

# Lowick School Days

## *A few recollections from Maurice Halifax*

The playground had a fence across the middle to segregate the rough boys from girls and infants. The centre of the fence was the school flagpole.

The 9am school hand-bell rang loudly. Children formed up in two columns, the infants marched into the 'little room' and the senior pupils into the 'big room'.

Mrs Grace Alicia Stokes was in charge of the 'little room' and Miss Muriel Kathleen Palmer – the Headmistress – ran the 'big room'.

The rooms were heated from radiators, a coke boiler at the back of the 'big room' heated the water, if you were seated near the boiler you could get cooked.

Corporal punishment was taken as an absolute necessity. Mrs Stokes would rap knuckles with a ruler, but for a serious offence the unfortunate child was marched into the big room for Miss Palmer to administer a few strokes on the hands with a cane. She had a selection on top of a cupboard and chose the one likely to have the greatest effect. One time, two of the elder boys caught the cane, grabbed it from the teachers hand, broke it in half and proceeded to deposit it in the boiler. Punishment also included out of school activities. Children were caned for paddling in the floods. On one occasion, practically all of the big room pupils played truant after dinner break. They were lined up in a semi-circle with both hands stretched out in front and Miss Palmer rapidly gave a stinging whack on each hand as she strode from one end of the semi-circle to the other.

When trouble got a bit out of hand, a runner was sent up to the Rectory and the Rev Worster came to try and restore order. He also came about four times a year to call out the names and mark the register.

A Mr Vickers was a schools inspector and if a child was absent he would go to the parents house and demand the reason.

On Empire Day the whole school lined up and each pupil marched forward in turn to salute the flag. Religious festival days were also given special attention. May Day was extra special, the day before the children would go out to collect moss and wild flowers to decorate the throne and garland, etc. The crowning was performed by some dignitary, on Miss P Perrin's lawn. The mother of the Miles quads did it once and later one of the quads herself. The children then marched round to the Parish Room and performed a play and sang songs.

During the school holidays, many of the children helped farmers with the harvest. Horses were generally used, but some would not walk in a straight line so a child would walk alongside holding the bridle. A child could walk many miles leading a pair of horses round and round in a field pulling a binder, cutting a field of corn until the lot had been cut.

They would also stook the sheaves and when they had dried off would lead a horse pulling a cart from stook to stook until a load had been collected. This was then walked back to the farm and uploaded to build up a stack. Towards the end of October some children were allowed off school to go potato picking.

When the shooting season started, the elder children would be used as beaters to get the game birds in the air in the direction of the guns. For about 7 hours of walking through fields of wet kale almost head high or muddy fields of mangolds or through the thickest part of the wood, the reward was 5 shillings plus maybe a rabbit.

During the war Lowick had its share of evacuees. Some had already been caught in a blitz area and it affected them greatly. One who was billeted with Mr and Mrs Stanton at Manor Farm insisted on sleeping under a sturdy kitchen table to start with, as the self preservation that had been drummed into him.

The village was showered with incendiary bombs one night, but only 'downstreet' was affected. The ruling was that if the village was bombed, the school would not operate in the morning. Children from 'upstreet' turned up as usual not aware of the night's activity. Soon after the war a group of children caught an unexploded incendiary near mill dam when fishing, knowing that it was harmless unless you deliberately clouted the firing pin at the end, they took it to a responsible member of the village, the Rev. Worster. When he

came to the door he was greeted with *'please sir, we have got a bomb, what should we do with it'*. The Reverend went quite pale and in a quivering voice pleaded with then to put it in the centre of his large lawn and depart as quickly as possible.

Children walked many a mile. Along the brook, fishing with a bent pin, round Bullocks and Oxen Woods, round Drayton Park, climbing trees and making camps. All boys carried a pen knife in their trouser pocket for whittling sticks or carving their name on a tree. You never heard of a child trying to stab another.

Battles took place between 'upstreet' and 'down street'. The battleground being the area of road between the bridge and the tram lines. Catapults, slings, bows and arrows were the usual weapons but nobody got seriously hurt and the parties would retire to the rec to claim victory.

Corporal punishment was sometimes ordered by magistrates at Thrapston Juvenile Court sitting on a Tuesday morning. If strokes of the birch were ordered they would be carried out in the afternoon. Very few offenders went back for a second helping.

The evacuees augmented the number of pupils so the old club room was taken over with desks etc, and an extra teacher, Clara Clarkson, came to teach.

Friday afternoon at school was the time to wash out the ink pots. There was no water in the washroom and water was brought inside in two buckets from a tap in the street, this usually made quite a mess.

But it was nothing compared with that made by Ken Mann's pet jackdaw which sometimes got in a gave itself a bath with water flying in all directions.

During the summer months the children would march down to the rec for a game of rounders with Mrs Stokes in control. On a fine day the children would go round Bullocks Wood making notes of birds, trees and flowers, etc.

Items were made at school from wood, leather, cane and raffia, etc.

The three R's were a top priority, but so was good handwriting and a large sheet showing a copperplate alphabet was draped over the blackboard and an hour was spent trying to make an exact copy.

It was during the war that the village saw their first person (normally and American soldier) with dark skin. Previously only seen in books or films.

Italian prisoners of war helped out on the farms, some being billeted near the farms where they worked. One or two visited 'The White Horse' and they did not appear to have caused any problems.

A very large contingent of Canadians with battle tanks, etc, went through the village, to Islip, up the Turnpike, along Red Road and ended up occupying a large slice of Drayton Park. Perhaps they did not trust the strength of the bridge !

A circus had it's winter quarters at Chelveston and on more than one occasion a procession of elephants plodded 'tunks to tails' through the village on the way to some performance.

The ironstone pits and the narrow gauge railway that ran through the village were of interest. Children knew the names of the locos.

Sometimes a continuous scream in the whistle would be heard and children knew some trucks had broken loose and were hurtling down the inclines towards the crossing. Sometimes the gatekeeper in 'Walt's Hut' would be able to get the gates open in time but sometimes it was too late and he had to leap for his life.

Chic Steward's Blacksmith's shop in Mill Lane provided great interest, seeing horseshoes made and fitted to a horse.

Cattle from Manor Farm and Tooley's Hillside Farm were herded down the street at appropriate milking times, as were other animals being walked to Thrapston market.

Cordite strips were extracted from faulty bullets which fell from the skies, put on the bridge wall as initials and burnt to make a permanent impression.

The expression "I'm bored" was never heard in those school days.