

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND QUEEN STREET COWBOYS

I was introduced to the Queen Street School at Barton-on-Humber where the Head Master was an ex India Soldier and a Gentleman.

This class of older boys was treated like young Gentlemen and the Head Teacher never ever used a cane once while I was there.

He did have a cane but the only time he ever used it was to point to something drawn on the black board.

The Headmaster had a white walrus moustache and ice-cold blue eyes that when they fastened onto a boy who was fidgeting in class, the snot on the end of the lads nose just about to hit his exercise book would freeze into an icicle and the lad would be anchored to his desktop until it was time to go home.

Friday afternoons in this class was like being treated to the local Zoo.

All lessons were forgotten about and we got a pep talk about doing what one liked to do best and we had until four o' clock to do it.

On a Friday afternoon if the Head Teacher had corrected our books he would ask us "Hands up those who want to read comics!" and he would count the raised hands.

Then he would ask, "Hands up those who would like to hear stories about the North West Frontier of India and the Kyber Pass!"

I thought it was going to be a lesson about sex and stuck my hand up cos me Dad used to say "If'n thee comes 'ome late tha'll get mah boot up thi' kyber pass (Ass)

Usually the Indian Frontier got the vote, so we would sit there entranced while the old Gentleman recounted some of the clashes that occurred in the Kyber Pass and other skirmishes.

Later on in the piece when some lads began turning up for lessons wearing turbans and cocoa powder on a Friday afternoon and the Headmaster trying to hide his mirth would ask them to put the turbans in their desks and go wash their faces till it was time to go home otherwise should someone important call at the school see what looked like a fantasy from the Arabian Nights and reported it, our Head Teacher could get locked up in Lincoln Asylum and spend the rest of his life in a bath tub playing, "Duddely dum" on his bottom lip wi' all fower fingers of one hand, while the thumb of tuther hand was stuck in his left ear.

When the Teacher turned his back to go back to his desk his body would be shaking but he managed to keep a straight face with great difficulty, but on one occasion he had to drag out a handkerchief to wipe the tears of laughter that were running down his cheeks.

The Headmaster sat at his desk correcting papers and Student's books.

We were allowed to quietly go to someone else's desk and swap comics.

The comics I remember were, Skipper, Hotspur, Rover, Rainbow, Comic Cuts, and Adventure.

Later in my travels I would get attached to, "The Broons" and, "Oor Wullie."

On a Friday afternoon at this Church School the lads in the Head Teachers Class could be recognized even outside the school because they had rolls of comics shoved down their socks.

There was a Scottish lad in the class and soon a heated argument was raging. “Ye bliddy Sassenachs goat the idea frae us cos we hev a wee dirk stuck in oor sock!”

And the snarled answer would be, “Ay! But we don’t go ponsin’ abaht in a skirt an’ wi’ oot knickers, an ah dare yu tu go spud pickin’ ‘ere in Lincolnshire dressed in a kilt wi’ no knickers.!”

And the Scottish lad not to be trumped verbally, replied, “Aye but the Sassenachs hev ti wear troosers cos they is aye a’feert o’ getting’ their ba’s froze aff in Winter”

One Friday afternoon one of the lads noticed a grating in the planked wooden floor of the class room.

His mate helped him get it up when the Head Teacher was called away by nature and the lad got through the hole and when he got through and stood up he only had to bend his head a little to walk under the floor.

The lad’s friend put the grating back so if the Teacher suddenly walked between the desks he would not be alarmed or fall through.

Having got wind that there was one of our lads under the floor boards of the room the whole classroom was buzzing with whispers and it was bandied about that he was going to see if the space extended to the big girls class room next door and if they had similar gratings it was prophesied that since we could see what was down on the ground by the light of a small battery lit torch through our gratings anyone under the gratings could look up from the darkness and who knows what would happen.

Apprehension mounted for the lads safety owing to the fact that one could be bitten by rats under there if there were any we began whispered calls for the lad to give it away and come up.

After about fifteen minutes another lad went down with a torch to look for the other lad.

He found him under a grating that was under the other Teachers desk and when he finally surfaced he explained that the foundations were so placed that it was impossible to implement the first plan, so not to be disappointed he was fixing to set a bonfire under the desk of the fat teacher in the other room since it was realized that the two separate school rooms had at some time been one big room that had been divided by a huge wooden partition with a door with a glass panel in the top half of it and it was assumed that was the reason why there were no brick footings between the two rooms.

He was finally dissuaded by some of the other lads when it was pointed out that he would have no comic to read in Jail or Borstal on a Friday afternoon for the next five years, and he also agreed to give away his urge to see what kind of underwear the girls were wearing when one day when he was bored and that gave him the idea to bore a hole through the soft cement between the bricks in the wall so he could sneakily watch the big girls playing hockey cos sometimes the wind blew up their short skirts.

It was just as well that we had a Barton Fair now and again to break the monotony. And I wonder how many remember the lad who having climbed the pear tree in the play ground and could not get down again, so the Teacher had to call the local Fire Brigade to bring ladders and rescue the lad.

Tom Barker.