

Fowey Story

The beautiful harbour town where I grew up lies between Looe and Mevagissey on the south coast of Cornwall. At the mouth of the harbour on each side there are ruined stone built towers, relics of a time when defences were constructed against a possible Napoleonic invasion.

I knew nothing of this as a child. My world was small and comfortably familiar. We lived in a council bungalow on the top of the hill and so to access anything we might need we had to walk downhill. So – it was downhill to school, downhill to the shops, downhill to church and so on. This could be a challenge in icy weather and not so good if you had a lot to carry back again.

Fowey was and still is a popular summer resort for holiday makers, but for me it was always more appealing during the rest of the year. During the winter, in the frequently wild weather, the tides would be so high sometimes, that there would be seaweed left in the narrow streets near to town quay when the tide went out. It was, in effect, a temporary minor flood. I remember a sense of awe that the sea had such power and strength and also feeling a little afraid that next time the sea might cover more streets. This aspect of life in Fowey was a long way from its summer persona, with sunshine, beaches, cafes, ice-cream and smiling tourists.

When the time came for me to move from Primary to Secondary education, I was delighted to pass the 11 plus and thus to gain a place at the Grammar School which was just across the road from the Primary School.

The Grammar School was an old building and some of its classrooms looked out over the harbour, quite a distraction when the lesson wasn't particularly interesting. Assemblies were held in the hall come gym and one of the duties of a prefect was to select a record of a piece of classical music for the rest of the school to walk into and out of the room. I have a vivid memory of a boy bringing in a single of the latest Beatles song and playing it on the ancient record player before school began. What excitement and strictly against the rules!

As I moved into my teens, other aspects of what the town had to offer came into my life. The Troy cinema, for example, offered 3 different films a week, although I was only allowed to go on a Saturday with a friend. The back three rows of the cinema had double seats, which were very popular with couples. The man in charge was a small, unsmiling individual nick-named “Torchy” because he wandered up and down the aisles during the programme shining his torch on anyone he suspected of getting up to mischief in the back rows.

When the time came to think of a career I chose teaching, simply because I found young children and their development fascinating. I had to leave Fowey in order to train and eventually found myself on the outskirts of London. What a culture shock that was, in more ways than one, but that’s another story.....

Jan Rees May 2022