

Tom John

1923 - 2014

Many of our readers will have memories of Tom John, who was headmaster at St. Mary's School, Shipton from April 1956 to December 1962. He continued as a Shipton resident until December 1969. His daughter Linda Taylor pays tribute to her father and shares her own memories of living in Shipton.

Arriving by Sofa

I was eight years old when we arrived in the Wychwoods in the back of a furniture van. As we had no car, the removal men put the sofa in last and my father Tom, mother Jean, sister Ros and I sat there in the dark for the journey to Shipton from Bicester.

On arrival most of our belongings were put in store in the loft of the vicarage outbuildings, courtesy of Rev. Winsor-Cundell. To begin with we rented Staddlestone Cottage in Shipton Road, which came furnished. Our landlady, Miss Ashby lived in a sort of prefab in the garden!

The School

After a year we moved to Salisbury Place in Church Street, which at the time was a small cottage with a large garden owned by Mr Monty Moore of the Shaven Crown. The stone well in the front garden was designed by my mother to replace the old pump and rotting boards. We were told our dining room used to be a



butcher's shop. I know the walls had so much salt in them that paint would not stay on.

The school had three classes and about 75 pupils. Only half of the playground was tarmac; there was a paddock with iron railings, a large heap of coke, and the toilets were round the side of the building with no access from inside. School dinners were cooked on the premises by Mrs Wiggins and Mrs Mabel Souch, who also doubled up as dinner lady. We ate in groups of eight and

one of us served the others. The caretakers were Mr and Mrs Hawkes, who lived, I think, in Simon's Lane.

Sheep, Sheep come home?

I will not write a list of all the children I remember, but Nina Viner, Victor Barney, Margaret Osborne, Nicholas Treweeke, Paul Viner and the Carpenter twins are a few that come to mind. Geoff Miles was a year or two older. Does anyone remember the playground games, *Sheep, Sheep come home* or *Truth, dare, double dare* or *promise*? Dad was only 32 when he

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became head teacher. During his time he had the area at the back of the building landscaped with a courtyard, the playground finished, a rather dodgy sandpit area removed and a climbing frame installed. The old tortoise stoves were taken out and replaced with modern ones. The first day they were lit we had to be sent home because of a suspected carbon monoxide leak.

Learning Italic Handwriting

Dad taught himself italic handwriting, which he then taught to the children. He wrote in that style until he died. Each morning we had an assembly with a different short service every day, complete with hymns and canticles. Dad was very keen on music (being Welsh). We had *Singing Together* on Monday, *Rhythm and Melody* on Thursday from the radio, and recorder lessons in the Beaconsfield Hall with Miss Storrs, a visiting teacher.

At Christmas a large tree was brought into the school and decorated. The room was cleared and laid up for a party. There were all sorts of games and food and then Father Christmas would arrive and give out presents. Then there were the carol services in the church, lessons and carols with added infant tableau. We processed from the back of the church singing *Once in Royal David's City*, complete with soloist. Children read, sang solos, played

instruments and the place was always packed.

On Christmas Eve, some of us would go with the church choir to sing carols on the staircase at the Shaven Crown.

Afterwards we were given refreshments in what was then called the top lounge, but I think is now the bar.

The summer brought rounders games and sports day in the paddock. There were egg and spoon, sack and 3-legged races and also a race for the mums, usually won by Mrs Wallis.

I remember a village project we did, creating a large book. We rubbed the brass and stones in the church, found out where people worked, made maps, drew pictures. Can you imagine these days a small group of young children being sent out alone to the station to interview the porter? Well, we were!

Dad loved Shipton. He played cricket for the village. He was a lay reader and sang in the church choir. He was on the PCC and enjoyed many a pint at the Shaven Crown. A few days before he died in March, I told him I had recently visited the village. He could not speak but his smile said it all.

Linda Taylor (née John)

Editor's note – If any reader would like to contact Linda she would love to hear from you. Please contact me for her email address.

St Mary's School Reunion: Photo Call

If you attended St Mary's School, Shipton you are very welcome to join us at our reunion evening on **Friday 13th June** at 7pm at the Wychwood Cotswold Inn.

Before the evening kicks off we plan to meet outside the old school building in

Church Path to update the school photo taken in 1967.

So bring your family and friends and let's have a good old reminisce together.

Jim Hudson