

Memories of Kibworth Schools in the 1920s and early 1930s

By Joan Spain (nee Allen)

My first experience of school was at age 3½ when I walked daily to the Infants' School in Paget Street (the building now behind the public library). This school was always known as the 'Little School'. It had two separate entrances, one for boys and one for girls. In the centre was the large hall where for assembly boys stood at the back and girls stood at the front. Classes were however mixed. We had slates and crayons for drawing and writing. But I can't remember too much about life at the school as I was away for a long period with scarlet fever.

When one was about 7 years old we moved up to the 'Big School' (or National or Junior School, now the Old School Surgery) in Station Street. I liked this school - it was a good one. Most children stayed at this big school until they left school at 14, or at age 11 if they moved to the Grammar or a High School. There would be about 150-200 pupils attending this school at any one time.

Again it had separate play areas and side entrances for boys (on the left as viewed from Station Street) and girls (on the right) each with a cloakroom which had coat hooks and a single cold water wash basin. Toilets were outside in each playground: they were earth closets which had to be emptied regularly (no flush toilets at this time) and often very cold. Boys kept to their play area and the girls to theirs, we were not allowed to mix. The front door was there, in the same place as it is today, but children never used this: perhaps teachers did.

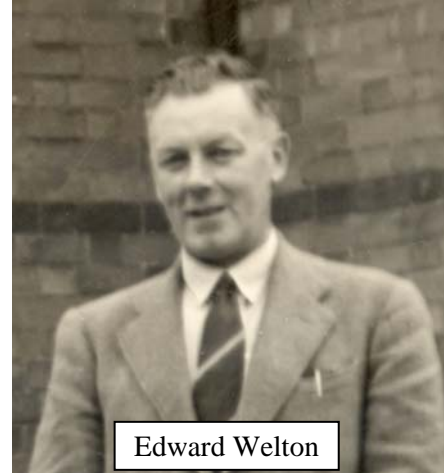
The day at big school started at 9 o'clock with assembly. This was held in the large room at the back - a room that had a dividing curtain so that two classrooms could be made. For assembly we were altogether, but boys were on one side and girls on the other. There would be a hymn, with one or other talented pupil sometimes playing the piano instead of a teacher, and a little prayer. As this was a Church of England school the local rector would also regularly come and give a reading. I recall that two girls were Roman Catholics and would go out of our assembly into a separate classroom at this point, but everyone else stayed in. Then we were dismissed to our classes.

Each class had its own teacher who taught most subjects in the same classroom. Some lessons were however taken in other rooms with a different teacher, such as history and singing. Arithmetic would usually be the first subject each morning. There was also reading and geography, but I can't remember doing any science lessons. Mrs Tummins taught sewing to the girls. Boys would walk up to the Grammar School to use its woodwork facilities and girls would go there for cookery classes. Fleckney girls came for cookery at the same time and we would pair up, one Kibworth and one Fleckney girl. My partner and I had loads of fun and got into no end of trouble!

There were three classrooms in the front main school building. Entry through the front door led you into the centre of these rooms. It had a coke stove on the far wall for heating the building. I remember that children from Carlton and other villages would bring their lunch to school and eat their food in that room at lunchtime. One day someone put their cheese sandwiches on the stove to toast, but the cheese melted down the stove so that for the rest of the afternoon there was a strong smell of burnt cheese and toast!

Classrooms had wooden desks with attached seats. The desks had a compartment under the lid to hold books etc. Each desk took two children, except that for big exams only one pupil sat at each desk so there was no copying. In this big school pencils were used by the youngest class but then one moved on to pen and ink. At the beginning of each week the class monitor would make up liquid black ink from a powder and water, and then fill all the small desk inkwells. Sometimes these had to be refilled during the week. On Fridays all the inkwells were washed out ready for the following week.

Mr Mansell was the headmaster and he taught history in the large back room. Miss Gardner took the youngest children, which was mixed boys and girls (she was the only qualified teacher in those days). Mr Welton had the next year of pupils in the centre room at the front and, among other subjects, taught us singing. He also supervised the 11+ exam in that room. Mrs Tummins took the next class.



Edward Welton

At the age of 11 or so we sat the examination to see who should move on to Kibworth Grammar School. There were usually two 'free' places available at the Grammar School for local children, though occasionally there might be three or four depending on vacancies. In the year I took the 11+ exam there were only two places. Four scholars passed the exam and a decision had to be made on who should take up the places. Two of the children (one boy, one girl) had each lost one parent through death so they were awarded the Grammar School opportunity. I was one of the 'other two' and was offered a place at the Wigston High School but when my parents found out that they would have to pay the train fares every day to and from Wigston a decision was for me to stay on at the big school.

My time at school ended in 1934 and then I was successful in securing work in Leicester.

Recorded in November 2008