

School Dinners 1957 - 1962

I attended a Girls' Grammar School in Hertfordshire. The main buildings were in a range of Georgian houses on the High Street, but the kitchen and dining room were housed in a Nissan Hut type structure in the garden, cold and damp!

There were two sittings, first was best, as we could then wander round the grounds for the rest of the dinner break. If we were on second sitting for some reason we tended to queue up outside the canteen till we were let in.

When admitted, each class sat at its own long tables, on backless benches, perhaps eight each side. There was a chair each end which obviously were much preferred, a sign of status in the group. Dull metal jugs of water and plastic beakers were already on the tables, these frequently got knocked over as a source of excitement. After the teacher on duty said Grace (although it was not a church school) we were sent, a table at a time, to collect our food from the counter. As there was no choice, and as everyone at school that day was cooked a meal, there was always enough.

I seem to recall there was a rota of perhaps ten meals, mainly meat or meat pie with boiled potatoes and soggy vegetables, quite similar to meals at home, although those were better cooked. Very bland and colourless. An exception was carved chunks of pink ham, bright red beetroot, and CHIPS, which was an experience for me as I never had them at home.

And of course puddings, pie or sponge or steamed suet puddings, always with custard. Jam roly-poly, spotted dick etc were steamed/boiled in a long cylindrical metal container, which was then unclamped and hinged open like slicing a sausage lengthways. The pudding was then cut into circular slices. Of all the baked desserts my favourite was Chocolate Crunch, a very hard shortbreadly thing cooked in large trays, with delicious Chocolate Custard.

When everyone at the table had finished, we were dismissed, perhaps to get some fresh air before afternoon lessons. It's surprising we were able to stay awake after so much stodge!

Amanda Davey