

I was born in 1907 in the village of Chenies in Buckinghamshire where I have lived up to the present time. I was the eldest child of a family of twelve. The youngest was born when I was 15½ years old.

At the time of their marriage my mother was a cook housemaid and my father worked in the flour mill on the side of the river Chess. Later he became a driver on traction engines going to farms in the district to thresh the corn for the farmers, or sometimes he worked on a steam roller making up the roads. When the engines were moved about a man walked in front with a red flag to give warning, quite laughable these days when we compare the speed of present day traffic; we could always hear a car coming a long way off and often ran to look over the gate to see one go by.

I started to go to school in the village at the age of three. On the first day I had a tray of sand and had to make patterns or maybe it was letters with my fingers. My cousin who took me to school was moved that day to the next room and I cried for her.

There were at one time between forty and fifty children in the school in three classes, Infants taught by Miss Turtle, the Middle Class by Miss Haynes and the big ones by the Headmaster Mr. James.

We did not wear uniform but the girls wore white starched pinafores which usually had a frill around the bottom and across the shoulders. I had to change to a coloured one when I got home. Boys wore strong grey serge or corduroy knicker-bockers which were buttoned just below the knee and long socks with turnover tops. They had jerseys and stiff white celluloid collars and strong black leather lace-up boots. Girls wore black stockings and boots which had buttons up the sides. We had special button hooks to do them up. Boots always had to be shining in the mornings.

A Bell hung in a little turret on the roof and it was rung by a long rope hanging down inside. There was always a bit of competition to get permission to ring it.

We all had to line up outside and march into school. We started by singing a hymn and having a prayer. Sometimes the Rector from the church came to take that and give us a short talk. On Sundays we had Sunday School in the classroom and afterwards went up to the church for the first part of the service - another class in the afternoon too.

Our hair was worn in plaits tied with ribbons. I remember one girl who had fair hair and her plaits came down to her bottom; we were always envious of her. She was one of the children who had to walk from Sarratt Bottom, about 1½ miles across the moor and fields, others came about the same distance from the Sheep houses at little Chalfont. They always brought their dinners with them.

We had an hour and a half for dinner and as I lived just across the road I often had to peel the potatoes for the family when I got home, also do other jobs. I liked it best when I had to go up the village to the shops, especially when the sun was shining. We always had to go for milk before breakfast, either to the Bedford Arms or to the Butchers, or if they were short of milk we went to Latimer. We had tin milk cans with lids and at Latimer we got them full of skimmed milk for a penny and there was usually a lot of froth on the top as it was straight from the separator. Very greatly daring we swung the cans round without spilling any, always, of course, half afraid that we might.

We had drill on Monday mornings, if fine enough in the playground or on the grass. Sometimes in very hot weather we had our lesson on the Green underneath a lovely

Lime tree. I can remember now the smell of the blossom and the hum of the bees. For nature lessons we sometimes went out to see the trees or flowers actually growing and had the sepals, petals, stamens, leaves and the veins explained to us, then when we got back to school we had to draw or paint them - these were my favourite lessons.

The girls had sewing lessons and we had to be very precise and do very tiny stitches and work buttonholes without taking our eyes off the work once. Boys were taught gardening, that was once very essential in the country where most of our vegetables were grown.

The cane was used quite frequently, mostly on the palm of the hands but sometimes if the master was very annoyed it would be across the legs as well. If he saw us making mistakes when he looked over our shoulder he would rap our knuckles with a ruler or box our ears. I say our but I don't ever remember it happening to me. Another punishment was to stand in the corner of the room with the hands behind the back and sometimes we would see the culprit turn around and grin or wink.

At one stage we had to use slates and slate pencils for writing. I hated the sound they made also the noise of chalk on the blackboard, it seemed to set my teeth on edge. Of course there were no Biro pens then, we used pens with wooden handles and nibs which were always getting crossed and affected our writing. It was always nice to have a clean new book and pen. The inkwells were let into holes in the desks, they had to be washed out occasionally, this was a cold job as the tap was outside in the playground, it also was used for water for the headmaster's house, as they did not have taps indoors, nor was there water laid on to the toilets. These were across the playground, and consisted of wooden seats with a step in front and a bucket underneath which a man was paid to empty into a hole dug in the garden. Toilet paper was newspaper cut in squares and hung up on a loop of string.

The classrooms were heated by huge iron stoves, but they never seemed warm enough in winter. They had big iron guards round them and if any children got very wet on the way to school they were allowed to hang their coats on the guards to dry. We often wore mittens to keep our hands a bit warm. Chilblains were a real nuisance on fingers and toes.

Playtimes were midway through morning and afternoon sessions and we played games like 'Ring of Roses' 'Poor Jenny is aweeping' 'Farmers in his Den', 'Wallflowers' 'In and out the window' 'Sheep, sheep come home' and, of course games we made up ourselves. Then we had skipping. Marbles which we called Dabbers played with five marbles, when we turned our coats inside out to sit on the ground. We would throw one marble up while picking one or more up from the ground, then catch the first marble before it reached the ground. The girls had wooden hoops bowled along with a stick and the boys had iron hoops with a skid hook to guide them. We could play on the roads in those days as there were few cars. The boys of course played football, cricket and leap frog and we all played Hide & Seek.

We didn't have any home work to do but we often played school in the evenings so that probably helped us to learn.

There was no television or radio, but we had a gramophone and we sang or danced to that, also we had time to play games like 'Snakes & Ladders' 'Ludo' 'Draughts' 'Rings' 'Spinning Tops' 'Jigsaws' etc., There was time too to learn to knit and sew and darn socks and stockings. In the summer we helped to weed and water the garden, also to go to the woods to collect fallen twigs and small branches which had to be broken or chopped up for fire lighting.

On Sunday evenings in the summertime my Father would take us for long walks through the fields and woods so that we became familiar with all the footpaths and we came home with hands full of flowers, there were many more about then. Bluebells, Horse Daisies, Buttercups, Campions, Meadowsweet, Primroses, Violets and many others.

We had no electricity, but there was gas for a stove and lights downstairs but we had candles to go to bed and my Mother always had a small oil lamp on the landing shelf so that we were not frightened by the dark if we woke in the night.

As there was always a baby and little ones in our family there was scarcely a week that went by that I had a full time at school, as I had to stay at home to help my mother.

The special days were when the Inspector came to examine our work and we all had to be there then. The doctor came sometimes and the nurse to examine our hair; it was nothing unusual for someone to have a note to take home. We had our eyes tested and also our teeth examined, but even so we got toothache a lot.

Another special day was Empire Day when we marched round the flag on a pole in the playground and sang Empire songs and then we had a half-day holiday.

The average number of children at school was around 40 to 50 aged from 3 to 14, when we left school for good. There was an exam which we could enter to pass for the Grammar school, but my parents could not afford to keep us until we were sixteen so we did not go in for it.