The old building in Mina Road began life in 1882 as Mina Road Elementary School. It was demolished in 1964-5. In the picture on the right you can just see the building opened in 1905 (it’s still there). Before Walworth Secondary School took over in 1946, the buildings were the boys’ and girls’ central schools.

Miss Anne O'Reilly
At our urging, Southwark is to erect a blue plaque for Miss O'Reilly, the first effective Walworth head (1947-55, died 1963). We don’t yet know where it will be placed.

The citation refers to her headship of Peckham Central School during the war when she also ran a group of Londoner's Meals Service Centres, known as 'British Restaurants', providing and delivering food across south London to emergency services and those affected by bombing, work for which she received an MBE in 1942. At Walworth from 1947, she led one of the first comprehensive schools.

Does anyone have a photograph?

Mr Guy Rogers
He succeeded Miss O'Reilly and is happily still alive. We found this shot from a 1958 TV bulletin.
Seated on left, with his class, 1951. Photo we think from Friends Reunited.

That isn’t school uniform so what’s the occasion? and who’s the other man?

We’ve learned much more about Mr Harvey, mainly from Roy Boardman in Naples. His c.v.: Penzance Grammar School, Oxford, Sorbonne; acting and directing in France, met James Joyce in a bookshop; schools inspector of French in Northern Ireland; published poet (with Laurie Lee) and friend of poets Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas; unfit for call-up (heart) so spent the war with British Council in Paraguay; London, taught for a year or two, appointed head of English by Miss O’Reilly.

He was plainly a remarkable teacher. A colleague, John Sparrow (1952-56), tells us:

*He was a brilliant teacher, I mean, he came into one of my classes once, he was going round, he wanted to get to know the pupils and that sort of thing, he came in, he had a sort of magnetism, and he started asking them questions, like what football team they supported or whether they liked dancing, and as soon as he got an answer from someone he plunged to one of the others and said, Is that right? Do you agree with that? He had them all arguing like hell within three minutes. It was uncanny, I hadn’t seen anything like this in a classroom. He had a sort of way of personalising things, he didn’t want them to make impersonal comments, he wanted to know what they thought. And they were always very willing to tell him, once he’d broken the ice which didn’t take more than a few seconds.*

On right. On left Mr Ash. Photo thanks to Sue Hills (née Price), from collection of Paddy Price

We think the play was *The Hopeful Travellers* and the director was either Mr Rosen or Mr Gus Grealy. The syllabus he wrote for the school is not only one of the earliest documents we’ve seen on English in the comprehensive school; it’s also the best we know of before the mid-1960s. He’s recalled with respect and gratitude as a kind, down-earth, amusing and learned teacher. Valerie Avery wrote her novel *London Morning* about the Old Kent Road and Walworth School while in his 5th year class.

We’d like to receive more memories of Harold from those who were taught by him.

English teaching in which working-class children could make the most of their natural language abilities in the new comprehensive schools: *Simon Clements* (see below) and *Leslie Stratta* who sadly died in 2010.

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**Arthur Harvey, 1949-55**

**Harold Rosen, 1956-58**

**John Dixon, 1959-63**

John Dixon was fortunate because two young colleagues were appointed at the same time who were equally enthusiastic about taking Harold Rosen’s ideas further and developing the sort of
Meanwhile Miss Pip Porchetta, Miss Judith Wild and Mr Andrew Salkey continued at least for a year or two -- and Miss Porchetta far beyond. All were effective teachers, though Salkey seems to have been more attentive to his writing and his broadcasting on the BBC World Service. (We’d love to hear a recording.)

It was Dixon, Clements and Stratta who were the innovative thinkers. Their main ideas were:

✦ There should be a lot of talking -- discussion -- in English lessons, certainly before tackling a piece of writing but also in studying literature. Yes, pupils needed to write correctly, but equally they needed the confidence to express their thoughts and ideas and this was more important than clause analysis and the like.

✦ In the early years, teachers needed to get pupils talking, writing and acting about their own experiences. As they got older they would deal with more public topics -- the ‘themes’ on that scrapbook cover on the previous page -- in a less personal style of language, as preparation for being citizens in a democratic society.

One result of the Walworth department’s work was the popular published textbook Reflections, that evidently met the needs of a lot of schools.

So, in the lower school and lower streams you might get this (donated to our archive by John Dixon):

And a 4th year English folder might look like this (page 1 of 3 of ‘Contents’ -- thanks to Jennifer Johnson née Fraser for the loan):
Jen Johnson (then Fraser) was taught by Mrs Noakes (Valerie Avery), Miss Porchetta and Alec McLeod. On Alec (later he preferred 'Alex'), and on English at Walworth, she told us this:

Well, Alec was a breath of -- he was completely different, wasn’t he. He never treated us as children, or teenagers, he just talked to us like we were young men and women, which led to discussions, and sometimes it could be uproarious but he would involve us, he would make us look at something and think about it, he would ask questions, searching questions, he would ask you to think about things, and it was just so completely different. It wasn’t so -- how can I say it, it was always different doing English in Walworth School anyway.... Sometimes you would think, ‘Oh, what’s that got to do with English?’ but when I look back now I can see what the point was, it was to get us to write about these things, to understand, to describe them.

I think the English all felt new, a new way to proceed. It wasn’t the old style, sitting there doing your bog-standard grammar, comprehension, things like that....I guess I thought ‘Doesn’t that happen in all schools?’. Of course I realise now it didn’t from the girls I grew up with, they didn’t have quite the same things going on.

'Two Bob’s Worth of Trouble'

In 1962 Simon Clements’ class, 3C, made a film, ‘Two Bob’s Worth of Trouble’. It’s about a boy in trouble for stealing who’s chased by a gang through streets and estates, over bomb-sites and along the canal, and it powerfully evokes the Walworth and Bermondsey environment of the time.

There’s a whole story about how they made the film, forming a company to sell shares to buy the camera, writing the script together as a class and making the film in a double period of English a week in the summer term, with the approval of Mr Rogers, the head. Throughout the proceedings Simon kept to his resolution never to be behind the camera himself: he never looked through the lens, though he did direct the group’s attention to the choices they could make for focus, angle, light etc.

Here are a couple of shots (thanks to Simon Clements -- we’re hoping there’ll be a good digital copy before too long):

We’d like to hear from former members of 3C who remember the film -- and their normal English lessons.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please send us anything you have about English up to 1965: memories (do write to us), saved work, diaries, photographs, films. We’ll return documents after copying, or place them in a public archive.

From the earlier period up to (1955) we’d like more on English as taught by Judith Wild, Mr Hall, John Sparrow and Gus Grealy.

For 1956-63 we’re after material on Harold Rosen, Andrew Salkey, John Dixon, Leslie Stratta, Simon Clements, Valerie Noakes, Graham Reid and Brenda Harvey.

We know quite a bit about Alec McLeod after he returned from New Zealand in 1963 (see Jennifer Johnson/Fraser above) but need more on his earlier stay, 1952-58.

http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/education/staff/pmedwaycurrentproject.html
Email Walworth Research walworthresearch@me.com
Dr Peter Medway, Education and Professional Studies, King’s College London, London SE1 9NH