



Brown Rigg Life - The Dormitories



Brown Rigg, it has to be said, was far from people's image of what a boarding school might be. There were no ivy-covered cloisters or mellow sandstone buildings, the living quarters at Brown Rigg consisted of dormitories - rows of wooden huts which more closely resembled an army camp in which the conditions were best described as spartan. Despite this, the pupils and indeed the teachers, lived happily and there was great camaraderie among the 'inmates'.

There were originally five dormitories at Brown Rigg with another, 'Coquet', being added later in the 1970s. They were all identical long, wooden rectangular structures with a balcony at one end, open to the elements. They were constructed entirely of wood with the roof shingles being Canadian Cedar which were reputed not to burn if fire broke out! The layout inside was fairly simple, at the entrance end there was a boot room and a small teacher's room, and at the opposite end a further two compact teacher's rooms. Down each side of the dormitories were the beds - cast iron double bunks with thin mattresses. Bedclothes consisted of a linen sleeping bag and several grey or brown ex-army blankets. The children's possessions were kept in a simple box-shaped locker.



A normal Brown Rigg day would start at 7.30am when the pupils were woken and everyone trooped over to the ablution block to get washed. Then it was time to get dressed and make your bed, sometimes this was an 'inspection bed', complete with knife sharp edges and hospital corners, or alternatively 'packs' where the blankets were folded up into a neat square, so symmetrical you would think someone had used a set square. Once the beds were made they were all pulled over to one side of the dormitory and the first of three sweeps would commence under the watchful eye of the 'Dorm Captains', while others would scurry about dusting the ledges and heating pipes, polishing the brass light switches, cleaning and tidying the boot room and putting away an assortment of shoes, football boots and Wellingtons.

The 'housekeeping' duties in the dormitories were undertaken with a remarkable keenness with each one vying with the others to be the neatest and tidiest. Individuals were rewarded for their efforts, a satisfactory performance gaining a star or 'Good Show', while if anyone failed to come up to scratch they received the dreaded black star or 'Bad Show'. There was a shield for the dormitory that gained the most points at the teacher's inspection and their verdict was awaited with great expectation, not to mention trepidation.

Once or twice every term the bare wooden floors of the dormitories were 'squeegeed'. This involved buckets of hot soapy water slogged all over the floor which was then scrubbed vigorously with hard brooms, then rinsed and the excess water then pushed down the 'squeegee holes' with the rubber blade scrapers. The said squeegee holes also served as a convenient exit for any person wanting to exit the dormitory when they shouldn't have!