

School Dinners

1. Sheila Kelsall



These are the memories which come to mind when dinners are mentioned. On Monday morning breaks we had to go and buy our Dinner Tickets for the week. Usually two halfcrowns would be the cost, as the tickets were one shilling each for the 5 days. The grey rectangular tickets were on a roll, and dispensed by a prefect who put our money in a tin and dispensed change where necessary. After we had queued in all weathers outside the Dining Hall, we went up the steps, through the doors and turned right to encounter a table set at an angle in the corner. This is where we parted with our tickets by tossing them onto the table manned by a prefect. The longer everyone had to wait for entry, the more dirty, curled, folded, and generally tatty was the ticket. The First sitting was usually for the younger end of the school, and maybe entry was by forms. Continuing down the long side of the building, we approached the kitchen end of the Hall. Trestle tables were arranged in front of the entrance to the kitchen, and word had already travelled to us while we were outside as to what was on the menu. Fridays we knew would bring

fish, but never chips. The nearest we came to chips was when the offering was roasted parsnips as a vegetable. They really looked like chips! A trolley on wheels with a middle shelf held a stack of dinner plates, and having chosen one, we progressed along the line of dinner ladies wielding ladles, large spoons and a huge aluminium jug of gravy.

Those ladies were jolly sorts, with rosy cheeks and grey, permed hair peeking out of their white starched caps. They said things like - "did you know there are 23 eggs in that custard?" or, "eat your carrots and you'll be able to see in the dark". The Catering Supervisor was a very youthful looking lady compared with her staff, and we had no idea of the way she had to figure out how to present nutritional meals on a budget. All we knew were our own likes and dislikes. Liver and onions, Steak Pie, Minced meat in gravy, Baked fish, "Frog Spawn" - Sago Pudding. Semolina with a dash of strawberry jam. Manchester Tart - a pastry base, then jam, then sponge, and served with custard. Everyone would be able to add to this as their memories select. The first incomers would then walk back down the far side of the Hall carrying a full plate, and occupy the first long tables by the door, which ran width ways across the room. By the time the room was full, those who came last did not have far to walk to their seats. We stayed in line, sat, ate, and went line by line for seconds, or for the next course. Our exit was made in the opposite direction towards a trolley in the opposite corner to the ticket table. Slow eaters sometimes gave up rather than bear the silent gazes of everyone eager to get out and play, as the whole line of about 20 children could only be dismissed when all had finished. After a short clearing away procedure, the whole proceedings were repeated in the Second Sitting.

There was usually a member of staff on duty, exhibiting varying degrees of interest in the proceedings. I remember Mr Leonard rapping on a table for attention, and announcing that he was disgusted at the way some people were lacking table manners. He held up a fork, and turned it curved side upwards, to show how we should use it. He did not want to see anyone "shovelling" food into their mouths. There was always an effort to keep the noise levels down. We never saw the washing-up, nor the preparation of the food. First-formers might hear a bit of clattering as the serving trays and containers were moved around, and of course they received the first aromas of cooking cauliflower or baked fish, being so near to the Dining Hall, but generally we acted as consumers pure and simple. There were a few pupils who went home for dinner, but they missed so much!

Sheila Kelsall

2. Dave McKenzie



I too remember Mr. Leonard gaining our attention by rapping on the table. In fact the whole scene is still very clear to me. Where I was and where he was. I also remember having slices of bread instead of potatoes when the latter were in particularly short supply. After rugby matches, I remember pop, crisps and potted meat sandwiches. I think we had these with the opposition. A nice social touch.

Dave McKenzie

3. Frank Poskett



I also remember Mr Leonard doing his dinner patrol. I was sat next to Dave Law (1D 1955) when he was eating with just a fork. Mr Leonard said, "We will put yours in a trough tomorrow, Law." To which Dave replied, "Ok, so long as it's full, sir." Was that a faint smile we got from Mr Leonard?

Frank Poskett

5. Frank Morley



There was a time, at least up to 1960, when a prefect sat at the head of each table and served the food which was distributed to the tables in large metal containers. This was when it was a good idea, as a younger student, not to have crossed swords with the prefects!!!! I think the meal was preceded by grace.

Frank Morley

5. Eric Jones



I can still remember my first school dinner at HGS. The pudding was apple dumpling which as I recall never appeared on the menu again all the time I was there. As one entered the Dining Hall, the girls were on the right and the boy's were on the left with the first table on the right being Staff. Each table was headed by a Prefect and seated 12-14 with 1st Form at the bottom acting as skivvies to clear away dishes and to scavenge for extra food if possible. There was an excess of boys over girls, so I remember being a skivvy on a girls' table headed by Margaret Townend, whose photograph appears on the website. Main meals tended to be of the meat and two veg. type (quantity rather than quality) with Shepherds Pie well to the fore. Puddings were of the following variety:

Wooden Leg - baked jam roll - a popular favourite and scivvies were guaranteed the Knob end - all pastry and no jam;

Spotted Dick - Sultana Sponge;

Jelly and Custard in summer;

Frog Spawn - sago; and always rice pudding.

Custard was eaten at one's peril and regularly we had the infamous Black Death - stewed prunes.

As I remember the school record for eating prunes was 41, by a lad from Grimethorpe called Johnny Orange. The skivvies were bringing in prunes from all over the room when he went for the record - I cannot recall it being broken while I was there. The Staff menu was much better than ours and when their trolley trundled from the kitchen to their table, it was like a scene from Oliver. As First Formers, we were amazed at the amount of food Mr Waters, Maths Teacher, was able to get onto his fork! There was a twist to school dinners in that you could take your own if you wished. These were consumed in the Domestic Science room at the end of the corridor next to the Main Hall. Crockery was supplied from the main Dining Hall. It was a Prefect's job to collect and return a basketful of this every day. I had a spell of about a year doing my own food and I remember that dried egg sandwiches figured prominently. As a Prefect, I finally graduated to having a table of my own in the Dining Hall, but the only skivvy I can remember was a cheeky young First Former by the name of Eric Sale. To be fair, the kitchen staff

worked miracles really, especially as things became in short supply towards the end of the war and the early years of peace. If I remember correctly, the head cook was Mrs. Cliffe who was the wife of the School Caretaker.

Eric Jones

6. Nova Websdale



The New Dining System 1963. From the School Magazine 1963

After weeks of chaotic dining in the Main Hall, (and what appeared to be an inordinate number of tea-breaks on the part of the workmen) the new Dining Hall was at last pronounced finished; the prefects, suffering under the effects of a last minute briefing which had served to put them in an even more bewildered state than before - and those monitors of staff who had the misfortune to be staying for school dinner, shuffled sheepishly to their places at the head of a table (designated by the mystical sign of two knives and two forks, for since the tables were eight-sided, considerable arguments might arise over what exactly was the 'head'). Trying their utmost to look supremely confident, these martyrs to the cause of school meals closed their eyes while a horde of starving schoolchildren stormed round the tables and finally settled at one or another of them while the wild-eyed master on duty scuttled backwards and forwards collecting

dinner-tickets, the 'heads of tables' found they had a vital decision to make - should they themselves serve out the food, and probably finish dinner somewhere in mid-afternoon, or should they leave it to their subordinates at the risk of an empty plate for themselves? And once this obstacle was surmounted, another, equally ominous, loomed up: which of these irresponsible plebeians seated round the table could possibly be expected to negotiate a path to the trolley, deposit the dinner plates and collect the pudding? Apart from these questions, other minor problems appeared how to impress on the seven table members the necessity of finishing within a reasonable length of time from the final whistle how to persuade erring first-formers that the best way of transferring a damp cloth from one table to another is not to throw it and hit the recipient in the face and, last but not least, how to instruct them to lay the cutlery on the table so that, when the next 'sitting' arrives, they do not have to eat their pudding with a serving spoon and knife.

Considering how radical are the changes from the old system, everything appears to have run much more smoothly than anyone could have expected, and the opinion of the majority - a majority which probably does not include heads of tables - would seem to come out in favour of the new system. However, the Prefects can take consolation from one fact - even if they fail their examinations, their invaluable experience at the head of an H.G.S. dining-table would find them a job in anyone's kitchen-staff.

Nova Websdale, UVIA.

Sheila comments:

I was reading the account of the "new" Dining Hall set-up of tables and method of serving lunches, and it all seemed familiar. I think I returned to School on a visit - maybe Speech Day 1962/3?- and saw it all. Prefects were at the head of each table, and a new set of serving dishes had been introduced to be carried to each individual table, with the potatoes and veg. etc. placed on each plate by said prefect. My impression of this was that the movement of pupils around the room had increased greatly, as each table sent its own clearing and collecting 'runners' who had to weave among the other tables to reach the trolleys. The sound levels and sense of chaos were consequently much higher. We had always been chided for conversations during meals, but the necessary questions of, "Please, is there more pie," or "Would you like more custard?" meant that the decibel levels were greatly increased. There must have been a group of us who were visiting that day, as I recall we were given a table to ourselves at the kitchen-end of the Hall. I think we were served individually, by the Dinner Ladies who remembered us, but they seemed harassed somehow - probably dreading the massive increase in the washing-up to be done! (All those extra serving-dishes.) I wonder how the amount of 'wastage' of food compared with the earlier system, as each serving dish would have a residue to be scraped away before being washed. Who would have decided on this major change of system? Local Authority, Head, Staff or Dining Room personnel?

Sheila Kelsall

7. Doris Watson



The thirties were a lean time for most families. We had never had school dinners before. We sat waiting round the table for the master (Mr. Crossland) to come in. What seemed to me an enormous joint of beef placed in front of him. He carved and plates were passed round and we helped ourselves to vegetables. I don't remember how long this went on for but a new dining room was built and it was never the same again.

8. Richard Hancock



I remember paying 5 shillings for a strip of 5 tickets for lunch. I liked dinners so much that I once got caned by Russ Hamilton along with a group of others who persistently went late to dinner because it guaranteed we would have the extra food left over. It got to be an inconvenience for the dinner ladies who complained about our behaviour.

Richard Hancock

9. Stuart Walker



Some of the staff had school lunches served in the Dining Hall with the children, and they took it in turns to say Grace at the start and end of the meal. "Scoff" (Ivor Scourfield) the Latin master, always said a Grace in Latin, usually two words like "Dominum laudamus". But "Dickie" Hamilton, the Art master liked to air his Scottish roots, with this unusual grace:-

"Some ha' meat and nae can eat,
Some can eat and nae ha' meat,
But we ha' meat an' we can eat,
And so dear Lord we thank Thee."

Stuart Walker, HGS 1935-40

10. Bob Vickers



From the School Magazine 1955.

At 12.30 pm., the bell is rung to signify that diners in 1st sitting have approximately ten minutes in which to ask teacher how many hundred times they have to write out the line and what it is - pack their well-worn text-books (20 years old) and their dog-eared exercise books into several pieces or shoddy leather which hang precariously together on a piece of string, rush upstairs through a crowd of jostling first-formers who are noisily making their meandering ways to their respective classrooms, to ram the satchel into a locker which is designed for strength against the many abuses that school furniture is subject to, dash downstairs, vainly attempt to wave (into a semblance of tidiness), the unruly mass of inflorescence which grows on the head, try, without effect, to remove the ingrained stains of ink which result from throwing wads of blotting paper, soaked in ink, at swatty swabs, female and male, and sometimes at the teacher when the latter is writing up information which is wasted on 99,999% of the class and then it is found that the person who is ineffectively trying to remove these same stains has thirty seconds in which to reach the dining-hall. The same person then proceeds to run, at a speed that the PT. teacher would scorn, to the dining-hall which is now almost full with clamouring persons whose hunger is shown by way of the voice, Just as the door is closing our friend manages a last desperate spurt of speed and beats the member of staff on dinner duty who is closing the door The late-comer is frowned upon and informed in no uncertain manner that he is late. On hearing this, he shrugs his youthful shoulders and walks swiftly and gaily to the table at which lie is accustomed to dine (devour) - he winks at the long-suffering head-of-table to signify that he, the devourer, wishes to be able to have a chance to get a second helping of potatoes.

Grace is said and, amid a clamour of chairs being drawn out from under the tables, a chorus of "Amen" shouted and the diners seat themselves. While dinner is being served amid a constant flow or grumbles about the meagreness of the meal, the head-of-table informs the pupils that their dinner-tickets must be handed in with the owner's correct names on them and not the names of their heroes or other people's.

After many helpings of food have been devoured, our hero collects a few friends and "borrows", without permission, the ball with which girls have been amusing their feeble persons and minds; the girls are informed that they will get the ball back, maybe, sometime. Our hero and his friends are now competing to see who can throw the ball nearest to a window without breaking it. The fun carries on until an unnamed member of staff comes along to confiscate the offending mass of rubber and also to dole out detention and lines. The offenders move off to the playing-field, hands in pockets, violently expressing their indignation and kicking at invisible, offending particles. As they reach the playing-field, being at a loss what to do, they wander around looking for amusement. They decide not to swing on trees as they are made the recipients of several more lines. Then, one of the leading meanderers lets out a gleeful yell, "First-formers in thousands". Caps are brought out of places where prefects are unlikely to see them and formed speedily into effective coshes. The ensuing struggle is beyond words except that it is one mass of yells, curses, flying legs, swinging fists and straining muscles. At last, the struggle is broken off by the sound

of a bell echoing across the field and, surrounded by his bruised friends, our hero wends his way to his locker. He remains for about five minutes playing at tag, heedless of the rule that pupils shall W A L K in single file in an O R D E R L Y manner. At last, he puffs his way into registration to find that he has been marked absent and then rushes off to place the waste-paper basket upon the door edge so that teacher will have a rather rude awakening from his meditations. He then helps to draw certain enlightening caricatures of the teacher who is expected. As the lookout gives a warning cry, our friends dive for their places to smile with imbecile sweetness when the teacher walks in.

Vickers, R. 3A (Holgate)