

Memories of Wally Hebden

Our much loved headmaster, Wally, was born on 25 January 1937 in Crofton, Wakefield, Yorkshire.

He took over the post as Head at Lakenheath Primary School in the early seventies. I was already employed there and remember that well. He arrived at a time of great change in the way pupils were taught. Previously children were taught in classrooms into which few people entered other than the class members and their teacher. The building of the new open plan infant classrooms came as a shock to some of the staff who were not used to having no door to close. Parents were seldom seen in school and were expected to leave their children at the school gate each morning. Pupils were expected to line up quietly and march into class. SATS were not in existence and technology had not reared its head.

When Wally arrived he was like a breath of fresh air. This likeable Yorkshire man soon won the hearts of all he encountered. The children adored him he got to know every child by name and took an interest in what they were being taught.

His loves in life were cricket, brass bands and Yorkshire. He would teach the game of cricket, take the choir and play his euphonium in assembly. He loved Christmas, Easter and Harvest festival when he would arrange a special assembly at which the children would perform and to which parents were invited. He even persuaded all the staff to dress up for a pantomime which we performed for the children. We thought it was hilarious even if they were rather bewildered. There was always a full house with a packed appreciative audience.

At the time of his arrival we still had the two tier education system which meant pupils remained at school until the age of 11. This enabled Wally to arrange holidays to Yorkshire or Northumberland perhaps to partake of outdoor activities. These visits are still remembered fondly by those who were included.

His love of band music, learned in his youth, led him to join the Lakenheath Silver band and to become an active member. He also encouraged young people to participate, providing instruments and training. Some of them are still members of the band.

Wally and I shared an office as I was school secretary by then. This meant on the rare occasion a naughty boy, I say boy because it was usually was, would be sent to the headmaster for punishment, Wally would have them in tears because he would tell them how they had upset him by being naughty and did they think he deserved that. Of course they said no, he didn't, and off they would go looking downcast. When they had gone he and I would smile at each other.

I remember his last Christmas at school, in the mid eighties; the staff had gone out for a meal together, shared Christmas greetings before going home for the holidays. In January, Wally didn't come back to school and we saw little of him as he underwent tests. By summer term we learnt that he was gravely ill and in October, at home surrounded by his family, he died of cancer.

At his memorial in Lakenheath the church was packed with pupils past and present, parents and colleagues all who wanted to pay their respects to this lovely man.

I think of you often, my friend, and still miss you. RIP Wally.