

School memories – by Richard Wall (1965-1972)

An everlasting memory for me is of the sea in Langstone Harbour crashing over the sea wall onto the Eastern Road and completely swamping a car.

I recall a boy finding a rabbit in the Great Salterns scrub (this being before the golf course), bringing it back to the school science area only to discover that it, and he, were both covered in fleas.

I recall a biology lesson where we went out onto the mudflats at low tide and at the end of the lesson, not wanting to walk the long way back I set out over the soft mud itself to get back to the school. I had no problem doing this as I was used to walking on the mud when I went cockling with my father. It was not until the following day that I found out that another boy (who I shall not name) followed me, got stuck, and had to be rescued before the incoming tide reached him.

I recall the day, just before the Easter holidays, I was called out of an RE lesson to be told that my mother had requested that I meet her at St Mary's Hospital. My father had had a heart attack just after I left for school that morning. He died on Good Friday.

I recall the maths 'O' level exam. It was so easy. I was ok, but nothing special, at maths and I was so surprised that it seemed that easy, especially as most other boys found it hard. I thought I must have misread some of the questions, but no, I got an 'A'. I still don't understand how that happened.

I recall a science teacher losing his temper with a boy talking, except he got the wrong boy. I told the teacher that his victim was not the culprit. He was determined to dish out punishment regardless, so it was either the other boy or me. I thought it wrong that someone be punished when innocent, so I took the punishment. I was hit across the hand with rubber tubing. 45 years later the palm of my right hand still bears the mark.

I recall being put in detention for being late. I was in the fifth form and it was the first time I had ever been late, and even then it was only by a minute or two. I deeply resented this.

I recall the art trip to Italy where we visited the Villa Borghese, the Colosseum, the Vatican and Pompeii. We heard the Pope's Easter message, saw 'La Pieta' shortly before it was attacked with a hammer and witnessed a thunderstorm over Vesuvius.

I recall running in the playground, tripping over my own feet, spinning round and striking my head against one of the stone steps. I walk, somewhat stunned, to the staff room, leaving a trail of blood in the corridor behind me. I was taken to hospital, checked over and stitched. I was told subsequently, that I had knocked the corner off of the concrete step.

I recall learning the violin and the cello, at least for a short while. Carrying a cello on the bus halfway across Portsmouth during a cold wet winter was just a bit too much for this small boy.

I recall dropping down to the bottom set for English in the fourth year where I had Mr Williams as teacher. At the end of the year I came second overall for English and moved up to the top set.

And I recall the art lessons under Mr Standen, he gave me a lifelong interest in art and enabled me to support my children in their interest.

The net result of all this is that I have an enquiring mind. I find things interesting, including art, science, history, genealogy, natural history, music, literature and religion (especially heresy!).