

No Quest, No Conquest

Memories of the All-Age Council Hungerford, c1920

A paper on the All-Age Council School

By Mrs Marjorie Eatwell

Ex pupil and teacher

This year, 1990, sees the 80th anniversary of the opening of Fairview Road Council School. When the all-age school opened, slightly behind schedule, it was the height of modernity, having large, airy, well-lit and ventilated rooms, centrally heated with running water and flush toilets. Granted, the children's toilets were situated in the centre of the playground – and they frequently froze in the depths of winter! The basement of the school boasted a bath for the use of staff! Very few houses in the town had running water, and baths were the galvanised variety and ablutions were taken in front of the kitchen fire.

Three playgrounds were provided, separated by iron railings, and mainly of gravel, each containing their own drinking fountain.

The school itself was in the fields at the south-east corner of the town, the road serving it (Fairview Road) merely a lane with hedges on both sides. Remember, cars were a novelty which only a few inhabitants possessed. None of the housing estates on that side of the town had been thought of – South View was non-existent, being a footpath to the common.

Being patriotic, there was a flagpole in the girls' playground upon which the Union Jack fluttered on appropriate days. Empire Day was kept with great solemnity - everyone in the school duly attending a special service, the Sovereign's birthday, and St. George's Day being duly acknowledged.

Children walked to school, there being no public transport. Pupils came in from Standen, Bagshot, Anvilles and Cold Harbour farm, Inkpen, Denford and Eddington. There were no catering facilities for these hardy little souls. Lunch was eaten under the shelters in the playground, come rain, snow or shine! The 'Eddingtonites' walked home at 12 o'clock, and had to be back in time for school at 1.30 – a total of almost six miles a day!

Children's clothes were heavy and cumbersome. Almost everyone wore boots, either lace-ups or buttons, navy or black trousers and sweaters for the boys with jackets and caps. Girls had little colour, checks being favourite. In school they wore white pinafores to protect their dresses – none of the attractive colours and clothes that modern children enjoy. Plastics hadn't been discovered.

One important asset was the school boiler, ably looked after by the caretaker, sending its aura of warmth around the classrooms, the pipes providing the necessary heat to dry out wet clothes, socks and boots. The smell of leather and wet wool drying pervaded all the school, but who cared as long as your feet were dry for the walk home!

Regime in school was very strict, boys sat with boys in every class. In the upper classes, from 12 years on, the sexes were kept in separate classrooms! Everyone left school at 14 and most of the boys went into farming, which was the dominant trade, the girls going into service in the larger houses around the district.

Lessons were equally regimented, the bell rang at 9 o'clock, everyone lined up outside in their class (come rain or shine) under the eagle of two staff members. Coats were hung in the classrooms and children filed into the hall to line up again, facing the headmaster's desk which was in the main hall near the bell tally. Assembly took place every morning with hymns (learned by heart) and prayers.

Once in the classroom children sat in dual desks and probably didn't move until given permission at playtime. The first lesson of the day was scripture – either New Testament, Old Testament or Creed. Great chunks of the Bible were learnt by heart.

This was followed by 20 minutes on chanting tables, then down to actual sums, which were written on the blackboard – no working at one's own speed – a certain number had to be done by playtime, or stay 'till all was finished. Play break was followed by English - grammar, composition, spelling or reading. Each child had a class reader and read in turn until, everyone had been listened to – again, no 'go at your own speed'.

Girls were taught to knit and sew – the over 11s having cookery lessons in the old National School in the High Street. Boys had drawing, modelling or carpentry when they reached 11 years.

Caleb Camburn taught metalwork and the weather-vane on the top of the present school is a testimony to the excellence of the work achieved.

Sewing was a chore – small needles, cambric or calico material. Knitting was with large wooden needles and dishcloth cotton, which eventually turned into dishcloths – complete with holes!

There was no apparatus for P.E. Children went into the playground in their ordinary clothes and performed 'drill'. Games were definitely luxuries; football and cricket for the boys, hockey and netball for the girls. The school had no playing field as now-a-days so the town ground came into use. The boys also did gardening.

Infants started with slates and slate pencils until judged capable of coping with pen, ink and paper. Squared paper was used for sums and double-lined books for writing. The 'Infants' or 'little school' as it became popularly known had three classrooms with a small hall – it had a separate headmistress and was practically independent from the big school.

The layout of the main school hasn't changed much – there were a couple of spare rooms, one was used as a museum and later as a Geography room with the world map painted on the floor, the other as a spare classroom. There were model displays in the main hall – a Swiss landscape and another of polar conditions with animals etc; there was no library, books weren't all that easily come by.

The cloakrooms have now been modernised, with indoor toilets and fire precautions have changed the position of the staff staircase.

Children had to make their own amusements, so singing games were very popular, as were tops, hoops, skipping ropes, marbles and cigarette cards. Five stones, tag and string tag are still played today.

Every Christmas a concert was put on for the enjoyment of parents and friends. Every class did a turn, either singing reciting or dancing. The upper classes performed a potted pantomime which comprised the second half of the programme. These were held in the main school hall until ambitious productions transferred them to the Church House (now Croft Hall) and later to the Corn Exchange.

The highlight of the winter term was the Christmas party. Children ate at their desks in the classroom, the food being provided by parents. This was followed by a show of some sort in the hall – often a conjuror (a local man named Billy Gibbs) obliged – or there were magic lantern slides.

Medical services were scarce – eyes were tested, the nit-nurse being the only regular 'medic'. Children died of TB, polio, flu', measles and malnutrition.

The photographer came once a year, this usually caused great excitement because it disrupted routine. Attendance at school was very important because money was allocated accordingly, so there was an Attendance Officer, frequently a retired policeman, to chase up offenders. He struck the fear of God into parents and children alike!

At the end of each year certificates were awarded to pupils who had completed a year without missing any attendances. Awards were also given for good work, a cup being won by the most popular boy or girl in the top classes.

The summer term began after Tutti-Day every year. Here children gathered for the traditional penny throwing, until heavy traffic made this almost an impossibility. Remembrance Day on 11th November was also kept with due solemnity and reverence.

Corporal punishment was the norm. If you misbehaved you were punished, minor offences receiving a smack or detention – naughty boys automatically had a caning from the headmaster and in most cases a back-up from the parents! Bad language was the exception, though quite a large number of families were illiterate and often very poor.

A new Primary School has been discussed, agreed, disbanded and argued over for many years since the early 1930s.

This year sees the culmination of this ambition – will the standard of work obtained be up to that of the 'new' 1910 establishment when everything that mattered began with the 'three Rs'

Marjorie Eatwell

Mrs. Marjorie Eatwell nee Willis (late of 76 Priory Avenue) was born 1915 in Eddington. Her father was George Willis, the plumber. Between 1920 and 1926 she attended the All-Age Council School before transferring to Newbury Grammar School until aged 16 years. She taught at the Council School for four years in the 1930s before going to Salisbury Teacher Training College to gain her Teaching Certificate.

She returned to the Council School and taught the juniors there between 1952 and her retirement c1977 – a total of 35 years teaching in Hungerford.