fourth years. At the end of the fourth year the majority of pupils, perhaps some 60%, left for work (without formal qualifications). I recall only four classes in the fifth form and much smaller class sizes, down from 37 to low 20s. In the fifth year we were treated as more mature. We could remain in school at lunchtimes rather than out in the playground, although we had not got such things as a pupil common room. The new sixth form was very small and almost exotic as few aspired to a university education. I left after taking my 'O' levels so never experienced the sixth form.

The new schools were very impressive, well equipped with specialist classrooms and laboratories. I remember volunteering to wax the new wood benches in the upper school physics and chemistry labs. At the end of the second year pupils opted for a modular set of subjects for their GCE 'O' levels in addition to the basic curriculum. I chose the engineering module that comprised metalwork, technical and engineering drawing, physics with chemistry. Two other modules were pure science consisting of physics, chemistry, biology, and commerce that, I think, had commercial mathematics and Russian as a second foreign language.

In my first year we started French Language and a trip to France for a week was offered. I asked to go but my parents were not able to afford it, however the following year it was on offer again and this time I could go. A great excitement as I had barely been on holidays, never without my family or left the country. I can remember all the details of that trip to this day.

In the fifth form, in addition to studying for my 'O' levels, I was also involved as a stage electrician in the musical Love from Judy. My tasks included actually manufacturing floodlights from old oil drums. Sport was more flexible, I took Judo (taught by another pupil!) and golf. We were offered the opportunity to learn to drive if parents could afford to pay the lesson costs. I played Fives at lunchtime as the new school had Fives courts built on the end walls of the upper school. During 1962, my last year at school, a very bad storm damaged the roof of the upper school lifting it and then dropping it back after windows blew in on a staircase. During the eighties I returned as a night school student taking wine tasting, definitely not on anyone's syllabus in the 1950s! The school has now just been demolished so I have seen the entire life of the buildings through from construction to demolition.

Margaret Plows nee Thirsk, 1962 - 1967

My first day at Allerton Grange Comprehensive School was a revelation: I actually enjoyed school for the first time! At primary school the only thing that I looked forward to was the bell ringing on Friday afternoon. Allerton Grange was such a different experience and a fresh start. On my first day, the new intake lined up in the playground and then filed into the Lower School Hall. Here we stood and waited for our names to be called out, starting with the top class A and then down to J. I honestly expected to be in J, so I was pleasantly surprised to be in G, along with Jeannie from my primary school. We paired up, and stayed friends throughout our time at Allerton Grange. Mr Lee, our form teacher, took us for French, an exciting new subject. We had, on the whole, friendly teachers and a well taught interesting syllabus. Our first week was spent trying to navigate the Lower School and the novelty of getting lost changing classrooms each period was fun. I can remember us being told off for trying to sneak through the science labs on the top floor, it had no corridor, and having to go back down and start again.

Allerton Grange was a large school with over fifteen hundred pupils but the only time it really felt that big was when we had full school assemblies. The school had a large Jewish population and consequently closed early on Fridays for the Jewish Sabbath.

My favourite subjects were needlecraft and later, in the fourth year, history. The appeal of the latter was to some extent due to a new young history teacher, called Mr Blackburn. I worked so hard for him that he moved me up from the CSE to the GCE set. This rather defeated my object as the head of history, Mr Swindells, took that set. In the late 1980s, when I was a member of the Allerton Grange Middle School PTA, I was helping wash up after a quiz evening, when the quizmaster Wally Blackburn, (who still taught at the High School) recognized me and came across for a chat. At fourteen, I learnt to type, and this has proved a very useful skill over the years. Subjects I

disliked were: physical education, except for playing hockey once in a snowstorm, and physics in which in one exam I achieved 18%! Also, housecraft was no fun especially when Jeannie and I, whilst chatting, burnt our curried eggs and had to come back the next day at dinnertime to clean the pans.

A swimming pool was being built in 1966, but that was an event of little interest to me, except that everyone was expected to contribute money once a week to pay off a loan from several famous parents. I believe that I took a sixpenny piece although I never got to use the pool.

In 1966 you could still leave school at fifteen and about half my classmates opted to leave at that age. This led to a disruptive third year as these pupils had little interest in academic learning. For the rest of us decisions had to be made at thirteen on course options. These influenced the path your working life would take. I was lucky in that my mother valued education and let me stay on at school. By choosing the secretarial course (shorthand, typing and commerce) I had to drop needlecraft, the only subject I had always excelled in. In Leeds at that time, sewing was perceived as leading to a job in a factory; something my parents did not want for me, and had lower status than working in an office. It was never suggested that you could have aspirations beyond that by perhaps becoming a teacher or designer. I only knew of one person, a friend called Anne, who, after going to Park Lane College with us, went on to teacher training college. She became a secretarial teacher, but she was an exception at our level in the school.

Whilst Trevor was in the A stream and I was in a lower stream, we both enjoyed Allerton Grange. A life-long friend, Rowena, had a different experience.

Rowena Smith nee Dewey, 1963 -1968

It would be good to look back fondly on school memories but my overriding feeling was that the building was a place to house those

who failed the 11 plus. To be branded a failure at such a young age is sad and damaging. My school days did nothing to dispel the feeling that the best had gone.

Unfortunately education for girls at that time still seemed to be an interlude before getting married. At no time did anyone ever suggest I could have a career. My job satisfaction and self worth blossomed in my mid-forties when I took Dental Examinations, and embarked on what I would have loved to have been my chosen career.

Not all bad though. Nobody was unkind to me but being a quiet student in a huge school meant you just did your time and left.

I was struck by the sheer size and confusion of the many buildings. In the new uniform I felt small and vulnerable. I remember the alien smell of the physics and chemistry lab and the huge assemblies. I remember Housecraft for girls in which we spent a full lesson learning how to iron a pillowcase. Still haven't moved on to the sheets. Oh well too late now!

It did seem that logic was not applied to learning in the 60s. The requirement was for a good memory rather than the solid foundation of knowing why a particular action was required.

I remember being 'put-up' a class for the first three years, ending up in 3A. Good yes, but it necessitated the making of new friends. Consequently a firm group with which to share the days never really materialized.

I was put into the secretarial stream at thirteen so my future had been decided. Nevertheless, shorthand, typing and bookkeeping skills have proved to be useful tools.

I enjoyed the flute and played in the orchestra. I enjoyed athletics. I liked tennis and eagerly anticipated the two weeks when it was our turn to use the courts each year.

The best times were undoubtedly the walk to school with my good friend Margaret, and the day I left.

Finally -

if you enjoyed reading these memories of Allerton Grange and they trigger any that you would like to share you can add them to the Allerton Grange web-site.