

Nicholas Hagger, first address on 1 July

1937/1944-47: a boy's memories

It's great that so many Oaklanders have come back to wish Oaklands a happy 75th anniversary, and we thank you very much for coming. I hope you've had, and will continue to have, an enjoyable afternoon visiting the places and classrooms you remember, and the exhibition, and maybe spotting yourselves in photographs and connecting with other memorabilia and of course catching up with some of your contemporaries. Matthew mentioned *A View of Epping Forest*. I am delighted to have been able to include a section on Oaklands as thousands of local people have passed through Oaklands' hands over the years and will appreciate many of the references as Oaklands has never been mentioned in other books about the Forest.

Not all of you will be aware of how the original Oaklands came to be called Oaklands 75 years ago, even though it had no oak-trees. Miss Lord started her teaching career at Oakland House School, 86 Shooters Road, Blackheath and was there for 15 years. She loved the children and her teaching so much that she wanted her own Oakland House. Just after the First World War she had stayed with long-standing friends of her mother's during her training: the two Miss Butlers of 86 Spring Grove, Loughton. One of the Miss Butlers offered to provide the funding for her to start her own school, and Oakland School, Loughton began in 1937 on the corner of Trap's Hill. Miss Lord told me that on the first day it had one pupil who was made to troop through the front door, out of the back door, and round to the front door again many times to give the impression that a lot of pupils were arriving. When I started there in 1944 there were about 60 pupils, some of whom are here today.

Miss Lord and Miss Reid, her most senior colleague, were both trained at the Froebel Educational Institute – Miss Lord graduated in 1921 and Miss Reid in 1926 – and both emphasised closeness to Nature. I remember an aquarium on the Nature table on the first-floor landing of the original Oaklands, outside the room where assemblies took place. It was wartime, and there was a Morrison air-raid shelter in the garden, where some of us sheltered when the siren sounded on top of the police station to warn that an air-raid was about to begin. There was a quince tree in the garden and we often had quince jam for elevenses.

Miss Lord's former colleague Miss Root, the Maths Teacher (affectionately nicknamed "square root"), had joined when she happened to walk by one day at the exact moment when Miss Lord was hanging out of a first-floor window with her hand in the gutter unblocking leaves (as Principals sometimes have to do). Miss Lord called, "Root, what are you doing here?" Later that morning she signed Miss Root up to teach Maths "for a term". Each term after that Miss Root said, "I'll just stay for one more term" and she ended up staying 40 years.

Oaklands moved to Albion Hill in September 1944, just after D-Day. It was still wartime and there were flying bombs (V-1s in the last half of 1944, and V-2s from early 1945). Those first Oaklands teachers on this site had to keep children safe not just from hazards on the ground, but from rockets fired indiscriminately into the air from France as well.

I can remember being a little boy in short trousers wearing a green blazer (with a badge showing an oak-tree) and a green cap, being walked to school by my mother – in those days most pupils arrived on foot or by bus, not car – and hanging my satchel on one of the pegs inside the door nearest the gate. The Nature table was outside Miss Lord's study (which is now the office). In 1946 according to the register in the exhibition there were 33 in Upper II, 32 in Lower II, 24 in Form 1, 25 in Transition and 32 in Kindergarten (a school of just under 150 in five classes).

The field we're in was full of buttercups in those days. During break we sometimes lay among them and looked up at the huge oak, reputed to be 800 years old, that's shown on the school badge. The bottom of the field had camps made from fallen branches. During break we could climb on the wooden jungle gym, which stood below the study. In those days the tennis-court was grassed. That was where plays were performed and I remember seeing the older children putting on *Hiawatha* with some dressed as Red Indians in coloured feathers. In those days much of the back of the school was covered in ivy.

In Transition I was taught to write in Marion Richardson-style handwriting. In Lower II I wrote about children from other lands – I had to write several pages as an Eskimo boy and as a boy in a Canadian lumber camp – and in arithmetic we did addition, in hundreds, tens and units in squared exercise books (with h, t and u above the squared columns). We read poems about Nature and I copied out Christina Rossetti's 'Who has seen the wind?' and Blake's 'Little lamb, who made thee?' and got a red star for each. In class we loved the reward system of red stars, which could lead to: a Gold Star prize. The teachers all set a great value on this prize – they frequently talked about it to motivate us – and such was the impact their motivation had on us that when I got one (my mother told me) I ran excitedly home, calling out before I reached the gate and waving the Nature book I'd been given, "I got a Gold Star prize."

Mabel Reid is still remembered for her Nature walks round the new Oaklands and for her enthusiastic love of Nature. She made us keep a Bird Diary. Whenever we saw a new bird we had to draw it, colour it and write two or three lines about it. She took us pond-dipping at Strawberry Hill, to net caddis, dragonfly larvae, frogspawn, tadpoles, newts and Canadian pondweed, some of which were brought back for the aquarium. From September 1947 Mabel Reid became Miss Lord's business partner – Miss Lord then owned three-fifths of Oaklands, Miss Reid two-fifths – and they ran the school together until Mabel Reid retired around 1967.

Both the old and the new Oaklands had a family atmosphere in which children thrived. I was at Oaklands until I went to Chigwell in 1947, and then my brother Robert replaced me, and in due course we were followed by my brother Jonathan and sister Frances, and unbeknown to us my sister-in-law Anne and her sister Elizabeth, and more recently by my daughter Nadia, son Anthony, nephew William and grandsons Ben and Alex, with a granddaughter Olivia on her way. Elizabeth Lord ran Oaklands through the 1950s, sixties and seventies, and you will now hear more about her from Carol Norris, who started at Oaklands as Miss Lord's secretary.