

Memories of Hadstock by Hilda Peck



Hadstock is a pretty little village situated on the Essex-Cambs border. I was born here seventy-two years ago and have lived for the greater part of my life in the village. It has a lovely old church nearly one thousand years old.

I had a happy childhood and pleasant memories of my schooldays and playmates. Quite a lot of changes have taken place through the years. There were big families in those days and there were between eighty and ninety children attending the village school. We had a splendid headmistress, and she did her best to turn out good scholars. She frequently used the cane which was all for our good.

We enjoyed our games during break, the boys with their marbles and spinning tops and the girls with skipping ropes and balls. We used to go home for our mid-day meal.

On St. Botolph's Day, 17th June, the village fair was held, and we used to go and spend pennies and halfpennies at the stall buying rock and various kinds of sweets. Years ago, it used to be a horse fair, and there used to be booths and dancing on the green. I cannot remember this as the fair was done away with before I was born but I have heard my parents and grandparents talk about it.

Sunday was observed more strictly than it is today. I attended Sunday School in the morning and afternoon followed by church service. The verger used to have a long cane which he often used if the children were troublesome. The Rector lived in the parish and he visited regularly. One afternoon during the summer we were invited to the Rectory for tea and games which we thoroughly enjoyed. We used to sit on the grass underneath a big tree. Our Mothers were invited as well if they were Mothers' Meeting members. On May Day, we used to make flower garlands and go singing round

the village. We all trooped up to the Rectory to sing, and each child was given a halfpenny. There was also a Mission Hall in the village, but it is not in existence now. The Verger also acted as Sexton and the churchyard was kept very tidy.



We used to have six weeks holiday during August and September, and as it was the harvest months it was a busy time. The boys used to work on the farms and go into the cornfields leading horses, and the girls went gleaning with their mothers and the corn that we gleaned was ground into flour. The age for leaving school was 14 but I went until I was 15. The girls who left the village usually went into domestic service, and the boys used to work on the farms, and some went away to work on the railway.

I would like to mention that 49 young men and one young woman joined up to fight for their country during the First World War. Miss Hilda Barker, the daughter of a shepherd, was awarded the OBE. She was one of my school friends. Also, quite a number of young men went from the village during the Second World War.

The men used to brew beer during the spring months, and this was taken into the fields for refreshment during the harvest. They mostly used miniature wooden barrels holding about half a gallon, and I still have two of these that were used by my father and grandfather.

The one village water supply was from St. Botolph's well in the churchyard and all the village people used it. It was eventually cemented over, and a pump erected which was used till the water was laid on. How much easier it is today just to turn the tap than have to fetch it from the churchyard. The men used to use yokes for carrying the buckets. Also, the women would fix a hoop between two buckets which made it easier for carrying.

I have been told by my grandparents that there used to be a cage standing on the green, and anyone

who had been doing wrong was locked up in it, maybe for the night until the next day. [Part of the lock-up door, the constable's truncheon and the handcuffs are in Saffron Walden Museum.] There was also a mangle room, with very old-fashioned rollers where the village women could do their mangling.

There was a small post office in the village, but our mail was delivered by postmen from Linton, a village about a mile away, as it still is today, only we get two deliveries instead of one. We still have a post office in the village. Our nearest railway station is at Linton and people used it when they wanted to go to town, but the buses are used more frequently now. There was a lot of walking done in those days. People often used to walk to and from Saffron Walden five miles away.