



**Part 9: 1960's & 1970's memories of Vinehall  
by matron, Pam Hart**

Memories of Vinehall in the 1960s and 1970s, by Matron, Pam Hart.

To be able to compare work and working conditions between the 1960s and the year 2002, one should really have some idea of what goes on now, and that I don't have. However, some things must be different.

When I began work at Vinehall in 1962, all children's clothing was made of natural fibres, and all laundry, personal as well as household, was sent out. Woollen socks and jerseys wore out quickly at pressure points, and the matrons spent many hours darning the elbows of jerseys and the toes and heels of socks. Laundry machinery was hard on buttons, which snapped and pulled off in the mangling process, so more hours were spent on replacing them on grey and white shirts and pyjama tops. Mrs Richardson spent her days repairing clothes on the sewing machine, machine darning shirt collars and rips and tears in all clothes, and also patching the seats of cord trousers, the knees of pyjamas and the elbows of shirts.

The washroom contained only three baths, and there was a limited supply of hot water, so boys only had two baths a week. For the rest of the time they used the washbasins, first washing face, neck, hands and arms, then hopping up to sit on the boards between the basins to wash feet and legs. The seniors washed in the showers after games, but the juniors changed and washed in the washroom. When they were particularly muddy the baths were half filled and they stood in them, three at a time, to sluice off. Cleaning the baths and basins and sweeping the mud off the floor was done by the matron on duty.

One of the hardest jobs was bedmaking at the beginning of term. It was done in one day, two matrons working together and one on her own. Underblanket, two sheets and three blankets to be tucked in with neat hospital corners, then the pillow case put on, and the owner's rug put at the foot, thirty times for each of us plus a few more, on such low beds meant that by the end of the day we could hardly stand upright! During term the small boys needed help with their beds, and once a week all bedclothes were pulled off, the mattress turned, bottom sheet and pillow case sent to the laundry, top sheet to bottom, clean one on top. Then the blankets were put on and as soon as this was done, often the underblanket was found under the bed, and the whole thing had to be done again!

A recurring fact of life, particularly in the winter terms, were epidemics, outbreaks of measles and mumps and German measles and chicken pox, but from the matrons' point of view, by far the worst was the dreaded 'D & V'. Its onset was sudden, and it spread like wildfire, nor was it confined to winter terms. Although most boys were only affected for 48 hours or so, the numbers in bed were huge. I can remember more than one occasion when not only was the 9 bed San full, but also Flying Saucers, Spits and Hurricanes, and Rabbits. Non-sick members of these dormitories had to take themselves and their bedding to any available bed. Diarrhoea was partly contained by pyjama trousers or pants, but vomiting just went everywhere! Sacks of sawdust were kept to help us clear floors, but sheets and pyjamas had to be dunked in baths full of disinfected water, put through the old fashioned mangle, hung out in the garden to dry, all before they could be sent to the laundry, and blankets sprinkled with sawdust

to absorb the worst of the mess before they could be brushed off. I think such outbreaks were the worst and hardest job that could affect the matrons.

Another job, which had to be done, was to collect up and boil all the face flannels at half term, and a nasty smelly, slimy job it was!

Matrons were in charge of the Junior Dining room. One thing I think must have changed is fried food after porridge or cereals. Bacon and fried bread, fried eggs and fried bread, fried sausages and fried bread, tomatoes and fried bread. There was a fair amount of fried food for dinner too, and even fried jam sandwiches for supper – they tasted like doughnuts.

It was in the Junior Dining room that Mr Croft from the shop brought a selection of sweets and biscuits on Thursday afternoons for the Tuck Shop. It was the only occasion the children had to spend money, as apart from attending away matches, or visits to the dentist or the like, they never left the school grounds.

And so to odd happenings. I remember one quiet afternoon when we were all sitting darning, when we were startled by scratching and scrambling noises in the blocked-up chimney. Buzz, who saw us all rush out, said that we looked just like flushed partridges. Sid Doughty was summoned to take down the board and kill the rat or what ever it was before we would go back. It turned out to be a jackdaw that had fallen down the chimney.

There was the occasion when Inspectors were due to visit the school – not educational ones, but health and hygiene and so on ones from, I suppose, the local council. We and the children had been warned that they would go anywhere they wished in the building. When I was seeing the senior boys in Hearts dormitory to bed that night, they were very concerned about whether the Inspectors would be taking up the floor boards! They were reassured, but I was curious, and next morning we had a good look at the floor in Hearts, and discovered a loose board, and under it a large cache of 'Girlie' magazines!

Seat belts in cars, and general health and safety rules had not been thought of in those days, but even so I was startled on visiting one Sunday to see a mother driving off with her two young sons – they would have been about 8 and 10 – and two friends, sitting on the folded down hood of an open tourer, waving to all and sundry as they roared off down the drive.

One morning it was discovered that a bullock was standing in the middle of the swimming pool. I think it must have been during the holidays, for I was at home in Stable Cottage during the hours it took to rescue the poor animal, and kept going through the arch to watch the various fruitless attempts, the increasing exasperation of the men, and the fear and panicky movements of the poor animal. I don't remember how it was got out in the end, but I did see it being driven through Stable Yard, and thinking I had never seen a cow look really ill before.

You won't really need my recollections of my first term in January 1963 – everyone remembers it, but it caused particular difficulties for the matrons. The children were only allowed out once a day, during the afternoon games period, because of the

difficulties of drying wet clothing. They changed into football gear, then added their boiler suits, windcheaters (cotton corduroy), woollen scarves, balaclavas and gloves and wellington boots. Of course they had a marvellous time, but they came in soaked. Windcheaters and boiler suits went down to the boiler house, but everything else had to be dried on the radiators all over the house. The house stank of wet wool. It stank of other things too, for it was far too cold to open windows and half the lavatories, baths and basins were frozen for weeks on end, so washing was of the sketchiest! I won't go on about the cold, and the discomfort, and all the rest of it, because no doubt those of you who remember the winter of 1963 know all about it!

We used to say sometimes that you could write a book about all the peculiar things the children said, but of course we never did, and then you forget. However, I do remember a few.

One day a weeping new boy was brought up from the gym, where they were being instructed in the noble art of boxing. His opponent had thumped him in the face with his boxing glove – not at all badly. What had upset him was that “he HIT me, and he MEANT to!”

There were often difficulties with new boys over eating up new or disliked food, but the best excuse I ever heard was “It's not that I don't like cabbage, but I've had to have my appendix out three times already from eating it!”

One music mistress decided to arrange a concert for singers and instrumentalists, and to make it more of an occasion, pupils from Boarzell were invited to take part, and parents came to listen. The next morning, the Form 1 form mistress, checking home letters, read that “last night we had a concert against Boarzell, and we won!”

Finally, one of my favourite memories. There was no television provided for the boys in those days, and some of the overseas boys had scarcely ever seen it. It was the time of ‘Dr. Who and the Daleks’. One night a shocked dormitory leader appeared dragging a weeping boy along by his pyjama collar, and said, “I'm reporting this boy for swearing. He said EXTERMINATE!!!”

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**This takes us, more or less to 1977, when the Chaplins came to Vinehall....but that's another story!**

Grateful thanks to everyone who has helped and encouraged me to compile this book. When I began researching it six years ago, I didn't even know how to turn on a computer....most of the hitches I have encountered have been computer related, so I would especially like to thank Mark Harman, Annabelle Parker, Gareth Philips, Rick Bolt, Robin Saunders, David and Roz Chaplin for sorting out the crises which have been frequent!

The people who have contributed to this history are too numerous to name individually, and sadly some of them have already died. I would however, like to make special mention of Ralfe and Benedicta Whistler, Hugh Palmer, Nell and Martin Jacoby, Carol Gilbert, Richard Taylor, Pam Hart, Jeremy Birch, Brian Dollar, Malcolm Gordon and Rex Shore, without whose help this book would never have happened.

Sally Chaplin April 2002