

Thomas Garner Rogers

(Editor's Note)

The following reminiscences of Overton Endowed Boys' School were written by Mr. Thomas Garner Rogers and sent to us by his son, Dr. Colin D. Rogers of Tintwistle.

The school Admissions Registers show that Mr. Rogers was first admitted to the school from Frodsham Infants' School on 4th May 1903, leaving on 13th November 1908 to go to Runcorn. He was re-admitted on 18th January 1909 from Runcorn National School and left to start work on 26th August 1910.

The school Log Book records the winning of the book prize for handwriting mentioned by our author, which does not surprise your Editor as I look at the beautifully executed manuscript before me.

Mr. Rogers is now over 90 years old and at present in hospital in Blackpool. We wish him a speedy recovery.

OVERTON ENDOWED BOYS SCHOOL

The Headmaster was Mr. John Cragg, tall, could reach a long way with his cane, but only when he had just cause to use it. In those days he was anxious to get a good attendance record and he used me to help him to do so, for it so often happened in our street, that certain boys did not answer the roll call because their mothers used to get up at 5 a.m. to see fathers fed and off to start work at 6 a.m. Then she got into bed again, and young Freddie and others were dressed too late to go to school. Mixed feelings, joy at not going to school, woe because eventually facing Headmaster for being absent. But that is where I came into the picture, for Mr. Cragg would call me out and say, "Rogers, go and bring me so and so." To me, that was an order. I ran the mile and a quarter down hill to our street and implored Mother to let me take the absentee back with me to that kindly man Mr. Cragg and Mother reminding her son that he would be "under my feet" all day, always agreed to my request. Of course illness was a different story. However, my efforts to get back to school quickly, usually meant running up the steep slope to and beyond the church with my protesting ward, ignoring anyone else on the way, except if we happened to meet the Vicar, then we would walk sedately together and at the right moment touch the peaks of our caps, if they were at the front of our heads. Justice, to my mind, was never clearly defined for Mr. Cragg was soon putting the question, "Where have you been?" I collided with my ward over explanations, but he has heard them all before, and there was never a punishment whereas to be one minute late any morning resulted in a good whack across the palm of the hand. I suppose not having to make a report on absence was balanced by non-punishment.

A schoolboy's dress in those days was boots, black stockings, short pants, a jacket which buttoned up to the neck and a cap. The pants are worth a mention, for very few were without patches, and there was a distinction about the patches, for if they were neat and tidy that entitled the wearer to feel superior in social rank and quality, whereas a patch freeing itself made the wearer uncomfortable and conscious, while anyone wearing pants that needed repairing. Well! But he who exhibited an honest tear wore a halo, until he got home.

Going to Frodsham School meant going home for dinner and back up the hill again, or taking sandwiches if, in the dinner hour, a football match was to be played. No cars or buses in those days though the farmers had high-stepping cobs and traps on dusty roads controlled just a little by watering carts. Walking was the main means of local travel, therefore our teachers Mrs. Holland and Margaret Wells in long skirts and, I think, shoes, footed it up and down the inclines.

My evaluation of my teachers seem to form after I left school and the crown rests on the head of Mr. Holborn, teacher of the top class, though to be fair to my earlier teachers I remember only that I seem to get on well with them. Mr. Holborn began a flower-identification system by which children were asked to bring uncommon wild flowers to school, the flowers were on view but, most important, the name of the flower and the name of the child who brought it were put on a notice board for all to see, and I glowed with pride on seeing my name opposite to Silver Weed.

For certain lessons the two top classes came together at the end of the long room, additional to those already seated, others stood elbow to elbow along the two walls. That was how we were introduced to the works of Shakespeare, reciting in unison from the blackboard extracts from plays explained by Mr. Holborn, serious works still in my memory after 70 years. Just as I remember the jokes uttered by non-moving lips and elbows nudging around those walls.

Disciplinary action without tears was natural to Mr. Holborn. He was a big man waving a cane but persuading by words. He would make an offender stand before the class knowing well that the offender must not be made to look a hero, on the contrary, he had the knack of making the offender feel foolish and red-faced. Control of such a large class was brought about by making a suspect recite the work alone. Much learning was done by reciting in unison, especially reading from the blackboard.

Sports were mostly football and local cricket. A highlight of Overton School football came when we won the Runcorn District Shield. I played inside left but remember little of the game, but distinctly remember Headmaster Cragg sitting high up with the driver and proudly bearing the shield, and how high up were coach drivers' seats in those days, well they had to control four horses aroused by a load of excited kids in that instance.

Of course I was a winner of "Gills Normal Handwriting System" but am a little hazy because I thought I won it twice. For the first year the prize was a book called "The Gorilla Hunters." I valued this smashing book more than the achievement of winning it. However, the next winter was a good frosty one and there were stretches of ice on pools. My brothers and I went skating as usual, but I had a nasty fall injuring one knee which later developed to water-on-the-knee and Dr. Selby ordered me to rest the leg in bed for a few weeks. It was during this period that the handwriting competition was open again and Mr. Cragg decided that I was eligible to do the writing at home. I did so, and won a second time and the prize was a book about Eskimos and the frozen north. I don't remember the exact title, but I did not value it as much as the Gorilla book.

It might be of interest if I recorded a saying of Mr. Holborn - I hope I have spelled his name correctly - it was as follows:

"Winchester was. London is. York is to be."

I suppose it is self-explanatory, and I have quoted it on many occasions not with any seriousness. However, I have read in "Now" that central London is gradually subsiding, it has fallen five inches compared with sea level since 1953 and is continuing, the whole of S.E. England is tilting into the sea. London itself is subsiding because its clay base is drying up, while melting polar ice caps are increasing the depth of the sea. With great respect for my old teacher I have decided not to worry too much about it, because I am informed that in London there are only immigrants and politicians. Also, I am sure York is in Yorkshire a far better choice would be Chester.

May I be permitted to tell another story - quite true - about another teacher, a disciplinarian. Joe admitted to me that he was not very bright and Teacher used to go along the backs of a row of boys, look at their work over their shoulders, if not satisfied he took hold of the boy's hair at the back and tugged it upwards. Joe said it was painful and complained to his father about it. This happened a few times and father was very annoyed about it, so one evening he put Joe on a chair saying, "I'll show that so and so he cannot treat you like that", so he cut Joe's hair so short it was like a billiard ball and not a head of hair. The next day Teacher followed his inspection route as usual and foreseeing that young balled head seemed undaunted for after looking at Joe's work he hit him on the top of his head with a flat ruler and Joe said it sounded just as if a bladder of lard had been struck. He went home and told father, enraged he said, "Well, he'll not beat me. I'll cut your b... head off first!" Well now, fathers have been known to offer their sons for sacrifice, what a pity some fathers hesitate to offer themselves for sacrifice.

Now, where was I? Oh yes! Overton School. It was a good school, the type that distance in time makes the heart grow fonder.