

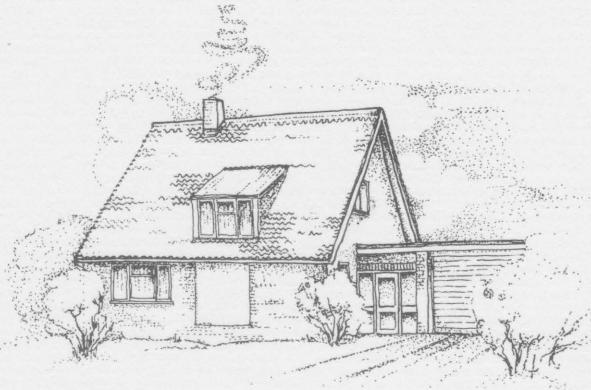


3 Bernard's Close Chearsley Aylesbury Buckinghamshire

In the absence of a written record of the school as a key aspect of the life of Chearsley, I will attempt to describe its characteristics during the years from 1959 to 1966 when I served as its headteacher. I must leave others to describe its life after that period.

From the beginning it was obvious that Alva (Miss Miller/Mrs. Martin) taught her younger children (5-7 years) in a sensitive, imaginative manner that coincided closely with my own belief that change was urgently needed in the learning opportunities for those of 8-11 years. As time passed the school environment became one continuous progression.

The classrooms themselves needed urgent changes: the walls painted, windows enlarged and doors glazed, floors made even, display boards mounted, the Victorian-style high teacher's desk in the upper room (complete with toilet roll prominently displayed) replaced with a low table large enough for children to share, the iron and oak children's benches replaced with light, flexible, stackable tables and chairs, child-usable cupboards and equipment drawers, individual drawers, areas for "messy" activities, a library corner for a wide variety of books and learning materials, and, eventually, (when hers arrived Alva turned its coke-filled tortoise variety elephant's trunk, with a coloured drawing of the head mounted on the wall above).



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Our emphasis lay in using the village environment to <sup>enhance</sup> ~~emphasise~~ and give meaning to the curriculum, an approach which was already the emphasis in the infant class. We brought the outside world into the classroom, with collections of objects old and new, of much variety, and explored the outside world whenever appropriate. (The infants loved to identify and follow animal tracks in the snow).

A bonfire in School Lane led to a demonstration of how the fire engine worked by the experts themselves. We saw how Stanley Parker fed, reared, sheltered and de-horned his beef cattle, saw how a local beekeeper collected a swarm, studied building methods from inside houses under construction, monitored a heronry in Chearsley Furze, recorded the changing seasons outdoors, marked Christmas with nativity plays and entertainment in the village hall and in school, with a visit from Father Christmas and his sack of toys.

There were Open Days with drama and country dancing, and on one occasion a series of slides to test parents' knowledge of wild birds. The juniors brought their pets in turn to use as a focus for learning on summer afternoons.

Friday afternoon was a "hobbies" afternoon for all the school to share their interests, skill and knowledge.

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We took part in Aylesbury district choral festivals and country-dancing, and in local village schools' rounders and athletics competitions.

Our school was alive. Perhaps its legacy may best be expressed in the words of a former pupil, recently received: "I never knew learning could be such fun, so exciting, interesting and meaningful."

Peter Mann.

