

Whether the Weather.....

Driving to the 2010 Reunion I was dismayed at the poor bluebell display in Ashdown Forest, though grateful for the wealth of cowslip drifts along the verges and embankments of the East Sussex roads. I did wonder whether this was anything to do with climatic change, growth cycles, or just plain bad luck on my part. Whichever, it was somewhat disheartening after the brilliance of the 2009 kaleidoscope of colour that encompassed the countryside.

The December-February winter months brought parts of the UK to a standstill, and even here in the Languedoc-Roussillon regional motorways and roads were closed due to the unprecedented fall of snow – yes snow! Neighbours walked and talked of this strange white material covering the ground, something that had not been seen in the Region in such quantities for 15 years or more, though they soon followed my wife's lead and began to build Snowmen, and enjoy snowball fights with their children.

This made me think of the Chailey winters that we endured, with huge drifts of snow, the pleasure we gained from 'winter sports', and the brilliance of the snow reflected light that almost hurt our eyes. I remember also the pain of thawing fingers, chilblains treated with (too hot) kaolin poultices, and lukewarm radiators that barely kept St. Georges at a survivable level of warmth. But I cannot remember the school closing for days on end, nor the failure of the school coach to negotiate Mill Lane. We seemed to cope with, and survive, what today's Press would probably call South Pole conditions.

So what is wrong with today's population? Easy living and every comfort yes, but their main shortfall must be 'they didn't go to Chailey'! Chailey boys and girls were treated to a 'toughening up regime' that provided their bodies with strength to cope with what nature's winters threw at them and to deal with problems rather than buckle. We were outside in summer, building our strength for the winter albeit unknowingly, though we were not wrapped in thermals, fleece gloves and scarves during winter.

But I have to be honest. Today I hate snow and ice for the immobility it brings me, I still get chilblains and wear thermal leggings in an attempt to avoid them. I have the 'flu jab' and enjoy a warm house in the winter so really I am very similar to the majority of today's population. I am a Chailey boy gone soft, but happy in my memories of those cold winter months up on the top of the Common. Laetus Sorte Mea!

Peter Sedgwick

