Chapter 16
Schools

Upton is served by five Primary Schools, one High School, one special school for children with disabilities and one private school, so the education needs of children are well catered for. The oldest recorded school is St Mary's which was first built in 1843 and the 'newest' school is the High School, built in 1968.

St Mary's School

The original St Mary's school was built in 1843 on a site known as *'Footway Field'*. From the 'Reports on Schools' inspection of 8th August 1853, by Rev. H R P Sandford, the following is known -

'Buildings very fair; mistress' house very small. Desks along the wall but not facing it. Books, tolerable supply. Apparatus not sufficient. Organisation in four classes, under the Mistress and her sister as assistant. Methods fair; pains taken to keep the class attention. Discipline good. Instruction fair, such as to produce correctness in what is taught. Though not a trained mistress, Miss Frith has her village school in very fair order. Some of the girls answered fairly, the boys were behind hand, especially in arithmetic. The plan of taking the farmers' children into the National School at a higher rate than the poor (3d - 6d weekly) seems to have succeeded here'. Census records of 1851 show that the schoolmistress, Miss Emma Frith, was 28 and her sister, Ann, 30.

The building of the new St Mary's school began in July 1884 '*For the benefit of the Parish'* and was of a size to hold 170 pupils. The Duke and Duchess of Westminster were invited to the opening ceremony, in April 1885.

After a short period Mr Bullock, the headmaster, received complaints about the playground and the cloakroom. It was felt that the boys' playground should be separate from that used by the girls.

There were 77 pupils in 1894 and records show there was low attendance in school during race week. Even in those days, school inspections were rigorous; it was pointed out that *'Spelling needed more attention, arithmetic of some pupils was weak, desks were of an unsuitable size and slate pencils were too short as they cramped the fingers'*. On the positive side, singing and needlework were good and object lessons were very popular e.g. the rabbit, the cat, the Post Office. No comment was made about the fact that sometimes the temperature in the classroom was only 48°F.

When Mr Bullock retired in 1899, there were 13 applications for the vacant post which paid £100 per year; it was filled by Mr John Evans. During this period the playground was re-laid using 23 tons of Spar. The school day started at 9am and the day normally finished at 3.30 but when Queen Victoria visited

Chester the children were allowed to leave at 3.15 pm. The school was used for '*Evening Continuation Classes'* from October 1899. These included two hour sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays, teaching subjects such as Commercial Arithmetic, Correspondence, Geography and Drawing. The fee was 2/- per session, Mr Evans was the teacher and received 3/9^{d} per hour.

After the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 the children were given a holiday to enable them to hear the proclamation given by King Edward VII. In 1914 Mr Evans was replaced as head teacher by Mr E Hacker, who was succeeded by Mr F Hewitt in 1925 and Mr Chidlow in 1930. Mr Chidlow stayed in the post for 22 years and saw many changes. Until 1947 children were educated at St Mary's until the age of 14. After this date, however, they were transferred to the Grange Secondary school in Ellesmere Port at the age of 11. Once Upton Primary School was built, children moved there at the age of 7, making St Mary's an infant's school.



St Mary's in 1908

During the difficult period of the war years, school carried on as near normal as possible. One ex-pupil, Anthony Evans, remembers the windows being blacked out *"With wooden frames covered in thick black paper, some of the lower frames were removable to allow a bit of day-light in but the higher ones were permanent. All the glass, in the windows and the partition between the classrooms, had rug canvas glued to it to make it shatterproof"*. He also

remembers going into school an hour earlier than everyone else, to set and light the fire. Known as 'the furnace', this was a large cast iron box with doors on the front and loose lids on the top for the kettle. *"The furnace heated the whole school via 4 inch cast iron pipes and cast iron radiators"*. During this time the children would also help in Mr Chidlow's garden, digging, weeding and watering the growing vegetables under the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. Weekly air raid practices were held when the children would be taken to the underground shelter behind the Village Hall. According to Anthony *"It was often 6 inches deep with water and attracted lots of frogs, thank heavens we never needed it for real"*.

After Mr Chidlow retired through ill health, in 1952, the temporary head complained about the low temperature of the main classroom and the two old stoves were replaced. Interviews were held for the post of head and Mrs G Waterworth was appointed in January of the following year. Later on in the year lessons were held in the Village Hall due to major alterations taking place in the school. The first open day was held on December 16th and a party and concert took place in the Village Hall.

After 20 years of service, Mrs Waterworth retired in 1971 and Mrs Irene Staples was introduced as the new head. At this time there were 178 children on the roll. Mrs Staples introduced the first out-of-school visit when the children travelled to the Liverpool Museum and Walker Art Gallery and the first Parents Evening was held on 9th May.

To celebrate Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee in 1977, parents organised a carnival float for the children to ride on and a party was held on June 24th. Each child received a commemorative mug from the carnival committee and jubilee crown from the school.

During its long history the school has had few breaks in its continuity. In June of 1894 the school had to close for a short while due to bad weather, in 1898 there was an outbreak of diphtheria and *'The closets were disinfected'*. In the early 1940s there was an outbreak of Scarlet Fever which again closed the school and again necessitated fumigation. In 1979, nearly a hundred years after the school was built, it closed for a very different reason. During February there was no oil for the heating, due to a lorry drivers' strike. What would Mr Bullock, the first headteacher, have thought of this?

July 1998 saw the last pupils leave the school and Mrs Staples retire, after 26 years, before its official closure on 31st August. Over one hundred years of education had taken place at St Mary's and to celebrate, the school held a series of Victorian themed events. Pupils and teachers wore period costume, enjoyed the delights of a Victorian lunch which consisted of gruel, found out what it would be like to wear the dunce's hat and used chalk and boards for drawing on. Each child was presented with a leather bookmark as a memento. The following term saw the school merge with Upton Manor to form Upton Heath County Primary School.

The building is now a privately run day nursery.

Upton Heath Primary School

August 27th, 1951. *'The morning on which the school opened was very wet but in spite of the weather all parents who had brought their children to the new school had seen their children's names entered on class lists and left the school premises as requested by 9.20am. The number of children admitted was 222 consisting of 130 boys and 92 girls'.*

With these words entered in the school log book, by head-teacher Mr E L Hughes, Upton County Primary School completed its first day. The account continues with comments on the smoothness of the opening, in spite of continuing work on the playground and main drive. The first meal was very good and various dignitaries called to thank head and staff for all their hard work.

It was soon realised that a rapidly expanding Upton would need more pupil places than the new school could provide and so the original village school, St. Mary's, became a feeder infant school quickly followed by a new infant school, Acresfield, on the Caughall side of Long Lane. Later, Primary changed to Junior in the school name and this title remained until the name Upton Manor was adopted. The final name change occurred in September 1998 when Upton Manor School and St. Mary's Infants amalgamated and the present name, Upton Heath C.E. Controlled Primary School, came into use.

The head, Mr Hughes, universally referred to as Len but invariably addressed as Mr Hughes by everyone from the smallest first year junior to the Director of Education, was utterly dedicated to the well being of the children in his charge.

He formed one of the first PTA's in the county, organised school trips and encouraged social events which had a bonding effect long before the term became known! In fact his name is mentioned in the Plowden Report. He removed grim, formal exams and replaced them with an annual Eisteddfod which encouraged children to write stories and poems, paint pictures, make models and sing, play and recite before a large audience. His Deputy Head, Joyce Cook, sought musical excellence and achieved it most notably with a string of choir successes in the 60s and 70s at the Bromborough Festival, a prestigious event which attracted choirs from all over the North West. Her culminating success was victory in the television programme 'A Good Sing' In turn this led to a choir performance in a concert at the Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool and in *'Christmas at Tatton'* for a few years.

Jock Addison will always be remembered for his gentle manner and unfailing good humour. He joined the school shortly after its inception and served devotedly until his retirement in 1981. Dennis Pugh and Caerwyn Jones both went on to head schools of their own after productive years at The Manor. The former could be seen blowing his whistle in the introduction to 'Match of the Day' in the 70s.

Len retired in 1977 and Mr R Matthews was chosen as his successor. A quiet, gentle person, Ray was sadly dogged by ill health and retired in 1985. In 1986 Glenys Owen, who had been a member of the Manor School's staff, became the new head teacher. The school continued to keep up the tradition of music and drama and sport and many more activities continued to flourish.



1958: P Lux, C Brown, P Guckenheim, J Addison, P Low, E Tingay, P Butcher V Lowe, J Cook, L Hughes, M Catchpole, M Warburton

In 1997 the decision was reached to bring Upton Manor and Upton St. Mary's together on the Manor campus and by Spring 1998, a new specialist infant extension at the North end of the school was ready to receive pupils. Mrs. Irene Staples, Head of St Mary's, decided at this point on a well earned retirement and Mrs. Owen became head of the new school. With the help of Deputy Head Lorraine Brookman and her team of teachers from St. Mary's, Upton Heath C.E. Controlled School came into being.

Although now a very large Primary School with some 420 pupils on roll, the school has never lost the ethos of a caring village school. Wednesday morning assembly is held for the whole school, during which a class or year contribution is usually the central point and the Rev. Conway is often present. The school has forged links with schools in Soweto and one teacher, Sylvia Williams, has exchanged with a Township teacher.

Perhaps the growth, change and creative energy so evident at Upton Heath are symbolised by the Mini Wood. In 1992 an army of children, staff and local dignitaries including Gyles Brandreth, the then MP for Chester, marched to the far end of the school field, each one clutching a tiny sapling. These were planted with much muddy fun and today there stands, at the corner of Demage Lane and Long Lane a beautiful, mature copse.



An early photograph with headteacher Mr Len Hughes



Upton Manor in the mid 1950s

Extensive photographic records of the early years of Upton Heath Primary School were made by Joyce Cook and are currently kept at the school.

Worthy of a book in their own right?

Acresfield Primary School

Acresfield School is situated in Upton Heath and was opened in 1959 in extensive grounds. Originally built as an infant annex for Upton Manor Junior School, they shared the same headmaster Mr Len Hughes. In 1975 the school was extended and the designation changed to primary, with that change came Mr Selwyn Matthews as the new head. During this time there were 60/70 pupils on roll.

1993 saw headteacher Selwyn Matthews leave to be replaced by Mrs Sue Smith who is still in post today.

The school building is light and airy with 1 open plan classroom and 5 traditional classrooms. It also has a reference library housed in the junior corridor. There is a speech and language centre on site which can take up to 10 children aged 7 - 11. A mobile classroom, installed in October 1995, provides accommodation for older infants.

A school grounds development programme was started in 1994 with the planting of over 300 shrubs and trees. This was followed with further plantings on subsequent years until 700 trees and shrubs had been introduced to the land.

A building programme, begun in 2000 has provided a small computer suite, cloakroom, PE store and caretaker's room. The following year saw the completion of a library/study area and meetings room. The large hall, well equipped with PE apparatus, also doubles as a dining hall.



Starting in November 1995, parents of the children transformed the grounds by constructing a soft play area, digging out a pond and building a fence around it. The process of ground development has continued in subsequent years with a range of seating and play facilities. A woodland trail has been laid through the now maturing woodland area. In 2002 the school won first prize in the Chester City in Bloom Schools Section.

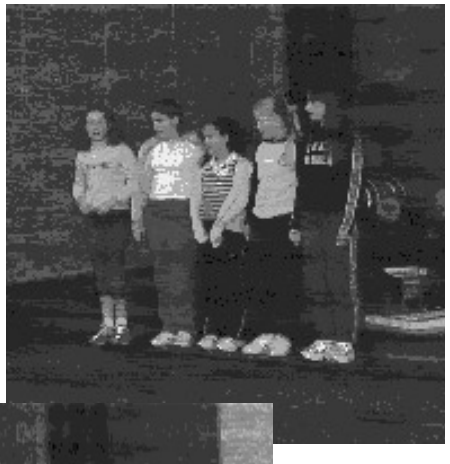
In 2002 the reception children were filmed as part of the 'Great Britons' television series and appeared in the Charles Darwin episode. The following year older children were filmed for a BBC Education 'Watch' programme at Chester Zoo.

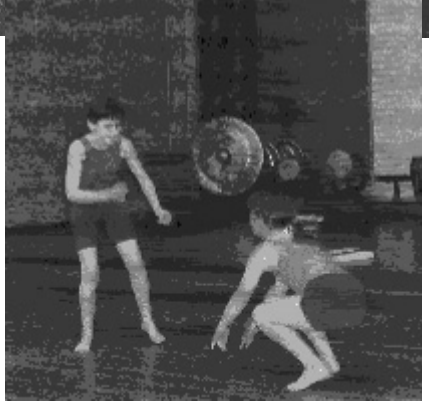
Before the last building programme could commence an archæological survey was carried out as Roman practice camps have been discovered in the locality (see chapter 2). Although no Roman remains were found, the remains of a prehistoric votive (fire) were uncovered. This was identified as a trench with charcoal fragments and small rounded pebbles.

In March 2004 children in year 4 and 5 took part in a project 'Pastimes' for the National Singing Strategy. This culminated in singing at the National School Proms, at The Albert Hall, in November along with 600 other children.

The 181 children on roll are organised into 7 teaching groups.







Images of year 6 taken from the school's website

Westlea Primary School

Westlea Primary School, built to accommodate the growing population of children in Upton, opened on 30th April 1962 admitting 158 pupils. The catchment area ranged from Weston Grove to the Chester City boundary and from Long Lane to Wealstone Lane. Designed as a one-form entry primary school, it comprised four junior and three infant classrooms, however there was no intake of year 7 pupils at this time. 91 pupils and all the teaching staff, including Mr F Skitt the headteacher, stayed for the first school dinner.

An open evening was held on 23rd May for inspection by parents and other interested parties. The official opening, attended by Mr John Temple, M.P. for Chester, took place on 20th July.

The number of pupils on the roll after the summer holidays rose to 171, which included the new intake of year 7. The number of pupils rose steadily over the following years. Within twelve months of inception the Parent Teacher Association was active and when the football team was formed the PTA were able to provide their first strip. Those participating in the lunchtime clubs of country dancing, recorder playing and choir singing all enjoyed a trip to the Llangollen International Eisteddfod.

From Easter 1964 the school agreed to accept children from Vicars Cross and Boughton, pending the provision of schools in those areas with two new demountable classrooms being provided. These, together with an extra infant class working in the dining room, meant the school now had 10 classes in total.

By February 1966 pupil numbers had reached 386. A special meeting was called of the managers of the school to discuss overcrowding. The following month saw the headteachers of Westlea Primary, Upton County Primary and St Mary's Infant schools meet with Deputy Director of Education and Divisional Education Officer to discuss accommodation problems. This led, eventually, to more de-mountable classrooms being used. Pupil numbers reached 411 in September 1967.

In March of the following year a group of 29 children and 3 adults left for a week long holiday at a Wildlife Youth Camp, the first holiday visit ever made from the school. Pupils also took part in the Chester Mystery Plays depicting 32 animals in the Noah's Ark scene. Animal heads and costumes were made, by staff and parents, for classes 6 and 7 who took part. An inscribed book of Bible stories was presented to the school in recognition of their efforts. In December 1967 the school closed for Christmas holidays and said farewell to 77 children who would be starting, the following term, at the newly opened Mill View School. The following summer would see the older children moving on to the also newly opened Upton High School.

Although by 1969 the school had a television, for the Investiture of the Prince of Wales, the infants were sent home early to watch the proceedings while the junior children watched together at school. This enabled as many children as possible to see the event.



The first school outing, to the International Eisteddfod, at Llangollen 1963

The animal heads and costumes created for the Chester Mystery Plays were utilised again in November 1973 when a party of pupils visited London along with a team from the World Wildlife Fund. The event this time was the Lord Mayor's Parade when they walked the six miles in their costumes as part of the largest Lord Mayor's Parade ever, attended by 750,000 people.

A major event in 1976 was the decision to open a Speech Therapy Unit which would accommodate up to 10 children. The unit opened the following May under the supervision of one teacher, one senior speech therapist and a class room assistant. The first intake consisted of seven full time children and one part time, aged between 4 and 8 years. The unit gives children the chance to spend time improving their language skills before returning to their local school.

In September 1979 Mrs D Nall took over as head teacher after Mr Skitt's retirement. Mr Skitt would not lose touch with the school however, as he returned some years later as 'Father Christmas' at the infants and playgroup parties.

Due to the extra junior school in Upton and the falling child population, numbers at Westlea gradually fell over the years (although the language unit was constantly at capacity). The decline continued until the late 1980s when the roll was less than 100. In the early 1990s the population began to rise again and numbers at the start of 2005 stand at 142.

Mrs Nall retired at the end of 1995 to be replaced by Mrs Christine Jackson under whose leadership the school continues to develop.

The school now has a nursery class and the language centre. The playground has been developed and there are several adventure play areas for the children to use. There is a technology room where ICT and Design and Technology take place, something that would not have been on the curriculum in 1962.



Mill View School

Mill View School opened in 1968 when existing catchment boundaries were redrawn and very clearly defined. Boundaries were very important at that time, not only between the local schools but between City and County schools. Children on the south side of Rosewood Avenue, for example, went to Newton school; those on the north side went to Upton Manor. The style of the building was very simple and typical of all County schools being built at that time. There were four junior classrooms built at right angles to the three infant classrooms with an open patio area adjoining the hall. The school cost approximately £68,000 when it opened, fully equipped, but the new roof in the late eighties and the new windows and cladding in the nineties cost three times that figure.

Bryan Lambert was appointed head teacher of this new school, built, according to many mystified parents, on the 'wrong' side of Wealstone Lane. They had a point. At that time every child in the catchment area had to cross that busy road and a crossing patrol was speedily established. A bend was removed from the lane that caused headlines in the local paper *"A long lane has no turnig"*. This spelling mistake inspired the staff to create a strange red felt creature, which lived in the staff room and became the school mascot known as Turnig.



1968: A Jones, D Williams, J Church, J Drew, J Roberts, J Tovey.
M Westgarth, M Higgs, B Lambert, D Nall, E Grinter.

Mr Lambert remained headmaster until 1978. The infant department, unusually, had two parallel classes of middle infants and reception children who started school in the term in which they had their fifth birthday. The oldest children from both classes moved up to become the top infants in September.

Horizons were broadened when pupils were taken on school trips, not only to the Outdoor Pursuits Centres but also abroad. Mr Lambert organised visits to

Belgium, which included a trip into Holland, and later, during the Headship of Mr Bob Springett, exchange trips were made to Angouleme in France in the Cognac area. The school also received visitors from Finland and Mr Springett took a group of the older juniors on a return visit, the first English teacher ever to make such a journey.

Mr Lambert left and in 1979 Mr C Royston Evans was appointed head. He stayed two and a half years before moving to Neston.

Mr Bob Springett was appointed Head in 1982, arriving at School in the early days in black leathers, astride his powerful motor bike. In deference to the feelings of Upton parents, he changed his mode of transport to a small Fiat Uno which, he complained, had only half the power of his bike!

During the 1980s the school developed links with Chester College when students were received on teaching practice. Mutually beneficial exchanges took place when Mill View children were bussed to the College for swimming lessons and the College sent science students to work with the younger children, in school and on field trips. When the College's new Primary Education Centre was opened by Princess Margaret in 1989 the Infants were invited to demonstrate their scientific activities during her visit.



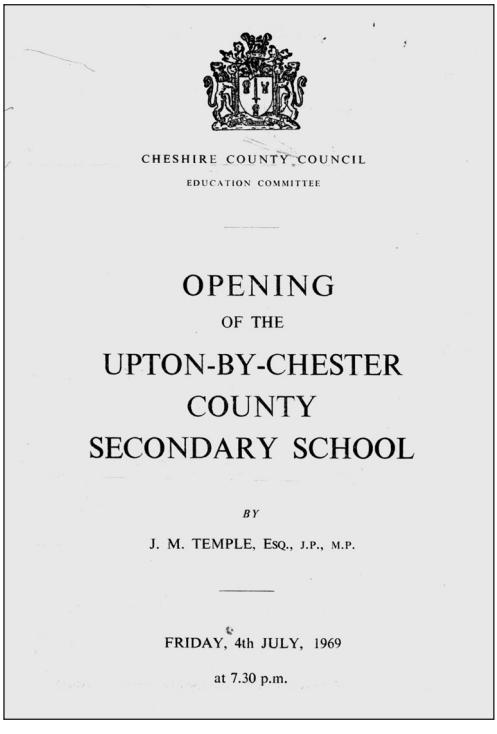
Maypole Dancing with Mrs M Higgs

In the 1980s, the junior cloakroom became a designated Library area for the juniors and the Infant corridor was used similarly for the younger children. The central patio area was roofed over to provide extra accommodation and the whole of the entrance hall was incorporated into a new Library area in the late nineties.

Mr Springett took early retirement in 1996 to be replaced as headmaster by Mr Richard MacRae. Major improvements have since been made to the building, which now boasts a computer suite, resource area, new staff-room and science area.

Upton High School

The high school in Upton opened in September 1968 as Upton Secondary Modern School, although the official opening was in July 1969. For the first five or six years it was under Ellesmere Port Education Authority until boundary changes moved responsibility to Chester. Previous to its opening, children living to the south side of Plas Newton Lane went to Chester City Secondary School and children living to the north of Plas Newton Lane went to one of three schools in Ellesmere Port; John Street, The Grange or Stanney.



CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

OPENING

OF THE

UPTON-BY-CHESTER

COUNTY

SECONDARY SCHOOL

BY

J. M. TEMPLE, Esq., J.P., M.P.

FRIDAY, 4th JULY, 1969

at 7.30 p.m.

It was in 1972 that it became a comprehensive and changed its name to Upton-by-Chester High School. Included as part of the uniform for the new school was a badge which related to an ancient Upton family (the Brock family), and a Cheshire wheatsheaf. The total cost of the buildings, furniture and equipment amounted to £266,000. The first head teacher was Mr Gordon Rigby, who, with the help of deputy head Mr John Farey and 20 staff, oversaw the intake of 200 pupils.

As with many building projects the school was not completed on time and for several months the builders were still on site. The new furniture did not materialise on time either, so suitable furniture had to be begged and borrowed to furnish the premises. For the first two years, pupils had to be bussed back to John Street School, Ellesmere Port, to use their sports field until Upton's was created next to the school. This was on a site that was formerly a pond. Consequently in early summer of the following years, there were lots of frogs on the cricket pitch looking for their old spawning ground.

In the early days it was a 3 form entry (3 forms for each year), the original intention was to take just first and second year pupils but this was over-ruled by the Educational Authority who insisted that the new intake should include all four years. This upset some pupils as they had, perhaps, only a term or two of education left before being eligible to leave. Over the years the intake increased to a 10 form organisation with 1650 students, fed by all the junior schools in Upton plus many of the outlying villages such as Mickle Trafford, Guilden Sutton and Mollington, as well as pupils from the city junior schools (parental choice). The school has developed a large and thriving 6th form with most 6th form students progressing to university, including Oxford and Cambridge.

Originally the school consisted of one main block of seven classrooms plus a library, dining room, gym, and a technical block. More accommodation had to be created before becoming a comprehensive school in 1972, so the first of several extensions was built. Over the years four more blocks have been added making it the large complex it is today.

When Mr Rigby left in 1972 he was replaced by Mr Norman Butterworth and he, in 1985, was replaced by Miss Jennifer Jackson who remains Headteacher to this day. The board of governors, chaired originally by Mr Richard Tucker, has always been an integral part of school life.

Pupils have always been encouraged to take part in community issues and charitable causes. The older students have been involved in such diverse assignments as helping at local residential nursing homes, preserving public footpaths such as the one at Picton and aiding the Carnival preparations in 1977. The parents of one ex-pupil set up a fund to reward the student with the best A level results (in the form of a book token) which they did this in memory of their son, who died tragically from diabetes.



Upton High School Staff in 1972

For many years the school housed a De Haviland Vampire jet plane in the grounds, this came about through a contact in the R.A.F. who knew it was about to be scrapped. It was transported to the school on a pantechnicon and hoisted into the quadrant where it fascinated students and visitors alike. Eventually the plane was removed for restoration and the staff and students established a garden where it had been located.

Dorin Park Special Needs School

After thorough consultation and a well-attended public meeting where local people were invited to express their opinion, the planning and building of Dorin Park School went ahead. It was designed to be non-intrusive in style and to merge well into its setting. It is situated on the site of the former Government House and where the playground now is, was a paddock surrounded by trees with a small stable in the corner. Dorin Court Residential Home was built more or less at the same time at the other end of the site. The original brick boundary wall is still there, facing on to Wealstone Lane.



Lee, Rose and Kyle playing in the sand, helped by nursery assistant Enid

The school opened in June 1977 under the headship of Mr David Lloyd Jones, with Mrs Sheila Garston as chairman of governors. For the first two months, the head had an office in Dorin Court.

The school was originally designed for 120 pupils, but the highest number to attend has been 95 due to the space required for wheelchairs to move freely. The children have to cope with physical disabilities such as spina bifida, hydrocephalus and cerebral palsy; one of the great strengths of the school has been its close contact with paediatricians from the hospital which means that parents received support from the earliest days. Clinics are held in school and parental involvement in activities and on the governing body has resulted in some memorable and very heart-warming contacts, not to mention phenomenal fund-raising activities, which have enabled the school to help the children in so many ways.

Because of the nature of the school population, the catchment area began with Chester and surrounding areas, soon extending to Malpas and Kelsall, Ellesmere Port and later, Clwyd. Eventually more came from Wales and there were even, at one time, one or two pupils from as far afield as Llangollen. All these enriched the school population which ranges in age from two to nineteen years.

The ethos of the school has always been to try in every way to *'equip pupils to become as independent as possible'*, hence the recognition of the place of the therapists – physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists in the development of the children. The school has its own nurse. The swimming pool is not only used therapeutically for the school but also for some groups from the Hospital – not to mention toddlers and children and for evening classes.

The welfare of pupils and staff has been at the centre of school life and respect and dignity are two features of the care of children, who sometimes are not able to do a great deal for themselves physically. Lifting and moving place a strain on helpers (there is a special band of assistants as well as teachers in the school) so pioneering care for staff by the provision of hoists was introduced. In a different way, computers were introduced to enhance communication and early work on computerised speech was undertaken through contact with Wythenshawe Hospital. This opened a whole new field of learning – even the publication of a book of poems by one pupil.

The school developed strong community links both with donors and volunteers. Because of this and the dedication of the staff, the children visit special school camps and enjoy many activities. Horse-riding is supervised under the auspices of Riding for the Disabled. The advent of the Multi-Sensory room a few years ago, added a new dimension for the severely disabled, who responded to the gentle light and sound features.

Mr Philip Kidman became Head teacher in 1997. His expertise has been much valued and he has been in great demand to share knowledge and experience. He has built on the sound foundations of the past - developing and expanding the success of the school.

To those who know it well, it is a very special Special School.



Lauren, Ashlee and Abby with Pooh Bear

The Firs School

The beginning of the Firs School goes back to the Second World War when Mrs Florence Longman was teaching at Westminster Road School in Hoole. As a result of the 1944 Education Act the 11+ examination provided free places in Grammar Schools and alongside this were the entrance exams for the King's and Queen's Schools. In order to supplement her income Mrs Longman decided to coach children for these exams after school. This was such a success that it was suggested that she should start her own school. Subsequently, Mrs Longman started her first school in a small room in Abbey Street, opposite the Cathedral. In 1949 Mrs Longman was renting rooms in Mill Lane Upton when she heard that Western Command had some vacant married quarters in the grounds of a large house (since demolished) called The Firs. As she already met the educational needs of several army children, their parents were keen to support her in her request to rent several wooden huts for use as a school. In 1950 the school moved in and thrived. The number of pupils soon grew to about 80 and gained a reputation for sound academic methods.

The main building in these grounds, Heywood Lodge, housed a private secondary school known as Normain College, which saw its numbers dwindling rapidly by 1961. The logical conclusion of the owner was to offer to sell the building to Mrs Longman, which she readily accepted. In 1962 Mrs Longman and her pupils moved into the new building, lock stock and barrel; just in time, as it happened, as the wooden huts burnt down only two weeks later.



Outside the 'New' School Building in the early years

At last settled in permanent accommodation '*The Firs School'* prospered and by 1971 was able to buy land adjacent to the school to site a Reception unit, as pupil numbers had grown to 230. For a long time one long wooden hut remained, which supposedly came from Chester Racecourse It deteriorated to such a degree that pencils would be lost between floorboards and an ancient piano descended to a mythical floor below.

Mrs Longman headed the school until 1987 when she handed over the reins to her son Rev. Ted Longman, while she enjoyed her retirement in a bungalow built for her in the grounds of the school. In 1990 Mr Michael Ellis took over as head teacher and the school continues to develop and improve.

The school grounds have been planted with a wide variety of trees and shrubs to provide interest for the children and resources for staff use.

In 1995 the school celebrated its Golden Jubilee.