

# Information concerning Miss Wren - Headmistress of Bell Lane Infants School

7 Kelvington Close,  
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CRO. 7NU.

8 March 2005

Dear Liz,

Thank you very much for having invited Barry and I to the Wheatley Open Day last Saturday. It was so interesting and very enjoyable. It was also nice to meet up with old friends again. Indeed, I smile now but it was a bit of a shock seeing a fellow pupil from the Church Road School. I last saw him 60 + years ago when he was wearing short trousers and had a mass of blond hair..... Alas!, there are some aspects of age-ing which are very cruel!

I was interested to see the questions pinned to the board in the main room. One of them concerned an early teacher of mine - Miss Wren. She was the headmistress of the Bell Lane Infants School in the 1940s. Her support teacher was Miss Flood who taught 1st year infants i.e. the five years old - the new intake. Miss Wren taught the second year infants at 6 years old prior to their admission to the school in Church Road. Miss Flood lived in a bungalow in Roman Road, Wheatley. Miss Wren lived in Oxford and drove a very sedate, small black car with green panels. (I am sorry I am not very good at knowing my cars although I have tried in vain to describe it to my husband and find out the make. Alas, my drawing is even worse!) All I can say is that the car was small, very old -fashioned and was driven to Wheatley each day.

Miss Wren was a rather 'difficult' character but obviously very competent in her work. Her proud boast was that she could teach any child to read - and she did. She terrified her very mixed- ability class into doing so. During the early years of the war, the Infants School in Bell Lane and the Chapel Nursery School were separate but later there was a slight 'frisson' when Miss Wren insisted on all the children from both schools going to Bell Lane for registration each day. It should be remembered of course, that many of these nursery establishments were run by volunteer workers and helpers in the early war years, some of whom did not have formal educational qualifications. Such arrangements, I suppose, did cause frustration and resentment in some quarters and perhaps those with formal qualifications, like Miss Wren, felt that they were being undermined. After the war, consequently, there were a few changes which resulted in a crocodile of the nursery children being taken to Bell Lane from the Chapel nursery each day in all weathers for registration and then returning to the chapel schoolroom half-an-hour later. I am not sure when the nursery school closed. It must have been after the war as neither of my sisters was involved in the daily registration trek and my youngest sister left in 1945.

Regarding Muddy Lane - This was the only name we knew as children. The Roman Road alternative came very much later. I imagine this must have been when the 'new' council houses were built after the war. My father used to talk of an old bam there in Muddy Lane which as children they called 'Poxy Cowhouse' because a village smallpox outbreak started from there years before when a tramp suffering with the disease sheltered there. This must have been presumably in the late 19th century. I certainly never saw it and I never heard any of my contemporaries mention it. My maternal great-grandfather, Joseph Cooper, who lived in one of the flats at the Manor House with my grandmother, Keziah, apparently caught the disease and recovered from it. But I understood that there were many village fatalities. As a young child, I did know of one other smallpox survivor, a John Sturgess. Obviously, there must have been a later outbreak of the disease. I think he lived somewhere in the High Street and to a small child he did seem very old but I have no idea as to whether this outbreak could have been linked to that in which Joseph Cooper was involved. I rather doubt it. But to return to Poxy Cowhouse and Muddy Lane. I understand that Wheatley used to have a fair number of itinerant agricultural workers and some of them may possibly have 'put up' there. They used to work the countryside turning up at the farms usually to help with the harvest.

Thank you again for such an interesting day last Saturday.

With very best wishes,

Christine (Jackson)