

**An extract from**  
**“Bright Morning - images of a Lancashire boyhood”**  
**by Don Howarth**  
(Methuen 1990)

The Thomson books, published after the First World War, were characterised by fast-moving adventure stories, although all of them, especially the *Hotspur*, still carried some stories about boarding schools whose style and assumptions were Edwardian.

In ‘*The Scorer of Westfield*’, Joe Smith the porter’s son is the central hero who, brought into the school cricket team in an emergency, saves the match. In looks, as the illustration makes clear, he is of a different race, ‘*a tousle-haired, snub-nosed boy*’ among the refined-looking young gentlemen.

‘*Bunk down to the pavilion and get my cricket boots like a good fellow*’, one commands him. It is characteristic of Joe that he proceeds by ‘bunking’ or ‘scudding’.

The intention of the story was no doubt to pander to boys of humble origin who were the books’ main readers. In our case the effort was misdirected because we would identify with school porter’s sons no more readily than with public-school boys. In fact we would not have known what a school porter was. The only porters we knew were railway porters and ‘natives’ who carried boxes on their heads. We were not really clients for a story designed to take the edge off class-consciousness; we had none because we hardly met other classes. There was no servant class amongst us and of the better off we knew only doctors, teachers and parsons, who owed their living to working people and refrained from asking us to bunk or scud.

None of the school stories I remember were about elementary schools like ours, nor indeed would we have welcomed it. We did not cherish school. It was not central to our thoughts. It had no corporate life. It stood for daily imprisonment. We counted the years until we might leave. When a later headmaster adjured us to strive for the honour of the school nobody knew what he meant. We did not want to read about elementary schools.

Boarding schools on the other hand we imagined to be institutions of freedom and independence. There were studies in which feasts could be held (‘*We sent down word to Matron that we shan’t be wanting regular school tea*’) and ‘*dorms*’ which served the same purpose after ‘*lights out*’. .....There was above all the absence of parents. ....To get rid of them and their rules and strictures for a whole term at a time would have been a boon beyond imagination. It did not occur to us that boys like those in the stories might be lonely or that underfeeding might lie behind their obsession with food and the many stories of ruses to lay hands on ‘*tuck*’ and in defiance of the school authorities.