

They Always Remember the Slipper do the Lads

Bruce Reed was born in 1921 and interviewed in 1996

I was born in 1921 in Burneside Kettel Houses just next to the churchyard where my mother's grandfather lived. There was a saying in those days "The eternal triangle – the school, the mill, the churchyard."

My father was an engineer at Burneside mill. There was a long family of Reeds who had worked in the mill for years and years. I think Croppers started in about 1845 my Great-Grandfather who came from Newcastle to work at the factory within ten years of that.

I went to Burneside School when I was about four years old. And I left when I was eleven. I got a scholarship, the Bryce Scholarship. John Bryce was one of the original directors and money was left for scholarships for boys of people who worked at the mill. I don't think I worked as hard as I should have done because of rugby and cricket. I was very lucky because in those days it was very difficult to get scholarships. I went to St. John's College, York and I was there from 1939 to 1941. Just before I went in the Services I worked at the mill for a few weeks. I worked with Charlie Simpson. He was on what we called a "Slitter." He cut these big reams up into different sizes and I carried the waste away which was called "broke." I got two pounds ten shillings a week which was good money in those days.

Then I went into the services. I joined up at Lords Cricket Ground on September 15th 1941. That was "Air Crew Recruiting Centre." I went to Torquay for ITW - Initial Training Wing," and then to Canada on a pilot's course. I went solo and got the mumps. When I went back I was too slow and I re-mustered as a navigator. I was posted to 159 Squadron when we were converted from Wellingtons on to four engine Liberators.

I came home on a Navigators Course and got married while I was home on April 24th 1945. On the morning of our wedding my father was repatriated from a Polish Prisoner of War camp and he arrived home on the morning of the wedding.

After the war I was looking for a job, Herbert Heath was clerk to the Director of Education and he was also the chairman of the cricket club and I was playing for Kendal. I went to him and asked "Are there any jobs in the area Mr Heath?" and he said "Yes there is one at Natland. If you want it, it's yours." And I did a year at Natland, but I always wanted bigger lads these were sevens, eights and nines. A job came up at Stramongate Boy's, the Modern School and I got that. I taught English to start with then Mr Brownsord who was doing the sporting job packed it in and I took over the whole of the PE and all the games at Stramongate and then the new school, Longlands Boys, opened in 1960 and I went down there and I was there until 1980 when they went comprehensive and then I left.

The lads never seemed to get away with anything. I always remember being called to the telephone and a voice, a very low voice, said he was making an excuse for his son's absence. I was a little bit suspicious of this voice. I thought it was a lad who was telling the tale. I said "Who's speaking please?" He said "It's me dad."

I was a fairly strict disciplinarian. I'd be 19 and the boys then were only 5 years difference I age. I played cricket with the boys. Later on I taught Arthur Shepherd from Netherfield and Brian Park who played football for Netherfield and Matt Ferguson who also played soccer for Netherfield.

We got very little trouble from parents in those days. Occasionally they would come complaining but they left it to the teacher. I never taught girls, except when I was doing school practice. I don't know how I would deal with girls. But if the boys misbehaved I had a

slipper, a big slipper, in the gym. They always remember the slipper do the lads because it would sting a bit on shorts.

I went down at odd times when my children were at the school and everything seemed to be in good order.

I've been very lucky in the sense that I have stayed around here all my life and done more or less what I wanted to do. If I wanted promotion, as some of them do now, they've got to move off to Manchester, Birmingham or Liverpool and that wouldn't have suited me.

I played rugby until I was 37 years of age. I would first play for Kendal second team in 1937 and I played in the first team until I packed it in with a bad knee. They tell me over these last few years the lads won't play because they've got a Saturday job. Well that never happened at all with me. We had lads who got somebody to their jobs for them but they definitely turned up. We didn't play a lot of cricket. We played cricket but not as teams and we didn't take them to other schools.

Of course we took swimming classes as well. The whole of Friday we took over the baths in Allhallows Lane. There was no messing about. Another thing I could always, with watching them, you got to counting quickly. I knew how many I had because the baths in those days were only cleaned out once a week and by Friday you could hardly see the bottom.

They had school trips and we had holidays. We went to Switzerland and Austria, Holland, Germany and places like that. Maurice Collet organised them. Then Norman Varty took over and I used to go and help Norman. He did most of the work but I went. You had to have so many adults to look after them. We used to go by coach and stay in hostels and hotels and things of that sort. Yes, we had some good holidays and then, latterly we took parents as well on occasions. About twenty-odd lads and twenty-odd parents.

Down at Longlands we had a wonderful brass band. Mr Mayfield, Bob Talbot and Mac Mechan and another master they had a great band. I think they still do. We used to do plays and pantomimes and have fetes and they have these table top sales and car boot sales forever making money.

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