

Gareth Rowbotham recalls arriving in Hertford and starting school.

I remember arriving in Hertford in 1959, in the removal van with my parents. Our destination was Calton Avenue on the Sele Farm estate and at that time roads were not made up on Sele Farm, there was potholes everywhere.

We were no. 31. So, we pulled up outside the house and the next-door neighbour who was also a printer, he came out, a single chap, he came out and said, "Can I make you a cup of tea?" I always remember that, and introduced himself, you know, so it was just not made up and the houses that were going up towards the shops, the private houses, they were in the throes of being built and they all seemed to be individually designed and this sort of thing

I was aged 14 and I had to attend my new school on the Monday, after I arrived in Hertford. The school was then called Hertford Secondary Modern School, now called Simon Balle. So, off I go to find the school on that Monday morning and I walked down the town and I saw kids going in different directions. Some were going to Hertford Grammar School as it was known then but in a different uniform. Some were going up by the Salisbury, up Church Road I think it's called there, into All Saints churchyard and I thought, I'll follow them to see what school they go to, I was going to Hertford Secondary Modern School. So through the lanes that lead you up to Mangrove Road, I followed them, went in and asked somebody, could they tell me where the headmaster's office was. And I went and I knocked on the door and he came to the door and I said "I'm Pharnell Gareth Rowbotham, come up from South Wales on the Saturday and I want to start school". He says, "Well, I don't know anything about you". And I says, "Well, I am here, like, and I've come up". He said "Well, there have been no pre-arrangements regarding receiving you". So, I didn't know what to say, I was fourteen, like, I was in his hands. So he said, "Wait outside my office".

In those days the head master of the school was Mr Feltz, and his wife, Mrs Feltz, he put me in her class and she put me in the first seat, the first desk, so she could keep an eye on how I settled. And the first thing Mrs Feltz did was, "Hands up the boys who live on the Sele Farm estate?" So, about four or five put their hands up. She picked one, Barry Burgess, who lived in Burnett Square and said, "Will you take Gareth and show him where to get the 310 bus to Sele Farm after school?" Yeah, that was it, and so he became a friend really, you know, his parents took me on holiday that first summer because I was new to the area.

I did get into a fight at the school, with a kid, to be honest, and whether that was anything to do with, new face or anything. But I smacked him on his nose and it bled everywhere and the teacher got involved and he had to lie down in the changing room and the teacher made me look after him until he was fit enough to go back, so whether that stemmed from anything to do with my accent I don't know. It's just that boys do that.