
On the British Education System and The State Schools in Cambridge (XI)

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In the preceding essays (Vol. IX and X), I mentioned the school lessons, especially science, physical education and project. In this essay, I will tell you about School Events in which my family and I took great interest.

School Events

Looking back upon the School Year of Milton Road Junior School, I remember there were a lot of things which my daughter, family and I looked forward to and enjoyed ourselves very much. I will tell you about some of them.

1. "Mary Rose" Trip to Portsmouth

When it was about one month since my family and I had been settled in Cambridge, we received a school letter informing us of a visit to Portsmouth during the coming half term for both children and their parents. It is as follows:

Milton Road Junior School
Gilbert Road
Cambridge CB4 1UZ

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3rd October 1986

To : Parents of children in Class P4 and R4.

Dear Parent,

As I am sure you know class P4 is fully engaged in studying the life and times of the Tudors centring on the "Mary Rose" warship which was recovered from the Solent four years ago. As an "extra" to the studies I am arranging a visit to Portsmouth during the coming half term for both children and their parents.

It isn't possible to make this a class visit during term time, nor to stay overnight in Portsmouth. The possibility of seeing the "Mary Rose" and the objects recovered from her while we are engaged in the topic seems too good an opportunity to be missed. To do so, however, means a coach journey of at least four hours in each direction, leaving school at about 7.45am and returning at about 9.00pm.

Since it is planned for half term for those children who wish to and are able to go, there is the further opportunity to make this a "family trip" by inviting one parent (initially) to accompany each child, and other members of the family if there is room on the coach. It will be possible for children from the class to travel unaccompanied since I shall ask all adults to help with the supervision of the children. If you are considering requesting seats for other children in your family, please bear in mind their age and the total length of the journey.

Preference for coach seats will be as follows :

- A. Children from Class P4 and R4.
- B. One parent for each child as above.
- C. A second parent and / or other children from families of children in class P4 and R4.

If there is room for those in C. these will be drawn 'out of a hat' where there are more applications than seats; the same could happen if B. is oversubscribed.

The cost depends to some extent on the number of requests for seats a 49, 53 or 57 seater coach will be used — but this cost, inclusive of the entrance fee to the exhibition, but exclusive of all meals and refreshments will not be above £4.00 per head; the exact cost will be communicated to you with the acceptance of your application for seats.

A packed lunch will be required and we shall stop somewhere for a meal on the way back.

Should you be on holiday in the Portsmouth area and would like to join the party there, it will be possible to arrange this, with the required entrance payment being made through the school.

The date of the visit will be : TUESDAY 28th OCTOBER 1986

If you would like your child, yourself and / or others in your family to go, please return the attached slip on MONDAY NEXT. No money is required at this stage.

Yours sincerely,

I.D. Phipps (Deputy Headmaster)

Thinking that it would be the first "family trip" since we were settled in Cambridge, I made an application to the school for my daughter's and wife's seat and mine. Fortunately our application for three seats was accepted soon with a formal application form from the teacher. So we handed in the form, filling in a blank. The form is as follows:

Milton Road Junior School
Gilbert Road
Cambridge CB4 1UZ
15th October 1986

PORTSMOUTH (Mary Rose) TRIP

Tuesday 28th October 1986

Dear Parent,

Please return this letter with payment for the combined coach and entrance fees. The combined cost is £4.00 per head. I shall send you further information next week.

With thanks,

Yours sincerely,

I.D. Phipps

Child's name..... Class

I enclose payment for tickets @ £4.00 per head.

Signed..... Date

Cheques made payable to Milton Road Junior School Fund.

So I paid £12 by cheque, and received a school letter telling us much more details and precautions about the trip. The letter was written in this way : "We have only one spare seat, and the coach company involved is Myall's from Bassingbourn and the trip has been organized under the Local Authority's arrangements for school journeys, and Mrs. Russon and Mr. Phipps are both accompanying the children as well as 11 other parents," and so on.

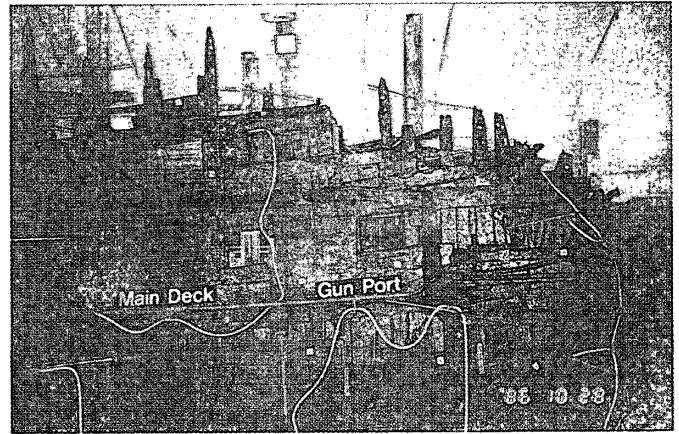
On Tuesday, 28th October, '86, we went to the school by Mr. Nagai's car, and Mr. Nagai is a Japanese and was living in the same kind of terraced house at our Mulberry Close. He was a medical researcher and was living at Mulberry Close for a long time with his wife and two children, Yuko and Ken. The latter was in the fourth year at Milton Road Junior School like

my daughter. So my wife and I were often told about a lot of things in our daily life after we were settled in Cambridge. As for my son and daughter Ritsuko, Yuko and Ken were their playmates; sometimes my son played soccer with Ken and some other children in the Close, and sometimes Ritsuko played the piano with Yuko.

At any rate, our bus started at 7:55 a.m. It was ten minutes behind schedule. We arrived at the Naval Dockyard in Portsmouth at something past eleven. Soon after our arrival, we took some pictures with my daughter's friends and class teacher, Mrs. Russon, and had our packed lunch at the dockyard. It was the first time that I saw and talked with Mrs. Russon. Then we toured the exhibition of recovered Mary Rose, which was a very old warship of the times of the Tudors. I took some pictures of the ship, and then we entered the Naval Museum and studied the history of warships and other ships. After watching the museum, we went to the shop to buy some books and souvenir, and went in the tearoom for a cup of tea and coffee. As it was raining rather hard, we spent the rest of the time there. At 4:30 p.m., we left Portsmouth, and dropped in at a roadside restaurant to have supper on the way back, getting to the school in Cambridge about at nine p.m. Though the day was not favoured by magnificent weather, we had a rather good time, partly because it was the first time that we made a family trip in England, and partly because I had a nice opportunity to talk with the teachers of the fourth year and the parents of the school children. And as for my daughter, I think she had a good opportunity to talk with her classmates and to be more friendly with them. Here I will show you two photographs on that occasion.



The Fourth Year Children
at the Naval Dockyard



Warship "Mary Rose" of Tudor Age

2. The Performance of the "Happy Prince"

At the beginning of March, my daughter told us that there would be a performance at school in April, and that the pupils from 3rd to 4th year would perform a play, dance, sing songs in addition to the chorus and that they were practising after school every day. On hearing this, I imagined that it might be a musical drama, looking forward to the performance, and expecting to videotape the performance. Meanwhile we received a school letter by the Headmaster concerning the performance. The letter said :

MILTON ROAD JUNIOR SCHOOL

19th March 1987

Dear Parents,

REHEARSALS FOR "THE HAPPY PRINCE"

In order to provide sufficient continuity practice it will be necessary to hold extra rehearsals after school as follows :

- TUESDAY, 24TH MARCH — for all those involved in parts 3 and 4 plus all the Choir until 4.00 pm.
- WEDNESDAY, 25TH MARCH — for all those involved in parts 1 and 2 plus all the Choir until 4.30 pm.
- TUESDAY, 31st MARCH — Complete cast until 4.00 pm.

Please note also that the Dress Rehearsal will take place on Friday, 3rd April beginning at 9.30 am. Any of you who may be unable to come to the evening performances on 6th or 7th April are welcome to join us at this final rehearsal.

Yours sincerely,

J. R. Ellis.

Wondering what day was best to videotape the performance, I wrote to the headmaster about it, and Mr. Ellis, headmaster, answered me, saying that 3rd April would be best because that day would be the final rehearsal beginning at 9:30 a.m., and that it would be light enough to videotape in the morning. Thus I had a permission to take a video. So at 9:30 a.m. on 3rd April I went to the school with a video camera. When I entered the school hall, I was surprised to find that all the pupils from 1st to 2nd year were gathered to watch the performance and that there were the stage in front of

the pupils, and the stage for chorus and band. At the side of the band, there stood a piano, and Miss Parker, music teacher, sat on the chair. Behind the pupils, there were some chairs for the guests and pupils' parents, and on one of the chairs I sat, and adjusted the video camera. But it was the first time for me to videotape such a performance, so I was at a loss what to do; camera angle, what to videotape, for example, characters on the stage, or the chorus, or the band. But I decided to take a video according to the development of the situation. Soon the headmaster made an opening speech, and the performance began. As I imagined, the original story of the performance was written by Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900), English poet and playwright, and it was a musical drama composed by Beronica Bennetts. I was moved greatly, partly because I had never seen such a musical drama, and partly because the main characters such as "Prince" and "Swallow" sang so many long songs very beautifully as if theirs were angels' songs, and the other characters, boys and girls, sang and performed without any pretension, and partly because Japanese school children, especially school boys, I thought, could not have done so. At any rate, it was a tremendous musical drama for me, so I took a veideo beside myself with joy. After about an hour, the performance ended, and the headmaster showed appreciation of the children's efforts. As I could not watch the video by a video deck in England because of the difference of voltage and of the apparatus, I played back the tape as soon as I came back to Japan. I was very glad to find that it was taken rather well. So even now after a long lapse of time, I often play it back and enjoy myself.

The final rehearsal moved me so greatly that I, having two admission

tickets from the school went to watch the performance again with my wife on Monday, 6th April, at 7:00 p.m. when it was put on the stage formally. There were a lot of parents then instead of the pupils. Of course, my wife enjoyed herself too much. That time, I took a lot of photographs of the performance with the help of stroboscope as it was evening. Indeed the performance is one of the best memories in Cambridge never to be forgotten.



The Performance of The "Happy Prince"