

# **Memories of Kibworth's Schools in the 1920s and 1930s**

*By Betty Ward*

## **Infants' School**

In these decades children started at school at the age of five. There were no pre-school or playgroups for us. As I was born in 1922, I first went to the Infants' School, in Paget Street, in 1927. This was known as 'The Little School'. Each school year started at the end of the long summer holiday and that was the only intake. There were three classes, or years, at this school and each child progressed through them.

My first recollection at school is of tracing lines and shapes in a tray of sand. Then we moved on to slates and chalk and later to pencils and paper. There were three classrooms and an assembly hall running the length of the building where we had such things as country dancing. Miss Bailey's large desk also stood in this hall.

The playground ran right round three sides of the school building, but generally girls played at the front and boys at the rear. The teachers there in my time were: Miss Bailey (Head), Miss Sumpter and Mrs Ralph.

## **Junior School**

The next step was to the Junior School, known as 'The Big School', in Station Street (now the Old School Surgery). You moved there when you were eight years old. I remember the following teachers: Charles Mansell (Head), Edward Welton (senior master, who later became the Head), Mrs Tummins (senior mistress), and Miss Gardner.

Mr Mansell had suffered some shell shock in the First World War and could sometimes behave strangely! Mr Welton was a good singer and took part in the Gilbert & Sullivan operas performed in the Village Hall in Kibworth. He married one of his former pupils, Doris Freer, and many an eyebrow was raised! Mrs Tummins had quite a temper and would sometimes poke the pupils in the back with a pencil, for no apparent reason. Occasionally, masters would also hit pupils on their head with a ruler. Miss Gardner was quite a 'sweetie', good looking with a wealth of black hair. She had a deep husky voice. Olive Phipps and I were her monitors, and she would sometimes take us out for a treat. Once we went on the canal at Foxton Locks: she 'couldn't row the boat for toffee' and I was scared we would end up in the water!

The Big School had three rooms, the largest running along the side of the building and divided by a curtain across the middle with a class on either side. For assembly the curtain would be drawn back to accommodate everyone. Two rooms were at the front, the smaller to the left was Miss Gardner's room. The other larger front room had a huge iron coke stove in the middle - fine if you sat near to it (did the other rooms also have stoves?).

This larger front room was where we took the 11+ examination. If you were successful you could advance to Kibworth's Grammar School in School Road. There were only a limited number of scholarships, but it was also possible to attend the Grammar School if your parents could pay.

Playgrounds at the Big School were separate for boys and girls and had high brick walls. The boys' area was at the left of the school, running by Paget Street, and the girls had the right side. The headmaster's house was near the left front of the school (at the junction of Paget and Station Streets) and is still there today though now used as offices.

## **Grammar School**

I went to Kibworth Beauchamp Grammar School in 1933 at the age of eleven having been successful in winning a scholarship. Standard uniform was essential for all boys and girls. If your parents couldn't afford the uniform you lost your place at the School. There was only one shop to buy uniforms - at Hare's in the High Street. Girls had a navy blue tunic (of recognised length), white blouse and school tie, black stockings, and black velour hat with a school band around. Boys wore a grey suit with white shirt and tie (maroon and white stripes), and school cap with badge. Maroon blazers were also used by both girls and boys. Summer wear for girls was a pink dress with white collar and cuffs, plus panama hat with the school band.

Mr John Elliot was the headmaster. Comparatively, there were not many pupils at that time, but Mr Elliot, being an extremely good head, worked up the numbers to 500+ and achieved much academic acclaim. There were no school buses so pupils either walked or came on bikes from the surrounding villages; one or two even came on horseback! The school took boy boarders and they had dormitories at the top of the school house and were looked after by Mrs Elliot.

There were no school dinners, so local children all went home for lunch, and others brought sandwiches. Apart from the classrooms, on three floors, we had a library on the ground floor. A separate domestic science building was provided (with cycle sheds behind) and a woodwork room opposite this and just outside the main gates.

For sports we had two tennis courts, one hard and one grass surfaces (nowadays replaced by the School Road car park) and the playing field up the hill on the opposite side of the railway. This field stretched from where the Hillcrest Avenue Primary School is now and westwards a little: we had a small wooden pavilion. We played hockey up there so the field must have been the size of a pitch. After-school games were compulsory: tennis or hockey for the girls and football or cricket for the boys. We had a big sports' day up there once a year in the summer. We were taken to the swimming baths in Market Harborough by bus once a week, again after school hours.

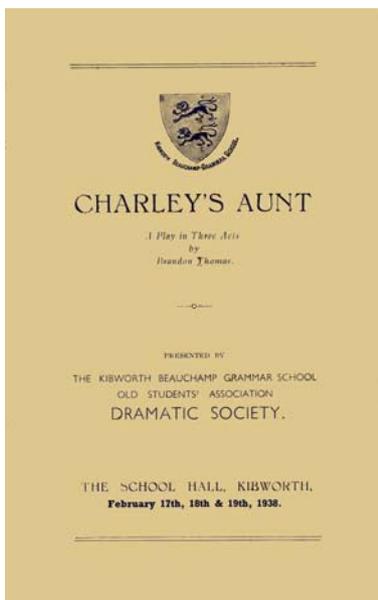
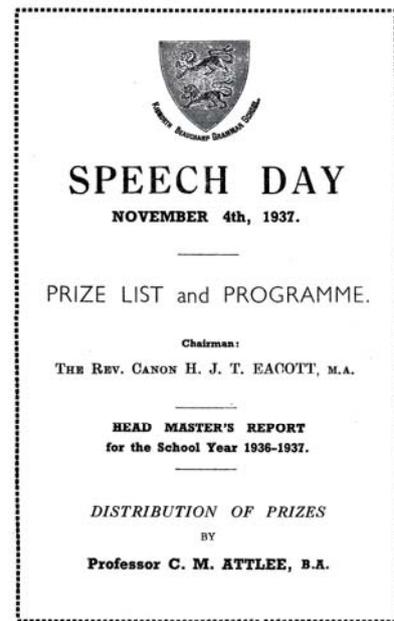
Assembly was held in the large room at the front of the Grammar School until the new block was built at the rear comprising a large hall, two further classrooms, cloakrooms, staff room and the Head's office. There was a kitchen off the stage in the hall and changing rooms with showers at the rear. As well as the playground we had the paddock at the bottom (where Elliot Close is now).

Mr Elliot taught us Latin. John Shell took us for history and French, Joe Martin ("yakka") taught mathematics and physics. He got this nickname because he once threw a blackboard rubber at a pupil in a temper. Miss Gladys Bailey was senior mistress and taught English; Miss Williams followed her. Miss Pop Hulland took us for domestic science, which included needlework, and was succeeded by Miss Cornish. Mr Copeland taught woodwork; later, Stan Bolton (a local character) took over the woodwork teaching. Then there was geography taught by Miss Callender, art by Mr Roberts, and gym (for girls) by Miss Evans.

All teachers either lived or lodged in the Village. Often there were other teachers who came for short periods and moved on. Although there were no school dinners in my day, a dining block with kitchens was later constructed in the paddock. An old pupil, Miss Megan Mason, trained for this type of work and eventually became head of this department.

Pupils were all divided into 'houses': Athenians, Spartans, Trojans and Romans, and competition was keen to win trophies for your house. Every year a Speech Day was held when trophies and form prizes, in the form of books, were presented usually by a local dignitary such as our Member of Parliament.

At the age of 15 we all sat the Oxford School Certificate examination - this gave us two goes at it, at 15 and 16, in case you didn't pass the first time. We had to 'cram' for this in order to matriculate, and we had to do all subjects at the same time (unlike today). Mr Elliot kept our noses to the grindstone to swot for our 'matric' and at that time we had to give up such frivolous subjects like domestic science and woodwork. He got good results this way and many pupils went to university, so putting the school on the academic map. I myself matriculated with honours at the age of 15 and left school at 16.



The School produced an annual magazine which recorded all winners etc, and lists of who came and who went. We were always encouraged to write articles for the magazine, and I still have copies today.

We had a flourishing Old Students' Association, again founded by Mr Elliot back in 1928. Social functions were held and there was an excellent dramatic society and, before the School moved to Oadby in 1964, a grand reunion was held when former pupils came from far and wide. The Association continued for a short time after the School's move to Oadby, but it was found difficult to carry on so it was finally disbanded. Stan Bolton and I were secretaries at the end. However, reunions are still held, showing the pride and warmth of feeling for the old School. A younger group meet every year at Wigston and a smaller group of 'old girls' meet up once a year for an informal luncheon at Smeeton Westerby.

*Recorded in November 2008 and revised in February 2009*