

MEMORIES OF GOING COMPREHENSIVE

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The switch over to comprehensive education could not have been timed worse for myself and my contemporaries, coming right in the middle of our sixth form "education". There was a hint of the fiasco to come when Crip chose the 1968 Speech Night to outline boldly the plans, extol the virtues and urge pupils and parents to embrace change.

Almost literally the following day it became public that he was "legging it" for another grammar school ! There then followed a mass exodus of 80% of the staff to whom we'd become accustomed and who had served us reasonably well.

My first year in the sixth form was the last in Mitcham Grammar's history. The hasty intake of new teachers was - shall we say - of mixed calibre. This included a painfully shy physics teacher, a totally bonkers history teacher (top bloke, though) and a chemistry teacher who imperilled pupils and laboratories alike when let loose with her experiments. Then there was the maths teacher who regularly used to conduct his class down at Leo's ice cream parlour.

Academic standards were on the slide!

There were some plus points. Bernard Atherton proved to be a very personable and human headmaster and the aforementioned history teacher usually had us in fits and injected a lot of energy into the school's cricket.

The very last day - Friday 26th July, 1969 - must have been quite sad. Fortunately, I missed it as I was called up to play cricket down in Eastbourne.

So to Eastfields....where the fiasco continued. Whatever planning had gone into the merger, it didn't make allowance for a sixth form and we joined a handful of lads from Eastfields in an adjacent youth centre. This comprised a few rooms with armchairs and sofas, coffee facilities and a fish tank with cannibalistic inmates. No desks, books or teachers in sight!

Not surprisingly, the temptation to lounge around swapping tales of exaggerated leisure time triumphs, drinking coffee, re-enacting the previous nights' Monty Python sketches and delighting in the spectacle of fish eating each other, was very strong. What little work we did was scribbled on a notepad resting on our knees. Needless to say, our A-level results were way short of previous MCGS standards. So for most of us it was "goodbye university- hello 3rd rate polytechnic!"

In retrospect, we should have shown a trifle more self-discipline but the environment certainly wasn't conducive to academic excellence! Whether the younger boys enjoyed a more seamless transition, only they can say. Likewise, whether the merger was ultimately successful, I don't know - but it certainly did me and my peers no favours.