

28th November 2010

Dear Harry and Callum,

Thank you very much indeed for your splendid and most welcome letter and photographs. They arrived on Monday last (22nd) which coincidentally was on my 82nd birthday, so your letter was the nicest possible anniversary present! I look back on my ten years spent in Gütersloh as the happiest years of my life so far!

Service schools were controlled by a civilian Authority called the British Families Education Service (BFES). This included 55 primary schools and 10 secondary schools in West Germany. The only primary school in Gütersloh before 1965 was called Trenchard School (parented on the RAF for daily servicing of supplies). It was situated on the other side of the Officers' patch in Siegfriedstrasse and has now been returned to German ownership again I believe. RAF aircraft became more sophisticated as the years went by. Vampires and Hunters gave way to Lightnings and Jaguars. There were many helicopters, VTOL and trooping flights to and from RAF Gütersloh. They all needed more air and ground crew. These were mostly married servicemen and civilian employees, which meant, of course, more children! Once full, Trenchard School, being surrounded by German houses, could only expand into Mansergh Barracks.

George Cooke, the headmaster of Trenchard, put four classes as an 'annexe' in a barrack block in Mansergh Barracks, which is now part of your school. As numbers continued to increase it was decided to set up a full primary school of six classes with 151 children from 5 – 11 years old. These included RAF children from Thomas-Mann-Strasse and the officers' and teachers' patch. The Authority decided to call this new school 'Haig' and I was appointed as headmaster from September 1965. Haig was parented on the Artillery Regiment resident in Mansergh Barracks at the time.

Continuing expansion of the RAF led to the building of the flats in Blankenhagen, and Haig school at its largest reached 25 classes and 525 children. Blankenhagen school was opened, I believe, soon after I left in August 1975.

That answers questions in your first paragraph, and now for your bullet points! The biggest difference between Haig School then and now must be that we had no computers or mobile phones! The government later on provided every primary school with one BBC computer. We were at first puzzled about how best to use it of course!

Your uniform sounds very smart. Our uniform was simply what the NAAFI could supply; navy blue blazers and grey trousers and skirts with white or blue shirts and blouses. Blue gingham dresses were worn by the girls in summer. Blazer pockets sported the BFES navy badge with yellow letters. We used three of the buildings (Blocks 17, 18 and 19 I think they were) and more and more of the rooms were used as the years went on. The extended hall and dining room with kitchen was built during my time as a great addition.

Haig School gets its name from Sir Douglas Haig, first Earl Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British armies in France in the First World War 1914-18. He remains a figure of great controversy, with many lives lost in losing many battles, except the last one, which ended the First World War. We tried with our four House names to forget war and remember those who fought other 'wars' to relieve human pain and suffering, viz. Fleming, Lister, Schweizer and Shaftesbury.

Our teachers were firm but kind, I like to think. Some of course were stricter than others! But the cane was never used in any school that I worked in during my career (1952-1988). Our classrooms were decorated and colourful, with samples of work from every child displayed on the walls. If visitors were ever critical of the efforts of less able children, we could always say "Yes, but that is so much better than what they did yesterday!"

Our school buildings were never bombed, because the Second World War ended in 1945. Mansergh Barracks may have been bombed during this war, when it was a German barracks; I don't know!

All our children were also bussed to school, except one family who lived at the end of a barrack block in Mansergh. That was the family of Mr Andrews of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. His department repaired and maintained all the barrack buildings, roads and all the married quarters. There must be someone like that today!

The headteacher's role then as now was to maintain the school system as closely as possible to the British system at home. The object is to minimise the turbulence experienced by children following their fathers' postings from Britain and back home again. This is specific to service schools, but there is of course much more to the role than that!

I am sorry, Harry and Callum, that short questions sometimes require long answers and that I have 'gone on a bit'! There's much more to say, not least about our good relationships through games and sports etc with other service primary schools and also our great neighbour, King's School. However, they would require a letter to themselves, or perhaps a visit sometime, if I'm spared, as they say!

Thank you again for your letter and lovely photos. I must search for some photos from our time!

Yours sincerely

Don Friswell