

# James Platt remembers his school days in Port

Known to many of you, James Platt is a Port Isaac boy who now lives in the Netherlands. He has written several books about his life in Port Isaac and they include stories of his schooldays (PISCES sells them if you want to buy copies). Here he remembers just a few events from his school days in the village.

I began at Port Isaac CP School in 1943, when i was just 4 years old. My first year of attendance took place in the Church Rooms, commandeered in the wartime to accommodate the increased pupil numbers due to the arrival of evacuees, who seemed as strange to us as we would have seemed to them.

My first teacher was Miss Dawe, and I remember her as being exceedingly kind and gentle, making a perfect start to motivating learning. My birthday fell in the late summer, so by a peculiarity of intake relating birthday to the start of the school year, I was always around a year younger than so many of my classmates.

Attending school was then considered a duty, and no matter what the weather did, or how far away you lived (Trelights for example), you never missed going. Illness of course was a deterrent, but Doctor Sproull saw to it that you had to be very ill if you were to be allowed to miss school. A more valid excuse was that your shoes were at the cobblers, and since most of us only had the one pair, that was acceptable to explain absence.

In my second year I went down to the school in Fore Street to join the infants class under Miss Smythe. As I lived just across the road in Canadian Terrace I went home for dinner, and never once took school dinners, which I saw as a blessing. Few of us liked eating food cooked by people other than our parents or grandparents.

It is impossible for me to imagine tha there could have been a better teacher than Miss Smythe, then or subsequently. The three Rs flowed from her to us.

At age 7 I moved to the second class under Mrs Morman, who was incidentally the cobbler's wife. She had no qualms with the shoe or boot repair excuse. Although she was a substantially tougher proposition than Miss Smythe, and adept in applying a one foot ruler to errant hands, she and her husband Harry were such good people that it was a privilege to know.

Mrs Morman liked handwriting to be neat and stylish. Mine was, and still is, neither of these, and we clashed now and then over penmanship.

I moved to the third class aged 9, but spent only a year in it before being put up to the fourth, and top class taken by the headmaster, the utterly legendary "Boss" Richards. My third class teacher was Mr Perry - in so many ways he was like "one of the boys"; full of fun, exceedingly well liked and respected, sporty and even tempered.

My leaving for Boss's class actually coincided with the departure of Mr Perry for new pastures, and his replacement by Mr Henry Pam, a man with heavy hands, who for good reason quite quickly became known as "Henry the Eighth". Hence my exit to Boss was in many ways an escape from tyranny.

With Boss you got straight discipline, but it was never less than your due, and never resented. Boss was fair and just in all things. No pupil of his was ever poorer for the experience of knowing him. He was feared, respected and loved, all at the same time.

In his class I was 10 years old, in among boys and girls who ranged up to the age of 15. It could have been easier, but then again they were happy enough to have someone like me to look down on. There was enough rough humour to make it familiar.

However, Boss pushed me hard towards the eleven plus exam for Camelford Grammar school, did that job well, and ensured that I was only with him in his class for a year.

The older I get, the more I become aware of the huge debt of gratitude I owe to the pantheon of teachers who taught me at Port Isaac School. A mark of their greatness in the way in how so many little things they taught and showed me then are used by me naturally on a daily basis. I often wish I could go back for a few minutes to thank them properly, but there we are, the moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on.

Then again, we remember them, and we remember the school, and we are so glad of the memories, and they will know that.



*James Platt, Michael Collings, Terry Thomas and David Sloggett on Lobber in the 1940s*