

## INFLUENTIAL TEACHER – MISS TRESSADER

By Ian Welland

In September 1974, I started “Junior” school – St Ann’s School in Hanwell, West London. I lived with my Grandparents at the time. The school had been an all-girls school until July 1974; but, with the growing numbers of children requiring places, London Borough of Brent decided St Ann’s had to change status. I was one of the first “boys” generation at the school.

Miss Tressader was my first form teacher. A lovely lady from New Zealand, she enthused confidence in all who met her or was taught by her. I can’t remember anything specific about her teaching methods; but, she was very clear on the pupil’s year “objective” and that was to work on a project that would be handed in as completed course work at the end of that first year. The best project would win a prize!

“Possums, choose something that you know nothing about but by the end of the school year, you will!” said Miss Tressader.

Being a good possum, I duly wandered off to Hanwell Library to see if anything would catch my attention. I knew the children’s library well having spent some child-reading days there during the school holidays. After some time sitting dejected, a kindly librarian approached and enquired.

“So, you haven’t a clue for your school project then?”

“No. I like football and music and buses and trains. That’s no good. Miss Tressader says I have to find something that I know nothing about.”

The kindly librarian went over to an adjacent shelf and started removing two books. Placing them on the round reading table, I quickly noted the titles: *The Ladybird book of The Night Sky* and *The Observer’s book of Astronomy*.

“Do you look up into the sky at night and see the moon and stars?”

“Yes. I like the sky. Especially when I can see the moon’s phases. I remember as a three-year-old staring out of my bedroom window one evening and seeing the Moon’s crescent, seemingly hanging over the Canal.”

“Have you ever looked through binoculars or a telescope?”

“No.”

“Well, you should. It’s amazing what you can see. I think astronomy will be a fine subject to learn. Do you know how many planets there are?”

“Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, I think. One has rings?”

“So, you know a little about the subject, but could you tell which one is which just by looking up into the sky?”

“No.”

“So, you have your project! Astronomy. And what better way to start than with these two books. Incidentally, Patrick Moore has a programme on television called *The Sky At Night*. I believe it is repeated on Friday afternoons for those too young to stay up late to see it. Astronomy is a fine hobby as well – something you can continue to be interested in after your project ends.”

The next day, I rushed into the school room clutching those two library books.

“Look Miss Tressader! Astronomy!”

“Goodness me! Now, that’ll keep you out of mischief for a long time.”

Astronomy has kept me out of mischief for nearly 48 years!

