



40 years of Brown Rigg School

Church Parade

The Brown Rigg Sunday morning church parade always had a huge attendance, not because the pupils were particularly pious, no, church attendance was compulsory and woe betide any girl or boy who attempted to avoid it, the only possible excuse would have been if one was confined to the school 'Sick Bay'.

Before marching off down to Bellingham, the entire school had to parade on the area outside the Assembly Hall, where they were scrutinised and inspected to make sure that they were smart enough to be let out amongst the good citizens of Bellingham. Shoes had to be polished until they shone so you could see your face in them, trousers had to have a crease so sharp you could cut your finger on it. Hair had to be combed, ties straightened, the girls skirts were checked to make sure they were a "decent" length and garish coloured socks were absolutely forbidden.

Once deemed fit to go out into the outside world, the pupils were marched down to Bellingham village with the teachers keeping an eagle eye out for any who might be attempting to skip the church service, preferring to sneak off for an illicit cigarette or simply to pass away the time with a comic. The secluded areas down by St. Cuthbert's Well, or up Hareshaw Linn were favourite venues to loiter but the teachers were well aware of this and made regular patrols.

Bellingham was well served with places of worship, still is, and there was one to cater for every denomination, while those of no particular persuasion simply went to whichever one took their fancy. The church nearest Brown Rigg is St. Oswalds Roman Catholic Church, it is also the village's smallest. Those who went to it were quite fortunate as they often had an early 7:00am Mass, which meant the attendees could be down and back before breakfast, leaving them with the rest of the morning free. Also, at that early hour, there was a marked reluctance on the teacher's part to turn out and supervise them so they were often left to their own devices.

The Anglican church is St. Cuthberts which is quite famous for having its unique stone roof, and the grave of the "Long Pack" robber just outside its front door. St. Cuthberts got quite a big attendance from Brown Rigg, many will remember it for its rather "Wheezy" organ, not to mention the extremely hard pews! Quite a few pupils attended classes at St. Cuthberts and were, eventually, confirmed there in a ceremony conducted by the Bishop of Newcastle.

The Methodist Church (Now United Reformed) was another establishment that drew a large number of 'Brown Riggers' although the fact that, at one time, there was a sweet shop situated next door may have had something to do with that. Another attraction was the large size of the prayer book, just large enough to hide a comic inside for better reading. To the congregation and Minister these pupils must have seemed very devout at prayer. Whatever the reason, it always seemed to draw a large crowd and they certainly received a very warm welcome from the local congregation.

Ironically, the largest church in Bellingham, the now defunct Presbyterian which stood on the edge of the village on the road to Otterburn, probably attracted the fewest numbers, only a small number of pupils attending which is a shame as it was a beautiful building, it is now, and has been for a number of years, a private dwelling.

After the various, obligatory, church services, everyone was lined up and marched back up to school again, although one or two managed to deviate out of line and purchase a Sunday newspaper. This wasn't the end of the day's religious activities however, for on Sunday evenings, a short service was held in the Assembly Hall with each dormitory taking it in turn to organise the service, the hymns and the readings.