



Brown Rigg Reunions

When Brown Rigg School closed in 1985 that might have been the end of the story. The place lay empty and semi derelict, with the pupils dispersed far and wide, it seemed like the Brown Rigg era would become a fast-fading memory, marked only by fading photographs in a long-forgotten album. This might have remained the case had not a small number of former pupils from the school's opening year in 1945 decided to hold a get-together to mark the 50th anniversary of Brown Rigg's beginning. A tiny, one-inch article mentioning this meeting appeared in the Hexham Courant newspaper and was spotted by eagle-eyed former pupils from other eras who went along out of interest. They had such a jolly time and were carried away with the euphoria of it all that a suggestion was made to hold a big reunion for everybody at Bellingham.



A committee of former pupils, mostly from the 1950s, was formed to get the reunion organised but they soon came across two seemingly immovable problems. Firstly, the school had been closed for over 10 years and no one knew where any of the former pupils were, and secondly the current owner of the largest portion of the former school was implacably opposed to allowing anyone on to the site. Undeterred, the committee forged ahead with their plans, Bellingham's Town Hall was booked for the day, an appeal went out for old photographs and memorabilia, posters went up on parish notice boards and local and national press were contacted.

Once news of the reunion appeared in the press the response was overwhelming. The organisers' telephones rang incessantly as people clamoured for information, and letters arrived from all over the country - even from abroad - as people expressed an interest in coming back to the place where they had spent, "The Happiest Days of Their Lives".

The second Saturday in June 1996 saw an amazing sight as Bellingham was thronged with happy faces, people wandering around the village eager to look up old haunts from years ago and to meet up with old friends not seen for many a long year. The visitors were able to see a small portion of the school, as the area once used as the football pitch had been turned into a caravan site with the proprietor himself a former 'Brown Rigger'.

