

Memories of Hadstock School by Bertha Stone



I started school on Monday, June 3rd, 1907, the day following my fifth birthday. An older sister took me along. We lived in a village with a church school. To reach it all children had to walk through the churchyard. The building consisted of a large room and a small one for infants. Boys and girls had separate entrances with a lobby to hang our outdoor clothes. Lighting was supplied by oil lamps.

There was a headmistress (who was also the postmistress, the post office being closed during school hours) and two teachers for about 100 children. Classes were mixed. Toilets were about 25 yards from the entrance, and it could be a very muddy approach, so we avoided them if possible. We didn't have school uniforms, but the girls were all proud of their clean white pinafores which had to be boiled and starched. Our hair had to be either tied back or plaited. I usually wore mine in plaits. Well, of course, I started in the infants and we really loved our teacher, who wore a black sateen pinafore on which she used to pin the flowers which we took her. When I was seven years old, I moved to the big room. This seemed so vast to me and at the far end I could see my brother.

Lessons here were more varied and every morning the Rector came for prayers and scripture lesson. Besides the more usual lessons we were also taught to sew and knit. I did make several garments, some of which won me prizes when entered in a local show. Knitting I found very difficult. I would pass the stitches from one pin to another, but it didn't seem to grow. The wool was crinkled from being knitted up so many times and the steel pins rusted. It was quite a job to get them cleaned and working. Eventually I did get the hang of it and later I was able to knit for the troops.

I was nine years old when King George and Queen Mary were crowned following the death of King Edward VII. We were all given a holiday and a Coronation Mug with a picture of George V and

Queen Mary on it. We had a very few holidays. No half term for us or terms either. We didn't know what they were.

We learned to sing Tonic Sol-fa. As we had no piano, we used a tuning fork to get the note C. When we had dancing (indoors in winter, outside in summer) we had to sing to provide the music. There was no radio or TV, and it was the very earliest days of the gramophone. I remember a total eclipse of the sun for which we used smoked glass for viewing. It was eerie getting darker and darker. The birds were twittering as they went to bed. Fortunately, it didn't last too long, and we were all pleased to welcome the sunshine once more. This is the only time I have seen a total eclipse.

On the afternoon of May 27th, 1913, we had a terrifying experience. The sky became very black with thunder clouds and we had a most dreadful storm. Lessons were abandoned and everyone was very frightened. Teachers gathered the children at one end of the room as the hailstones smashed the windows. Teachers and children were crying. When at last the storm was over and we were able to go home it was a scene of desolation. Nearly every house had windows smashed and hailstones as big as hens' eggs laid around for hours.

In the summer of 1913 army manoeuvres were held in the area. King George V and the German Kaiser inspected the troops. Horses were everywhere, hundreds of them. I was scared making the journey to and from school because of the horses and the soldiers. For the first time we children saw aeroplanes which flew very low. We also had to watch out that we didn't trip over cables laid along the roads for communications. How obsolete and unbelievable this all seems today.



In summer when the weather was nice, we would take our books and sit under a tree in the churchyard for a lesson. We found this very pleasant and at the end of the lesson we were able to slip to the village pump (also in the churchyard) for a drink of fresh cool water. This was a special treat as we had no water supply in school. We sometimes went for walks around nearby fields and woods

where we found much to interest us in nature study and wildlife. Each summer six girls were chosen from the higher classes to attend cookery classes. These were held in a village four miles distant. A young man with a pony and buggy was hired to transport us, and with other girls we had a series of twelve lessons. Cooking was done on a coal range, there being no gas or electricity available. We worked in pairs. Some of the ingredients we had to take and some we bought at the local shop. We used small containers and many of the items we were able to purchase for 1/2p. In winter the school was very cold, the only heating being provided by a tortoise stove, which burnt coke and it was often getting bunged up with clinkers which made it difficult to get any heat or even keep a fire going at all.

We would push the desks towards the centre and teachers and children would march around clapping our hands and stamping our feet to get warm. When there was snow, we would fill an enamel bowl and stand it on the stove for hot water. Why we did this I can't imagine as we had no washing facilities or towels for drying. When we were breaking up for Christmas every child was given an orange provided by the headmistress. We didn't have set exams or tests but once a year an inspector would come and make oral tests. The school leaving age at that time was thirteen provided one had a job to go to. My parents allowed me to continue at school until I was fourteen and I left school in June 1916 on reaching my fourteenth birthday.

On reading this you may think there were many drawbacks and disadvantages and indeed according to present day standards there were, which all goes to show the progress made over the years. To us children they were happy days, and we were well content. It has given me much pleasure to think back on these things.