

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LEMS福德 SCHOOL

Compiled from the School Records by E. L. Temple
Headmaster from 1963 - 1979

The Education Act of 1870 required that provision be made for all children to have the opportunity for education. Prior to this date few children, other than those from wealthy families, were able to attend any kind of school. However, there was at Cromer Hyde a 'Dame School' run by Miss Archer for about forty children whose parents paid 2d per week for each child. In nearby Welwyn, St. Mary's School had been established some years before but this was too far away for the children of Lemsford and the surrounding district. In order that these children should have their own school, Lord Cowper, who at that time owned the Panshanger and Brocket Estates, had a school built in 1872, which he supported financially until 1903.

Thus, on the 4th March, 1872, the first entry in the Head Teacher's Log Book was made by Mrs Mary Seaman, the first Headmistress. On the first day, seventy-seven children were enrolled and these were divided into two classes - one being taken by Mrs Seaman and the other by her husband, Walter, her assistant. The school was approved by the Government on the 16th May, 1872.

The Vicar, the Revd. Fred Burnside, opened the school each morning with prayers, and he made himself responsible for the teaching of Scripture to the older pupils.

Few of the children had any idea of numbers or of letters, and the first task was to teach them to read and write and to do simple arithmetic. The girls, however, did learn needlework, the boys gardening, and all the children learning to sing.

The children were admitted from the age of three upwards. Younger children were allowed to attend provided they were entered on a separate register. In 1875, one two and half year old so disrupted the school by his crying for his sister that, after one week, he was not allowed to attend again until his third birthday.

The pupils were drawn from a wide area surrounding the school; from Handside on the one side to Cromerhyde, Symondshyde, Astwick and Cooper's Green on the other. The majority of families were engaged in agricultural pursuits. Wages were very low, and many parents resented having to pay school (2d a week), although the fees of some children were paid privately or by the parish, but in 1876 the parish refused to pay for children under five. A national conscience about the employment of children was slow to develop; thus many children were kept at home to work on the farms.

The parents of children aged from five to thirteen were required by law to cause their children to attend for a minimum of 250 sessions per year unless they were unavoidably absent through sickness. The maximum fine for non-compliance was 5/-, and in 1875 it was recorded that a fine of 2/6d was imposed on the mother of a boy who had not attended for some weeks. A School Attendance Officer was first mentioned in 1879. On receipt of an Absence Report Form from the Head, he would visit the homes of absent pupils, first warning the parents and then instituting proceedings if his warnings were ignored. When it is realized that many men earned only 2/6d to 5/- per week, it is easy to see that the Attendance Officer was not overworked.

Under the 1876 and 1880 Amendments to Forster's Act of 1870, children who had reached a certain standard of education (Fourth Standard) were permitted to leave at the age of ten, and those who had reached the Third Standard were not required to make more than 150 attendances in a year. Certificates of exemption were given to the successful children after the Chairman of the Managers (the Vicar) had satisfied himself that they had reached the required standards. Very backward or frail children could be granted a special exemption. In 1891 schooling became free for all children from five to thirteen years of age.

Lack of suitable clothing (many children had no footwear) was responsible for large numbers being absent in bad weather. After heavy snowfalls very few children were present, as the roads became impassable. The Hon. H. F. Cowper made an annual gift of boots to the boys and cloaks to the girls, and, until his death in 1887, provided 'treats' in Brocket Park. He was sadly missed as one who had been 'the greatest possible friend to the school in every way'. The year before his death, he had provided the children with soup twice a week in cold weather.

During the early years of the school, sicknesses of various kinds were very prevalent, and epidemics by no means uncommon. Influenza, measles, chickenpox, mumps and scarlet fever all spread rapidly and caused many absences. Bronchitis also took its toll and, developing into pneumonia, caused the death in 1877 of Miss E. Reynolds, aged 15, a pupil teacher who had been at the school from the age of three. She was sadly missed by the children. Smallpox hit Stanborough in 1877, but apparently no children died in the outbreak.

Each year there are reports of children being absent for various reasons other than as the result of sickness or bad weather. Many would go 'nutting' in the autumn, collecting acorns in Brocket Park. Whole families were permitted to go 'wooding', i.e. gathering in stocks of brushwood and branches for winter fuel. The harvest drew so many children to help on the farms that the school was closed, in common with most others in the country. This gave rise to the long holidays being taken in August and early September.

There is evidence of a kindly attitude towards the more frail children as references are made: '... is very weak and cannot be pushed' '..... has been very ill and is unable to do his work satisfactorily'.

The children's exercise consisted of a form of drill, but in 1876 the boys were presented with a football by the Vicar (now the Revd. J. A. P. Fletcher). No doubt football was as much in the minds of the boys then as it is now, for the school shares its 1872 centenary with the date of the first Association Football international match, England v. Scotland. Iron hoops were popular, and could be obtained from the Smithy (now the Millstream Stores).

As mentioned earlier, the number of children who attended on the first day was 77. These ranged in age from three to thirteen, and were accommodated in one room. This is the oldest part of the school, and extends from the old cloakroom at the West end to the new cloakrooms. It was necessary, therefore, to maintain strict discipline and allow little movement. At the East end there was a gallery in the infants' room where the children sat in tiers (and often in tears?).

It is known that many children were from poor families, and they must have often been very hungry. In 1875, two children were caned for eating another child's dinner. School dinners as now known were not provided until 1942, but it was recorded by Mr Ladbury in 1914 that he had supplied soup to those who wanted it at 1/2d for about 3/4 pint. This was prepared from the fresh beef, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, beans, peas and pearl barley. The present canteen was a gift in 1905 from Lady Mount Stephen (then resident at Brocket Hall), who happened to pass the school on a wet day and saw that the children had nowhere to eat their dinners or to play in wet weather.

From photographs it can be seen that, at the end of the 19th century, the boys were wearing 'Eton' collars, jackets and knickerbockers, the older girls dresses similar to those of their mothers with many pleats and decorated with ribbons, whilst the youngest children wore smocks - fashions which were hardly designed for freedom and movement but which persisted with little change until 1914. Lady Mount Stephen took a great interest in the children from her first visit in 1894, continuing to provide clothing for them and to give them treats in Brocket Park in the summer time and gifts at Christmas.

The number of children attending the school steadily rose during the first years. In 1881, the number of

children had reached 100, but the official view then had been that the school could accommodate 120 pupils. This, of course, was physically possible but it meant three and four classes being held in each room. In 1883 Her Majesty's Inspector recommended that the school should be enlarged, and in 1886 plans were made to do this. A new classroom was completed in 1887 (now used as the kitchen) and, apart from some extensions in 1897, the buildings were to continue unchanged until the gallery in the infants' room was removed in 1933. The removal of this had been recommended in 1918 by H.M.I., as had improvements to the toilet and washing facilities. It was not until 1950 that work was commenced on a new toilet block, which was not completed until 1952. Until this time conditions had been very primitive.

In January, 1951, the school became independent of open fires, when a gas central heating system was installed. This was a very welcome change, as classroom temperatures were often very low. During the bad winter of 1947, indoor temperatures as low as 29° were recorded. These were raised during the day to 40° to 41°. The heating system installed in 1951 continued to give good service until it was replaced in 1971.

The ironclad building that had been presented in 1905 by Lady Mount Stephen was first used as a classroom in October 1936. In 1942, it was established as a dining hall, when a temporary kitchen was added in order that hot meals should be available to all the children. The first cook was Mrs Bliss, who stayed for one year; then Mrs Ethel Newson was appointed in 1943 and put in 23 years of stalwart service until she retired in 1966. The 'temporary' kitchen remained in use until it became uneconomical to maintain and was superseded in January, 1971.

In July, 1970, work commenced on a remodelling of the school. This comprised the addition of two new classrooms, a new kitchen and various improvements. The latter included the removal of a chimney breast in the old building and the provision of three plain glass windows. The heating system was renewed and now includes heating of water for the kitchen.

The land which the school uses, together with an additional area for use as a games field, has now been purchased. A new car park has been added, and the grounds are being laid out by the County Council. Every classroom now faces an open view on the grounds and, facing south, received its full share of sunshine.

In the early days of the school, apart from the infants' gallery, children sat at narrow tables and used slates for their work. Some textbooks were provided, such as the Royal Readers and the Royal Geography Readers. Copybooks were used for handwriting lessons. During the years when Miss Aldridge was Headmistress, new slates were provided to which 'pink ribbons were attached'. In Mr Ladbury's time, many new books and pieces of equipment such as easels and desks were received from the Educational Supply Association, who still supply equipment from their Harlow factory.

New swings were erected in 1903, to replace old ones. In 1936 the school was presented with a radio receiver by Lord Brocket, so that broadcast lessons could be received. In 1948 the school received its first film strip projector, a machine of very good quality that is still in occasional use.

Since the last war, much new equipment had found its way into the school. The following are some examples of items provided from funds raised by parents: a television receiver, extensions to climbing apparatus, a tape recorder, a sound film projector and a pottery kiln.

The school also has a larger television receiver, new agility apparatus and climbing frames, a film strip/slide projector, record player and numerous smaller items of equipment including musical instruments and mathematics apparatus. Fluorescent lighting in the classrooms was provided from P.T.A. funds in 1949 and 1950.

When the school opened in 1872, Queen Victoria had been on the throne for 35 years. It was only two years after the end of the Franco-Prussian War. The repeal of the Corn Laws had reduced the price of

bread and flour, which helped the poor. Although wages were low, so were prices of most essentials, but poverty was rife in the cities and towns. The countryman was in some ways better off than the townsman, and certainly better off than the industrial worker, whose wife and children worked in appalling conditions in mines and factories, but it was still difficult for him to make ends meet.

Thus, many children would be too poor to have proper clothing; and many were ill-fed. Nearly all children walked to school, many travelling more than three and a half miles from Coopers Green. No doubt some would have had lifts on farm wagons or milk floats and some may have been brought on horseback, but nowhere is any reference made to motor cars until the sad death of Brenda Lines, an infant of six years, who in 1922 was run over and killed instantly.

Although this was a period of very bad social conditions when much drunkenness prevailed (the chief 'demon' being gin, which was then very cheap), there is no mention of anyone having had any connection with the school whilst inebriated; but annual lectures on 'The Dangers and Effects of Alcohol' were given by the 'Band of Hope' to the older children during the last twenty years of the last century. These lectures and others given at this time were illustrated with a magic lantern. David Livingstone, the great explorer, who had travelled widely in Africa, died in 1873 and magic lantern lectures would have shown pictures of 'darkest Africa'.

The year 1887 saw the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and on the 12th July, she visited Hatfield for two hours. A visit to Hatfield was paid by the Shah of Persia in 1889. In the same year Frank Lines, a pupil at Lemsford, was awarded the Silver Medal of the Royal Humane Society for rescuing James Cochrane from drowning in the River Lea. In 1893 there took place the wedding of George, Duke of York, and Princess Mary of Teck. The children were presented with medals and new shillings by Lady Mount Stephen. The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 was another occasion for celebration. The children were taken to Clarence Park, St. Albans, where they were presented with Jubilee Mugs by Sir J. B. Maple, M.P. The next day they were again presented with mugs in Brocket Park, the infants being given 6d each in addition.

On the occasion of the Relief of Mafeking in May, 1900, the children were given a half holiday, but it was not until January, 1902 that the Boer War ended and a 'Peace' holiday was given to the children. In this same year the 'Balfour' Education Act was passed. Local authorities had to provide facilities for Secondary Education- Parents paid fees for this education unless the children were successful in a scholarship examination.

In 1909, the first mention is made of a school medical examination, carried out by Dr. A. Gill.

In 1910, King Edward VII died. His funeral took place on the 20th May. His successor, King George V, paid a visit with Queen Mary to Brocket Hall on the 12th December. On this occasion, the children lined the entrance to the Park to see the King and Queen drive out in their car at walking pace after the visit. A flag and flagstaff were presented to the school by Lady Mount Stephen in commemoration of the visit. On the occasion of the Coronation in June, 1911, medals were presented by Lady Mount Stephen and the school was closed for a week's holiday.

The first Empire Day lesson was recorded in 1911, and these continued in many schools until 1939 and even after the Second World War.

In 1912, the first dental inspections under a new scheme were carried out in the Nurses' Home (the house opposite the Church).

1914 was, of course, a memorable year. At Lemsford, the first school badges were worn by children of the top class. The decision to have a distinctive badge was made unanimously by the children after a debate. They designed their own badge, using the symbols of St. John - a spread-eagle in red on a black ground.

Lord Roberts paid a visit to Brocket hall on October, 6h.

The soldiers who were in France during 1914-18 were constantly remembered. The girls made many shirts for them; and in November, 1915, the older children 'unanimously decided to forego all prizes this year and donate the money obtained to Christmas parcels for our boys at the Front'. The winters of 1916, 1917 and 1918 were very bitter, certainly not adding to the comfort of the troops.

In 1917, seven children from London were temporarily admitted. They were sent to the country because of air raids. Four of them had not undressed for eight days before their arrival at Lemsford for a rest.

At last, in 1918, the word PEACE was written on November, 11th. After a half holiday, celebrations took place. Apart from this, 1918 was a dreadful year, with severe weather at each end of the year and epidemics of measles, whooping cough and influenza, the latter resulting in the death of one girl from pneumonia.

The 'Fisher' Education Act was passed in 1918, raising the leaving age to fourteen.

In 1919, the Daily Mail organised and financed poultry and bee clubs for children. Lemsford chose to keep bees and poultry, and in subsequent years paid visits to the beehive factory in Welwyn and to the poultry farm in Codicote. In 1921 the club attended a luncheon at the Cherry Tree Restaurant given by the United States Bee and Poultry Club.

The girls began attending cookery lessons in Hatfield in 1920, the boys also going to Hatfield for woodwork. During this year the children were taken to Handside to see the digging of the first sod of the Daily Mail Ideal Village by Lord Hampden. This was later to be known as Welwyn Garden City. By 1923 a new school had been built (Handside) and the numbers of children attending Lemsford rapidly fell to 68, pressure being brought on their parents by the Garden City authorities to send their children to the new school.

The school was again given a holiday in 1923, on the occasion of the marriage of H.R.H. the Duke of York (later King George VI) to Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon.

1924 was the year of the Empire Exhibition at Wembley. Forty of the older children were taken by bus to the exhibition through the kindness of Sir Charles Nall-Caine (later the First Lord Brocket).

In 1929, the children had wonderful views of the ill-fated airship R. 101 on her first trial flight from Cardington.

In 1932 the first school transport was provided, to bring in 24 children who lived at more than two miles distance from the school.

By 1933 the number of children on roll had risen to 114, but dropped to 88 in 1936.

School milk was first provided in 1934, at a charge of 1d for 1/3 pint to those who required it (or could afford it?). During the same year, some of the children formed part of a Guard of Honour for the opening of the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital at Welwyn by the Duchess of York, and in November there was a holiday for the wedding of the Duke of Kent to Princess Marina.

1935 was again Jubilee Year - this time for King George V and Queen Mary. Great celebrations were held in Brocket Park, accompanied by the presentation of mugs, badges and medals. Seven months later the King was dead, and the children listened on the radio to the broadcast of the Funeral Service. This radio had been presented by Lord Brocket, and was used for the first broadcast lesson on 'Science and Gardening' in September 1936.

In May, 1937, the school was given an extra week's holiday in honour of the Coronation of King George VI, his brother, Edward VIII having abdicated.

In 1939, the school numbers suddenly rose from 83 to 144, a result of many children being 'evacuated' from London at the beginning of the Second World War. During the War, the school acted as a centre for various money-raising efforts. In 1942, £3,265 was raised for Warship Week; Wings for Victory Week in 1943 resulted in £3,375, of which the school raised £310; Salute the Soldier Week in 1944 raised £ 1,410, the school contributed £ 166.

V.E. Day was at last celebrated by a holiday on the 8th, and 9th. May, 1945.

During the War, mention was made of an incendiary bomb that fell in a nearby field, and of some bombs that fell in the Cromer Hyde area. Otherwise, Lemsford appears to have been spared.

In 1945, the school was reorganised as a Junior and Infants' School as part of the implementation of the 1944 Education Act, and the older pupils were transferred to St. Mary's School, Welwyn. The school leaving age was raised in 1947/8 to 15. The children were soon subjected to Selection examinations (the notorious 11+ examination), the results of which determined whether children went to Grammar School or to Welwyn St. Mary's Secondary (Modern) School. Nowadays children proceed mainly to all-ability schools in Welwyn Garden City.

When the school first opened, the staff consisted of the Head Teacher and one assistant. Miss Digby's sister Kate was employed as the first pupil teacher in 1874.

Emma Binns served as a pupil teacher and then proceeded to Hockerill Training College in Bishop's Stortford later the same year.

Intending teachers were later drawn from the ranks of the pupil's at the age of thirteen if they showed promise. They would receive special tuition from the Head Teacher before the school opened at 9 a. m. The pupil teachers received an Annual Grant of One Sovereign each. In addition to these intending teachers, monitoresses were also employed to help look after the Infants. A qualified teacher, i.e. one holding a certificate from the Ministry of Education, would earn approximately £35 per year. This varied because of the system of 'Payment by Results', which meant that the children were tested annually. The more who had attained the required standards, the higher the teacher's pay - this regardless of any innate differences in children's learning capacity. It should be pointed out, however, that the poor results of some children could be discounted if they had been ill or if they were agreed to be 'incapable of learning'.

With the advance of an understanding of psychology, it was realised that children varied considerably in their capacities and that they were not lazy if they were slow in their learning. Consequently, to pay teachers according to pupil's attainments was seen to be unrealistic and the system was discontinued.

In recent years, much research has taken place to discover how children learn, and the methods now used in Primary Schools centre very much on learning by discovery and through interest in the environment. Lemsford is very fortunate in having buildings and equipment that are well suited to these methods and in being set in attractive surroundings. At present a new entrance and library area are being built, the money for this having mainly been raised by the great efforts of the children and their parents, and supported by the Church.

The achievements of the past 100 years are a foundation from which the future of the school can progress, and the education, well-being and happiness of the pupil's continue.