

ORPHANAGE MEMORIES

S Larcombe



' THE ORPHANAGE ' (Druids Heath School) WALSALL WOOD ROAD - NOW DEMOLISHED

ORIGINALLY RUN BY RAOB, AND THEN DR. BARNARDO'S HOMES

As a young boy of nine I was first admitted to the orphanage in 1944 and for a total of just over five years was to spend my time within the confines of Druids Heath School.

Aldridge then was just a quaint and picturesque village with a small population. My first two years spent in the annexe in Stonnall Road (now a private nursing home) bring back so many memories of how life was then, so different from today's hustle and bustle.

Walking across open fields, two of us boys would carry the milk churn to Rowe's farm, passing across Lazy Hill and past a small pond, and along the track down to the farmhouse. Whilst waiting for the milk, we were allowed to climb up in to the barn, and enjoyed a few minutes amusement jumping down into the hay below, before our return journey to the home.

There was a lovely view from most of the dormitory windows at the rear of the big house. Overlooking open fields, one could just view the branch railway line before it crossed over the Chester Road on route to Birmingham, also Swaine's farm and Gould Firm Lane in the distance. In the winter-time the scene was breath taking and would have graced any Christmas card.

I recall summer days down at the main school, playing football on the back yard, and the big slides that we made during the cold and frosty weather.

A glimpse of the green Harpers Brothers buses as they journeyed past the school on their way to the village, or the other way to Brownhills and Cannock, were always a reminder to us boys that there was another world out there.

Inter house cross-country runs took us down the winding lane of Hobs Hole, past bluebell wood and back along Back Lane to the Plough and Harrow pub. The hedge rows were a mass of wild flowers and there was an abundance of foxgloves and poppies. Then the arduous route back up Frank James Hill past the church into Noddy Park Road and finally Walsall Wood Road, as the old school came back into view. One of the rarer occasions that we would be pleased to have arrived back into our sheltered world.

We enjoyed our visits to the Avion Cinema, which was a big treat, but had to be earned if one was not on detention. We were always made to feel welcome by the manager Mr Harry Russell. The march to matins at St Mary's church every Sunday morning and complete silence observed by us boys during the whole of the service.

There is so much one could write about during the early 50's but I cannot close without a mention of the numerous friends from the Aldridge village folk, who always made us welcome where ever we ventured. Such happy memories.