

Interview with Bruce Marshall

b. 1914

Monday 19th July 2005

[Bruce Marshall was a member of the first staff to teach at
KING ETHELBERT SCHOOL]

King Ethelbert Secondary School opened in May 1938 and there were about 15 teachers. It started with a two-class entry (**A** stream and **B** stream) aged 11 to 14, so four years, and children left school at 14 at that time. So there were 8 class teachers and then some had particular jobs. There was a fellow in charge of the Lab. He was the only one on the staff who had a car.

I taught at Drapers' Mills School for 18 months when I first came to Thanet, while I waited for King Ethelbert to open. Drapers' School was only a Junior School. I was trained for 7 to 14 year olds but preferred the older children.

The first headmaster at King Ethelbert was Mr Cork - the boys called him "Bung"! There was a fellow who used to teach the children gardening and grew most of the vegetables used in the canteen. The building now used as the Medical Centre was the Canteen in the beginning.

On the very first day, all the pupils-to-be were sitting on the floor in the main hall and all the new staff were seated on the platform at the front. The staff members were all introduced and the names of the children were all called out - the fourth year, then the third and the second and then the first year went. Everybody had gone, but there was one poor little girl left, as her name hadn't been called out - she was a first year. I was in Birchington about 6-12 months ago outside Somerfields, when a lady said, "Hallo Mr Marshall." I asked her who she was - she was with her husband. It was the girl who was left alone sitting on that floor when everyone else had left. They soon sorted out where she had to go - but I can't remember her name - I wish I could.

I had the **A** stream of the second year when I first started at King Ethelbert - the 12 year-olds - then the next year I had the **B** stream of the second year.

The school opened in May 1938 and in July all the Senior Schools in Margate Borough had a joint Sports Day. I was in charge of our school's P. T. in those days. The big Sports Day was held at St John's for the Boys and at Lausanne for the Girls. And our King Ethelbert Boys and Girls beat all the other schools in the Borough - after only three months training! So we were off to a flying start. There was a great big fellow, known as "Big Smith" - he became captain of a ship that used to go all up the east coast of Australia.

I taught English and P. T. to all the boys throughout the school. One year I took the **A** stream and the next year I took the **B** stream. Bill(?) Sullivan, who was a great friend of mine, took the alternative streams to me each year. I never ever had a failure in any of the exams the pupils took. There were no outside exams to start with - the children just left at 14 and got a job. Parents tended to make the children feel failures, "because they hadn't got the *11+ exams*". But I used to tell the children that they weren't to think they were no good - because, if YOU want to get on, YOU'VE got to do it. I'm here to help you and advise you - MY work is making YOU work!" And I'd say "You must start NOW - it's no good waiting until the exams are coming up. It will take three or four years of work. It doesn't need hard work, but a little work all the time - then you'll have no bother."

I gave them so many spellings to learn each week - and I did grammar with them too. Some of my boys eventually got to Oxbridge - they had been transferred to the grammar schools as they got older.

We were all evacuated up to the Midlands in June 1940 - I landed at a place called Chasetown, which was 10-15 miles from my old HOME! Chasetown was one of the mining communities of Cannock Chase. It lies halfway between Cannock to the west and Lichfield to the east. They mined the best deep coal in England in those mines. I went up there with my wife and when they were placing each person with a host family, we were the last to be placed, because there were the two of us. Eventually a family agreed to have us - the son of the family didn't realise that Phyllis and I were married - and he thought she was very nice and had hopes for himself!. He was a safety inspector down the mine, I think.

Phyllis didn't teach with us - she taught infants, but as soon as we were married she had to give up - married teachers were not allowed. I was 25 when we married in 1939 - Phyllis's parents were living at Tunbridge Wells - our eldest son Ian was born there while Phyllis was staying back home with her parents once I was called up. I was only with the children in Chasetown for a few months. The school was called Shire Oak, at the top of a hill.

Phyllis and I met while we were both at Teacher Training College. Our colleges were quite near to each other in Chelsea and each group used to have dances and social events every so often and would invite the other college members along too.

We were both in lodgings before we got married, but we were able to get an unfurnished house to rent in Westgate once we were married. It was a detached house in a road off the eastern end of Station Road. When we were evacuated, there was a very kind lady on the staff called Cat Carter (who was very good at dealing with the boys in the school) and she let us store all our furniture in her home in Tivoli Avenue.

Before the war started, I had joined the Civil Defence Volunteers, later called the Home Guard. We used to go and sleep on mattresses on the floor of an empty house, when we were training. Two of us went off at perhaps 10 o'clock, for two hours, and then another two would go off for their two hour duty. The two on duty had a rifle each, with just *10 rounds of ammunition* and when we came back we handed those rifles and the ten rounds to the next couple - and we were *DEFENDING THANET!* Two of us would go along the sea front and two would go inland towards the aerodrome.

When I was called up I was trained to be a flying instructor - I had to get 200 flying hours in, in order to be able to do anything that was possible with an aircraft. I was based at the RAF College at Cranwell. I was eventually posted abroad in 1942 and was sent to Zimbabwe as a flying instructor.

I finally came back to England in 1945 - just before the war finished - that's when I was put onto long-distance transport flying. I was collecting and delivering all sorts of freight and personnel - stretcher

cases sometimes had to be brought back to the U.K. - and so on. We used to deliver anywhere round the Med. and over as far as Calcutta, Madras and Sri Lanka. We flew Wellingtons and later Lancasters

I was demobbed in 1946 - they offered me a short-service commission, but I wasn't interested - I'd had enough by then, as for twenty-four hours a day, there are rules and regulations covering you!

When I came back to Thanet after the war with Phyllis, I continued to teach both English and P.T. I only gave up the P.T. as I got older. The old Sports Days run by Margate Borough Council died a natural death after the war.

[Bruce's second son, Peter worked for B.P. then worked for the French Company. They live in Chelsea, in the King's Road. It's a second marriage - his present wife runs an advertising firm in London.

Peter and his first wife had a boy, then a girl, then another boy. My sister only had girls, but we Marshall's tended to have boys - so we used to tease our brother-in-law by saying:

"Anyone can make a cup - but it takes a craftsman to put a handle on it!"]

Phyllis (Sabey) (originally came from Bedford) died in 1980