

Recollections of Goxhill School

The old school had three classrooms, the largest of which was used by the whole school for morning assembly after which the top Juniors and the Infants would go to their own rooms. Then screens would be put across the largest rooms to create two separate teaching areas. Teaching in this situation was far from ideal and one could always hear what the class on the other side of the screen was being taught. There was one large cloak room which also served as the main entrance to the school. The adjoining School House was unoccupied but was used for storage, medical examinations and, occasionally, for group teaching. There was no electricity supply to the School and rooms were heated by coal fires and coke burning stoves.

There were four teachers. Mr Huxtable was the Head Master and taught the Middle Juniors. The Top Juniors were taught by Miss Salter who had come to Goxhill with a group of evacuees from Hull. Other teachers, that I remember, were Miss Parritt, Mrs Labourne and Miss Peggy Raby. Mrs Towle was the caretaker.

The education provided was of a formal nature. There was little opportunity for practical experience. We chanted tables and learnt the basic rules of arithmetic without understanding what we were doing. We had to learn lots of conversion tables, i.e. inches to feet and yards, ounces to pounds and stones, etc. There was also emphasis on English. Composition was a regular exercise followed by learning of all the corrected spellings. We had lessons devoted to the teaching of grammar, comprehension and poetry. We had few "reading" books but we had reading practise of some kind every day. Poor spellers and readers often missed their playtimes until some improvement was made. (I write from bitter experience!) The paper of which the books were made was often of an inferior quality and coloured illustrations few. The Top Junior children were allowed to take home a library book once a week. Choice was rather limited since the library was a small cupboard full of books which were changed, infrequently, when the library van came round.

Physical education consisted of drill, country dancing to a wind-up gramophone, and simple games, all of which took place in the playground.

The Top Junior girls devoted almost the whole of one afternoon a week to needle work. We were expected to be able to produce wearable garments for, like food, clothing was rationed. As well as sewing, we were taught how to knit socks and vests. One girl would knit the front of the vest and another, the back. Similarly one would knit a sock and someone else the other to make a pair. The problem came when the two were put together since it was seldom that two people knitted at the same tension. Younger children made kettle holders, scarves etc.

While the girls were occupied with needlework, the boys would be busy in the gardens or looking after the

rabbits which were kept in the yard at the back of the house. Sometimes the girls also worked in the gardens but never doing the interesting jobs like planting. Instead they would be given jam jars containing salt water and told to pick the caterpillars off the greens and drown them in the jars. Others had the unenviable task of weeding the paths. The whole aim of gardening was to provide food. I do not remember any flowers being grown. There were beehives in the orchard area and as far as I'm aware these were Mr Huxtable's responsibility. We were warned to keep away from the hives. The only contact we had with the rabbits was to go and look at them occasionally. They were kept for food and their skins, which could be sold to make gloves etc. A few chickens were also kept in the orchard part of the main garden to provide eggs and meat.

When I started school, children who lived too far away to go home at lunchtime brought a pack-up which was eaten in the main classroom. In the winter a hot drink would be made for them, the kettle being boiled on the fire. Later the Memorial Hall was used as the School Canteen. Meals were prepared by Mrs Osgerby and Miss Stubbs in the kitchen there. We were escorted there and back in a 'crocodile'. This was very pleasant in the summer but it seemed a long walk in the wet and cold of winter.

The School population was very mixed. Although most pupils were local children there were quite a few evacuees staying in the village. This was a good learning experience for all concerned as some of these children were very 'street-smart' but ignorant of the country way of life.

The "dick nurse" was a regular visitor since, as today in schools, there was a constant battle against head lice. Medicals were carried out in the old School House. We were inoculated against diphtheria but I believe this was the only vaccine available to children at this time. There were no antibiotics and illnesses had to take their course. Hygiene was not a top priority! The toilets; earth closets, emptied regularly by the "dilly man", were situated at the back of the school, quite a way from the classrooms. One only went when really necessary on a cold winter's day. Squares of newspaper hung on a nail on the wall of each toilet served as toilet paper. There were no washing facilities in the immediate vicinity and no running water in the school. A hand pump, in the garden, provided water which had to be carried across the playground to the washhouses for cleaning hands.

During the war gas masks had to be carried at all times. Every so often we had gas mask drill and their efficiency was tested. Thankfully we never had to use the masks for real. They were not easy to put on and soon became hot and uncomfortable to wear. Sometimes we had air raid practices. The shelter was built on the other side of School Lane, where the Council

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