

20th Century Sparks!

School

Discipline and punishment

Corporal punishment was abolished in state schools in 1987 and in private schools in 1998.

Here are some memories of the type of punishments administered to pupils, in the local area of Brighton and Hove, during the first half of the 20th century.



School Drill lesson c. 1900
Albert Paul - Poverty: Hardship but Happiness

Discipline

Discipline was very strict in those days and in schools, the cane was quite frequently used. If you were persistently disobedient you were sent to the headmistress who administered a collection of leather straps known as the 'tawse'. This was more painful than the cane as it was used on the posterior and was considered a great disgrace!

Marjory Batchelor - A Life Behind Bars

I did go to school to try and learn, but I couldn't learn because of the outlook of the masters. I hated the discipline. In my young days it was a nasty business, really spiteful. I think I would have liked the subjects if there had been decent people teaching us those things. I learned to be a rebel at school. I always was a rebel, without knowing why.

Les Moss - Live and Learn

Punishment

If we misbehaved at school we had to take our punishment. The boys had the 'cat o four tails', which was four throngs of leather joined together at one end, and the girls had the cane which was administered by Miss French. I remember her very well as the end of her nose used to twitch.

When we knew someone was due for the cane we used to break it in half and hide it behind the needlework cupboard. At one time they decided to decorate the interior of the school and this cupboard was moved. There were all the broken canes! That caused a few laughs. We didn't escape the cane punishment, however, as we were always sent down to old Nell Tuppen's shop to buy another one and believe me she always had a good supply.

Margaret Ward - One Camp Chair in the Living Room



School

Discipline and punishment - continued

Another way of punishment was, as you all know, that a pupil was made to stand in front of the class wearing a conical hat with the word 'Dunce' written across it. This was not physical punishment but I think it was a mental one.

Ernie Mason - A Working Man

The recognised instrument of punishment at our school was the 'Strap', a length of leather, handle-shaped at one end, and cut into strip lashes at the other. But this was not for Mr Pell. He had his own special weapon, a short, thick stick about a foot long. The miscreant was held firmly by the wrist while Pelly, bottom lip locked under the top teeth, whacked the stick down onto the palm of the outstretched hand. The rest of the class used to enjoy watching his spectacles jump about an inch off his nose as each stroke came down.

Sid Manville - Everything Seems Smaller

Another punishment was, hold out your hand and get the cane across one hand and then the other. It didn't 'arf sting. Should you be extra naughty, the teacher would make you go to the headmaster's room and fetch the strap or tawse. (This was a leather belt slit up at one end into narrow strips to make it sting across your hand.) You only wanted this once.

Albert Paul - Poverty, Hardship but Happiness