

Tribute to Don Sinclair by Pam Cork

Don Sinciair was Headteacher of Warninglid School for most of his working life until 1989. His wife Yvonne was the secretary and between them they ran the school along with 3 teachers, a cook, assistant cook and caretaker. This was in the days before there was a National Curriculum. Don was a teaching head and was in his element in the classroom and the playing field.

The school had a reputation for academic achievement, but there were many and varied activities in addition. The pupils excelled in of all forms of sport, competing with local schools in football, netball, cross country and swimming, to name a few. The trophy cabinet was full! Swimming excellence was due in no small measure to the building of a swimming pool, aided by the parents. All pupils swam every afternoon during the summer term. During the winter months they swam at Crawley Leisure Centre. At the inauguration of the second, upgraded pool, Don had contrived that the Chairman of Governors be pushed unceremoniously, fully suited, into the pool by some of the older pupils! Oh what larks!

The drama productions were amazing - from infant nativity, ambitious choir performances, led by Mrs. Sinclair to the 'top class' musical comedies. Lavish costumes were sewn by Mrs. Sinclair. French was also part of the curriculum and the children were lucky to have Mrs Jenkins, a French national and Class 2 teacher, to give them a good grounding in the language. Every year the Year 6 children went on a residential trip to Dieppe, accompanied by Mr & Mrs Sinclair and, Mrs Jenkins. Quite an adventure in those days.

Another celebrated activity was beekeeping. This was voluntary and a surprising number of pupils were keen to learn the skills. The beekeepers tended hives locally, were always ready to collect a swarm when called on and demonstrated at the South of England Show at Ardingly. The cross country team always got a spoonful of honey after completing the inter-schools competition at the Hyde (which they usually won), as they had given their all! As well as honey production, Don manufactured the famous Sinclairs Bee Cream, which reputedly cured all skin problems.

Under his headship, the school participated in a national competition, organised by the BBC, to foster relationships between more senior members of local communities and primary school children. Warninglid School won the Southern area award and took part in a BBC documentary showcasing the collaboration of elderly residents teaching the children about nature, local history, knitting, sewing and other crafts.

Don encouraged the pupils in various ways to raise fantastic sums of money for charity, particularly Guide Dogs for the Blind. This included him accompanying a group of children 'busking' in Crawley. Guide dogs visited the school and the children were greatly enthused in their fundraising.

Don and Yvonne lived in the School House adjacent to the school, with their four children, until moving to Handcross where it was not quite so easy to spend every moment at the school! Don was passionate about the children and giving them a rounded education. The school was his life and he put everything into its success. On his retirement, Don and Yvonne moved to Spain where they enjoyed walking and swimming and the occasional bootsale!! They returned to England, living in Burgess Hill, just a few years ago.

Our sympathy goes to his widow, Yvonne, and their four children.