

Scholars and Teachers

1847 - 1948



An Elsworth Chronicle Publication

Foreword

“Scholars and Teachers” is the history of the old schoolhouse in Brook Street and was written by Betty Evans as a series of articles published in the Elsworth Chronicle between 1991 and 1994. These drew on the log books kept by the school teachers and the history of the village church, as the rectors were greatly involved in the running of the village school.

A subsequent article on the present school was written by Alan Farrow in 2004 for the 50th anniversary of the opening of the replacement school in Broad End. The complete series of “Scholars and Teachers” is presented here with the anniversary article at the end.



Scholars and Teachers I 1847 -1875

Pity the despairing Schoolmistress who wrote in her Log Book "Still find it a difficult matter to make II Class understand the rule of simple subtraction". She was Miss Lucy Groble and the entry was made in 1873 after she had been in charge of Elsworth National School for a year. She was in a line of struggling teachers who had come and gone with startling rapidity since the opening of the School in 1847. Progress in those first twenty-five years had been blocked by lack of funds, the incompetence of untrained teachers, poor discipline and deteriorating premises. The reports of the Inspectors were severe, and it is hardly surprising that the castigated teachers resigned after their visits.

The school was founded by the National Society for the Education of the Poor. This was a Church of England charity concerned with the setting up of voluntary schools all over the country. The Rector, the Reverend Philip Bagge, gave the land at the bottom of The Causeway in Brook Street, and he became the sole Manager and Correspondent. The building (now a private house) was erected by subscription, aided by grants of £187 from the Privy Council, £55 from the National Society, £70 from the Cambridge Board of Education and £10 from Queen Adelaide, the widow of William IV. Fees were charged weekly at the rate of 6d for each child if more than two in the family attended. (Labourers' wages at that time were 9s to 15s for a 70-hour week.) Parents often refused to pay the fee and the child was withdrawn from school, to be readmitted when the money came in.

There were two classrooms and a house adjoining for the Teacher. On the first day the number on Roll was 114. The staff consisted of the Mistress; a Pupil Teacher, who received instruction from the Mistress; and a Monitor, who was a salaried older pupil appointed to teach the younger ones. (This was a favoured system because of the low cost.) Children were admitted from two years of age, no doubt to relieve the pressure of the ever growing family in the home, but so great were the infant numbers in the school that the Inspector reported in 1864 that "the work of the Teacher is very heavy owing to the tender age of almost half the children". The school leaving age was between 9 and 10 years, when both boys and girls were considered old enough to work in the fields.

In 1853 John Dobson succeeded Philip Bagge as Rector of Elsworth and took over the management of the school. A revised code of regulations was introduced in 1862 which stated that "Principal Teachers must daily make in the Log Book the briefest entry which will suffice to specify either ordinary progress or whatever other fact concerning the school or its Teachers". Some of the entries are very brief, "progress

as usual" or even "p a u", but other enable us to piece together a colourful patchwork of the somewhat turbulent school life in the village in the mid 19th century.

Attendance figures fluctuated wildly from a 101 high down to a 16 low depending on the weather, the time of year, illness and whatever was going on in the village:

May 20th 1864 - very few children present - only three in 2nd class. The remainder gone to procure wheat for the "Feast".

June 2nd, 1864 - attendance rather thin because of visit of the Princess of Cambridge.

July 6th 1864 - attendance rather thin on account of a cricket match in the village

October 12th 1868 - many of the children going to St. Ives Fair.

Sometimes the school work was interrupted by the demands of the community on the building, and holidays were proclaimed:

May 3rd 1865 - Holiday all day in order that a club might hold a meeting in the School.

July 21st 1873 - School closed for three days, the room being required for the tea provided for the accommodation of visitors to the Village Bazaar in aid of Church funds.

The school was closed each year for six weeks for the harvest, but many children were already in the fields before the official end of term, and were still working in them at the beginning of the next. When they did return the Teacher sighed:

September 23rd 1873 - The children require great attention and work to regain what they have forgotten during the holidays.

There were three basic subjects in the curriculum - reading, writing and arithmetic. Writing was on slates but on very first day Miss Jones, the new Mistress, reported:

January 11th, 1864 - First Class wrote on paper for first time.

Two years later another new Mistress, Miss Hogben (who stayed only seven months) introduced craft for the girls:

May 14th, 1866 - All the girls in the first three classes taught needlework in the afternoon.

A choir was started in January 1871 by another new Mistress, Miss Christina Gow, who took the children up to the church to practice. But the Inspector was more concerned with the basics, and after his annual February visit he wrote:

"There is a great deal to be done in this School. The discipline is not what it ought to be and the work is inaccurately done by the children".

The behaviour in the classroom was rough and unruly and it sometimes led to accidents:

June 29th 1864 - William Childerley hurt by falling from the First group of desks into the Second Class.

There was another occasion when the disturbance was more violent and the consequences startling:

January 13th, 1865 - A disagreement between two boys I. Wilderspin and F. Bellamy. The father of the former rushed into school and flogged Bellamy, who has been absent from school the remainder of the day and also on the following Monday.

There is only one other record of flogging, this time by the Mistress, Miss Lucy Groble herself:

October 18th, 1873 - inflicted corporal punishment upon Anderson Wilderspin for showing a spirit of rebellion in the school and for general disobedience.

If a beating was rare, being kept in or sent home were common. Often enraged parents (usually the mother) confronted the Mistress and withdrew the defaulter from school:

November 10th, 1863 - Margaret Papworth withdrawn because punished for bad behaviour by being kept in half an hour after school.

November 23rd, 1873 - M. Papworth readmitted on her mother making an apology for withdrawing her, and promising to leave her entirely under my control.

October 23rd, 1873 - Sent Minnie, Eliza and Martha Lovell home again from school, the mother having behaved in a very uncivil manner to the Mistress for having punished her child Minnie for inattention to lessons. The mother acknowledged herself wrong, they were readmitted.

February 11th, 1874 - Leonard Thomas absented himself from school part of the morning to go sliding on the village brook. Sent for him but he would not come. When at last he came sent him home.

Corporal punishment, which did not appear to provoke parents, was another frequently used weapon:

March 6th 1873 - Kept whole school in for half an hour after 12 o'clock was a punishment for general talking throughout the school and inattention to reading lesson.

December 10th 1873 - Many of the children kept in for talking. Gave them a long writing lesson on slates as a punishment for same.

Amidst all the trials surrounding the teachers, who were clearly not up to their job, the sole Manager stood firmly in support. The Reverend John Dobson visited the school regularly, taught in the classroom (arithmetic in particular), pressed the founders for extra funds to appoint another apprentice and took charge of the school in emergencies, backed by his family:

January 21st, 1868 - Mistress away all day through illness. School conducted by the Reverend J. Dobson, Miss Dobson and Pupil Teacher.

January 23rd, 1868 - School conducted by the Reverend J. Dobson and Miss Dobson in the morning, and Mrs. Dobson and Miss H. Dobson in afternoon.

September 23rd, 1872 - Miss Gow ceased to have charge of the School. School opened by Manager, assisted by uncertificated paid teacher, Catherine Bleet, the Pupil Teacher and Monitor.

Even Mr. Dobson, however, failed at times to stimulate the scholars and once blamed the hot summer:

July 23rd, 1870 - The great heat of the weather seems to make the children listless.

He could be magnanimous. Three days after the 1871 inspection the Mistress writes:

February 11th, 1871 - Reverend J.R. Dobson gave each child a penny.

The Education Act of 1870 made education compulsory for everyone between the ages of five and thirteen, and the meagre State grant to the National Schools was doubled. Slowly matters improved in Elsworth. On January 11th 1875 the first Headmaster, Mr. Henry Thomas Matthews, who was a well qualified teacher, took charge of the School. His first impressions were "the scholars are under very little control and given to much talking, especially the girls". Let that be the last word on these first twenty-five years.

Scholars and Teachers II 1870 - 1886

The year 1870 was a turning point in education. Up to that time the country was covered by a network of National Schools set up by a Church of England charity, the National Society for the Education of the Poor. They were voluntary schools paid for by subscription, and they received a small government grant. This grant was dependent on the state of the premises, attendance, and the ability of the children to pass tests in reading writing and arithmetic. During the nineteenth century controversy over the religious issue raged between the Church and Dissenters, and in 1870 new state schools were established under Forster's Education Bill. These were financed out of local rates and Government grants. School boards were set up which had the power to compel the attendance of Children between the ages of 5 and 13 years. The Bill doubled the grant to the voluntary schools, and they continued under private management to provide education, mostly in the villages.

At first the new act had no impact in Elsworth. The sole manager remained in charge, running the school with the same dismal results. Teachers came and went in rapid succession, parents withdrew their children from the age of 8 to work in the fields at seasonal times for fruit picking, pea pulling, ploughing and manure carting. The official harvest holiday was declared each year by the head teacher, but the children, particularly the older boys, would be absent from school for several days before and after the appointed dates. In 1870, the Mistress was Miss C Cook and the sole Manager was the Rector, Mr John Dobson.

Two months after Mr Forster had introduced the Bill to the house, H.M Inspector reported on Elsworth: "It is much to be regretted that the funds of the school do not admit of at least one more apprentice. It was with considerable hesitation that my Lords have paid the grant without reduction under Article 52, considering that of the twenty-one children examined in the third, fourth and fifth standards only one passed in writing and seven in arithmetic. Marked improvements will be looked for next year. The issue of the Mistress's certificate must be deferred". The cut came in 1872 when the Inspector found that there had been no improvement in arithmetic and spelling, and that the school premises were unsatisfactory. The grant was reduced by 10 per cent that year.

Changes came in 1874 when, after twenty-two years as Rector, Mr Dobson died and was succeeded by his son-in-law, George Shaw from Fen Drayton. On 11th January 1875 Mr Henry Thomas Matthews, a first class certificated teacher, took charge of the school. His wife was the sewing mistress and Susanna Knibbs the monitor. On roll were 79 children; and the weekly school fees were 6d each child

in the 1st and 2nd classes for masters and tradesmen and 2d each child for journeymen and labourers (this dropped to 1d if there were more than two children in school). For infants the fee 2d was paid for everyone. Finances and attendance were Mr Matthews' chief concern, although the spectre of the reduced annual grant did recede in the early days of his office. At the end of his first year H.M. Inspector wrote: "Mr Matthews has done much during the past year to raise the character of the school". Discipline also improved greatly, Mr Matthews rarely used the cane, preferring exclusion. He had to warn boys on 19th February 1885 about "stopping near the school playing marbles after school dismissed". They did not heed his warning and next day "several boys stopped playing marbles again this morning, and among them was the boy John Lovell. I told them to take their marbles out and among them they had 54. The boy, Lovell, however, sullenly refused by his actions to take his out. I took him away and ordered him to leave the school.

Mr Matthews was master from 1875 to 1886 and although he raised the standards of work and behaviour at the start of his tenure, slowly, in spite of his efforts, school slipped back. The H.M. Inspector's report of 1884 states: "The results of the examination are not at all satisfactory and compare unfavourably even with the very poor results obtained last year. Grant to elder children reduced by one-tenth for faulty instruction in Arithmetic and Spelling". Nevertheless, there was sometimes cheer for the beleaguered Master. On the first day of the winter term in 1884 he wrote: "During the Harvest holidays the schools have been whitewashed, colour painted and thoroughly cleaned. They look very nice and healthy. I am sure that a nice-clean-bright-schoolroom has a good effect on the children" He should have added "and Teachers".

Scholars and Teachers III 1887 -1901

"I to-day take charge of Elsworth National Schools, (signed) William R. Billing (2 class)." So wrote the new Headmaster in the School Log Book for 29 November 1887. William Billing was a Devon man of 34 years and had a Cornish wife, Elizabeth, and two young daughters, Edith (6) and Nellie (7). Mrs. Billing herself was a certified teacher (2 class), and six months later she was appointed to the post of Assistant Teacher and Sewing Mistress in the school. Edith, too, was bound for a teaching career, and when she was nine years old she became a Monitress, and, later a Pupil Teacher. A son, William, was born in 1888 and he went on to win a scholarship to one of the Cambridge Grammar Schools in 1901. There was no maternity leave in those days and two more girls arrived. Winnie in 1891 and Bessie two years later. Mrs. Billing then resigned her post to attend to her family. However, she was frequently called upon to take over classroom duties when teachers fell ill or left. They were a talented family and Mr. Billing was made church organist soon after he moved into Elsworth. He had a good voice and the family took part in village concerts and were in demand in neighbouring villages. In 1899 they were on the bill at the Conington school concert. Mr. Billing sang 'Death of Nelson'; young William performed a solo; while Winnie sang 'Go to bye, Mammy' and was encored. The account in the Cambridge Chronicle reads "One little vocalist, Miss Winnie Billing from Elsworth, aged eight, must not be passed over without special mention, her song being given in a very pleasing manner and in tones remarkably true for so young a performer"..

Such family achievements must have brought cheer to the Headmaster, who had a Herculean task in the school. The troubles which had beset the long line of teachers before him were to plague him too. Poor attendance due to illness or the weather; disobedience, indiscipline and insolence in the classroom; and a constant turnover of staff all contributed to the backwardness of the school. The Inspector's report for 1886-7 states "The new Master found the attainments in this school very low so its present condition must not be reckoned to his discredit. The reading is fluent, but writing and spelling are very bad. Arithmetic is almost a total failure and no class subjects are attempted."

It is small wonder that learning did not flourish. There was no encouragement from the parents and little support from the local farmers and landowners, many of whom were Dissenters, hostile to the system, and paid their school toll reluctantly. The Chairman of the School Committee, Mr. Richard Parsons, was a much respected and influential farmer in the village, yet he drew on child labour and had under-age children working for him in school time. (The minimum age for leaving school

was fixed at 11 years.) A typical entry in the Log Book reads "Very thin attendance. Many children currant-picking for Mr. Parsons., 18 July 1887". Nor was the Rector, the Reverend Henry Hutchinson, able to give so much time to the school as his predecessors had done, for he was engaged in raising money for the great restoration of the Church. The scripture lessons for the 1st Division were taken by the lay reader, Mr. Rollings, whose wife was the Infant Teacher.

Mrs. Rollings (2nd class) was a good teacher from Luton, and under her the infants began to improve. She was ably supported by her Monitor, Harriet Nutt, aged 12, whose father was an engine driver (agricultural, not railway) and they lived in Spigot Lane. The other Monitor, for the Second Division, was Elizabeth Witherow, aged 13, daughter of the miller James Witherow. He lived up The Causeway and had a bakery next to the school playground. Also living up The Causeway (probably at the bakehouse) was Charles Pauley, a journeyman baker, and his family. There was no love lost between them and the Headmaster.

The trouble started when Mr. Pauley complained that his son, Frank, had been improperly punished. Frank alleged that his ears had been boxed, and his outraged parents wrote to the Chairman of the School Committee, Mr. Parsons. A special committee meeting was held and the Pauleys were invited to state their case. Mr. Billing declared that Frank's ears had not been boxed and Mr. Pauley acknowledged himself to be misinformed. He then took up the whole issue of corporal punishment and questioned Mr. Billing's right to impose it. The Rector agreed to write to Her Majesty's Inspector. The HMI replied that "the Schoolmaster was entitled to punish children in such ways as seem to him needful to maintain discipline up to the extent to which a parent is legally allowed to punish children". He added his own view that "schoolmasters do not punish children so severely as parents frequently do". He then dismissed the complaint as "frivolous" (10 May 1889).

A few years later a craze for stone-throwing broke out and Mrs. Pauley complained that two boys had been lobbing stones from the school yard into her yard. The malefactors were apprehended and caned. It was ironic justice for Mrs. Pauley.

Such confrontations were small compared with the sadness which must have swept through the village in January 1889. A serious throat infection (?diphtheria) broke out and several children died. The school was closed for a fortnight and the Medical Officer of Health and the Sanitary Inspector for the district came and ordered the school closets to be removed. Four days later they threatened to impose a compulsory order to close the school if their order was not complied with. Next day Mr. Hodson's men started work to remove the condemned closets, and happily no order to close the school was received from the Sanitary Authority (16 January -

8 February 1889). The infection abated, the school returned to normal, and it received a good report from the HMIs at their annual inspection in March.

School closures were frequent for national celebrations such as the Queen's Jubilee, when the village went en fete with sports, lunch, tea etc (21 June 1889) and the Duke of York's wedding day (6 July 1893). But no national event could have been more exciting than the reopening of Elsworth church on 14 April 1892 after the restoration of the building. The church had been closed since 2 August 1891, and Sunday services were held in the school during that time. The school's Easter holiday was extended to include the opening Tuesday, which was described in the Cambridge Chronicle as a gala day. The Bishop of Ely conducted the service, which was attended by neighbouring clergy and gentry, and it was reported that fully five hundred persons were estimated to have been present. A public tea took place in Mr. Witherow's barn after the service, and afterwards "all the children of the village were entertained free of cost. In the evening a service of song was held in the school-room, which was crowded to excess. The children and members of the choir, who gave the service under the conductorship of Mr. Billing, acquitted themselves remarkably well." One hundred years later we applaud them to the very echo.

The quotations are from the Elsworth School Log Books 1887-1901.



The Lower Division of Elsworth School in 1896

J. Throssell is 5th from the right in the 2nd row from back.

Scholars and Teachers IV 1901 - 1919

"Tuesday, 22 January 1901. Death of Queen Victoria," This is all the Headmaster wrote in the School Log Book on that fateful day. The school had known no other monarch and during the fifty-four years since it had been founded discipline and attendance had improved markedly, teachers were better trained, and the curriculum had been widened to include History, Geography, Object Lessons (using a lantern), Musical Drill, Drawing, Needlework, Singing, and Physical Exercises. The pupils were still using slates, however, and in March 1904 the H.M. Inspector reported "Slates should gradually be abolished. Some new maps are necessary and also pictures for object teaching, and a school museum is desirable." The attendance that spring reached a record almost in disbelief "Every child present again today. The attendance this week has been extraordinary. Not one in the Infants' Department has been absent at all. Average for the whole school 125.7 or 98.97 per cent."

Statistics such as these must have cheered him considerably, for bad weather and sickness continued to reduce numbers and the school was constantly being closed, sometimes by order of the Health Authority, on account of serious epidemics such as measles, scarlatina, whooping cough, influenza and mumps. Deaths among children were recorded bleakly: "Clara Hinson present at school Thursday. Sent home because she was unwell. Died Saturday." (15 June 1901). The Staff suffered too, and it was fortunate for Mr Billings that he was able to call upon his wife (the Sewing Mistress) and his son and daughter (Pupil Teachers) to act as supply teachers in emergencies. In October 1905 Mrs Billings applied for the post of Assistant Teacher, and it must have been a disappointment to the family when her application was turned down by the Managers. Their grounds were that "it was not advisable to have so many of the same family on the staff". This decision was recognised a week later, but the result was the same, and no other candidate had applied.

Mr Billings continued as Headmaster for another seven years and the effect of his departure in March 1912 was as if a time bomb had exploded. Three weeks after Mr Cruse, the temporary Head, had taken over there was a visit from Mr Keen, Education Secretary, who reported "Have to make greatest complaint as to discipline, i.e. noise and talking quite terrific. Children at times are diligent, but most uneven in this respect and cannot be trusted a moment." Mr Cruse did not survive long after this; on 10 June the new Headmaster, Mr Frederick John Hunting, took charge and steered the school through the First World War.

At first the war made little impact upon school life, and new heating was installed in November 1914. A further development came in the following March: "A new Manual Instruction Room has been approved by the Board of Education for teaching of Handicraft and Cookery. Premises recognised as providing accommodation for not more than 12 scholars in Handicraft and 16 in Cookery." (10 March 1915). This small building up The Causeway served the village as a Schoolroom, and later as a Community Room, until 1976, when it was demolished. Soon after it had been erected and Woodwork and Cookery classes had started there, it was requisitioned for soldiers - happily for only two days.

The needs of the army were met by recruiting farm workers, blacksmiths and wheelwrights from the villages, and the shortage of labour on the farms in the County was a serious one. Women went to work in the fields and the Education Authority passed a by-law enabling children to work in term time as well as holidays. On 5 July 1915 Mr Hunting reports "Six boys have been granted a special exemption from attendance at school, they being required to work on the land in place of those men who are serving their country". In the following year the harvest holidays had to be extended until the beginning of October "on account of the lateness of the harvest and the scarcity of labour to gather it in" (25 September 1916).

As the war progressed food shortages increased and everywhere derelict pieces of land were cultivated. In April 1917 the school created a war garden from a piece of rough ground which was worked by senior boys (over 11 years of age). Six months later, early in October, the boys missed their Woodwork classes to lift the crop of potatoes in the garden. The girls, too, were called to war service and went gathering blackberries for the use of the Army and Navy. On 9 and 10 October 178 lb were picked and dispatched to Messrs Chivers Farms jam factory at Histon. The enterprise was repeated the following year when the grand total of 1359 lb was collected in three weeks.

The Assistant Master, Mr Beaumont, was called up for military service in 1917; and the Headmaster himself was constantly absent from school attending voluntary camps and meetings of the War Savings Committee, both local, and national at the Albert Hall. An exciting call to duty for him occurred on 15 November 1917 when, as he records, "H.M. absent this afternoon having been called upon to guard an aeroplane which had come down in the village. The children were allowed to go and have a look at the machine after playtime."

Patriotic fervour in the village was whipped up on Empire Day on 24 May 1918 and the school children "spent the latter part of the morning in singing patriotic songs, saying

recitations etc and were instructed in the meaning of Empire Day. The school was closed this afternoon. An Empire Day demonstration was held this evening. The children marched in procession from the school to the Grass Field singing patriotic songs, carrying flags and bedecked with flowers. The Rev. C. W. Tibbits addressed the children on Empire Day and also presented the Medals and Bars to those who had earned them for the year ended 31 March 1917." The children were to wave their flags again on 9 October when they all went to Papworth Hall and lined up at the entrance to greet the Queen and Princess Mary, who were visiting the hospital. It was a fearfully wet day, but in spite of the rain the Cambridge Chronicle reported that "the children gave the Royal party a hearty send-off". The gloomy, dark photograph shows a line of drenched flag wavers standing by the majestic Rolls Royce with the elegant Queen under a large umbrella acknowledging the cheers.

Four weeks after this event the Armistice was signed but there were no excitements to report. The scourge of influenza had gripped the village, the death roll was high and the school had to be closed for six weeks. Celebrations came the following summer when the annual harvest holiday was "extended by one week in commemoration of the signing of the Peace Treaty". (15 August 1919). On the first anniversary of Armistice Day, at 11 o'clock in the school "all work was suspended for two minutes in order to think of the Glorious Dead. The Headmaster addressed the children on "The League of Nations". The Veterans of the village now would have been at their desks on that first Remembrance Day.

Betty Evans

The quotations are from Elsworth School Log Book II

Scholars and Teachers V 1920 - 1930

In the difficult years of the agricultural depression of the 1920's farmers in Elsworth went bankrupt and unemployment among farm labourers was high. These were hard times for needy families living on or below the poverty line and striving to feed and clothe the children. Frequent outbreaks of infectious diseases struck the village, and the school attendance figures fluctuated wildly. In November 1920 cases of scarlet fever were sent to the Cambridge Isolation Hospital, and in the summer of 1927 the School Medical Officer ordered the school to be closed because of the epidemic of whooping cough, a killer in those days. The Head Teacher (Mr Addy) wrote in the Log Book on 5 August: "The attendance this week has been very low. Victor Wright has a sprained ankle; George Desborough has put out his collar bone; Dennis Cross and Arthur Brand are having their tonsils attended to. 22 other children are excluded on account of whooping cough. On roll 77, attendance average 47.8%".

Much greater attention by the County Authority was now being given to the health of school children, and there were regular visits from the School Nurse, who brought cod-liver oil and malt with her; the School Dentist, who followed up his inspection with treatment; the School Medical Officer (or his assistant), who tested eyes, and looked for ringworm and impetigo. Free school milk was supplied from February 1938; one-third of a pint was handed out at mid-morning and another one-third of a pint a midday lunch time. There was education in health and cleanliness from outside sources. On one occasion the makers of Lifebuoy soap ran a 'Clean hand campaign'; on another "a cinemotor lorry of the Health and Cleanliness Council visited the school at noon and showed films in the playground".

It was not only illness which kept the attendance figures down. Each year truants went off to the point-to-point races at Caxton, and to the St Ives Fair. On the day when the children were allowed out of morning school to see the meet of the Foxhounds "12 boys who had followed the hounds too far failed to put in an appearance at school this afternoon. ! [7 April 1922]. The annual Sunday-School outing organised by the Chapel was not counted as an official day off, and on 6 July 1925 the Head Teacher (Mr Addy) reported that 22 children were absent on the day of the Baptists' excursion to Hunstanton. When the Church held their own Sunday-School outing the school was closed.

Mr Hunting, the Head Teacher from 1912 to 1925, used to award attendance-medals and certificates at the end of each school year (31 March), and on 11 November 1921 he reports "The school was presented with a board by the LEA because the attendance for the year ended 31 March 1921 exceeded 97 per cent". This was one year after little Maud Lawrence entered the school as an Infant. Nine years later "The Rector made a presentation of a silver watch subscribed by the Mangers of the School

and others to Maud Lawrence (who left this school Easter 1928) in recognition of her 8 years of perfect attendance at school. Also present Mrs Iggulden, Mr Wright and Mr Hodson." [9 August 1929]. Mrs Iggulden was the Rector's wife; Mr Wright and Mr Hodson were school Managers. This record must be almost unbeatable, even today, and where is that watch now?

This gladsome event came a few weeks before Mr Addy had to face a serious discipline problem in the Lower class. A new teacher for them had been appointed on 2 July but the class soon summed her up and two days later the Head recorded "The Lower class was very noisy today". By the middle of November the pupils, not the teacher, were in control and anarchy reigned: "Teacher no control over class. Work very unsatisfactory. Some children writing in large untidy double lined printing. Some drawing on scraps of paper in the reading lesson. Constant playing and talking." [28 November 1929]. Four days later: "Lower class very noisy. Now necessary for the two classes to work without the dividing curtain being drawn along. This is very distracting." [2 December 1929]. Mayhem followed: "During Dictation examination this afternoon a girl in Standard II pricked the back of a boy's hand with a pen. This is the outcome of the teacher's lack of control over the class." [11 December 1929]. Conditions were no better next term and the despairing Head agonises over the behaviour of the girls in Standards II and III who "are allowed to walk about where and when they choose. Hence many of them are merely gossiping the whole time. Work is constantly dropping on the floor and at times one or two girls were actually running, across the room". There was only one way out, and the Managers had to give the lady her notice. She left at the end of the term, but not before the Head caught children "running along the writing part of the desk". On another day "four boys fell backwards from the desk on to the floor; and in the general rush to go out to play the board fell from the easel. Miraculously it fell between two children instead of on them". All rioting ceased when Mrs Addy (a certificated teacher) came in as a supply after the defeated one departed. By August Class II showed a great improvement in discipline and quality of work, and never again was such disorder seen in an Elsworth classroom. From the mid-thirties onward minds were all focused on the chaos that was to come in Europe.

The quotations are all from Elsworth School Log Book III

Scholars and Teachers VI 1938-1948

The dread of war and the fear of Hitler hung over the nation in 1938. When the school in Elsworth reassembled after harvest in September, air-raid rehearsals began. Arrangements were made for each child to disperse to certain houses on the signal being given. After several practices the time taken for the pupils to reach their safety posts was five minutes. Gas mask instruction came next. In July 1939 everyone in the village was issued with one and the schoolchildren took theirs to school to have their names "printed on the boxes and on the tapes of the respirators in indelible ink". They were taught how to put them on and they wore them for five minutes each day.

On 31 August the Head Teacher and Mrs Addy returned from their holiday in Yorkshire to receive a party of evacuees from Popham Road School, Islington. Unaccompanied by parents, they arrived next day at 2.15 p.m. There were 39 children, chiefly Junior boys, 3 women helpers and 1 male teacher, Mr D. H. Stevenson. On the following day they assembled in school at 10 a.m. but the Elsworth children were still on holiday, many of them working in the harvest field. It was a time of settling in for the evacuees and easing them into their startling new environment. They were taken on walks across the fields to Knapwell and Papworth, and they had informal activities each day in the British Legion Hut. The new term began on 11 September and a shift system was arranged so that the Popham children could have normal school for half the day in the school classroom. Mr Addy gave them a beekeeping demonstration and "a hive was opened and frames taken out to show different stages in hive life and the Queen was found and shown". There is no record of anyone being stung. That same afternoon the Rector, Mr Iggledon, gave them tea in the school and the Knapwell evacuees also attended. Every attempt was made to keep the children happy and interested.

After a fortnight the Popham Road Headmaster, Mr A.W. Dean, visited the school and assessed the needs of his pupils. He returned five days later accompanied by the Chairman of the Islington Education Committee, Captain Cummins. They had with them a load of school material conveyed in ambulance coaches. Mr Dean was back again within three weeks with a load of desks, furniture, cupboards and tables for use in the British Legion Institute, which had already been inspected as a classroom by the HMI, Miss Harrison. The Popham Road pupils then settled down to a normal school day, using their own familiar equipment under their own master, Mr Stevenson.

Meanwhile, homesick evacuees had begun to beat back home. Parents came up at week-ends to fetch them, and by the end of November twelve had left the village. This drift continued throughout the war, and on one occasion, in March 1941, a boy set out to walk to London. He was billeted with Mr Harper of Rogues Lane, who reported his absence to Mr Addy. He informed the police and they found the wanderer on the road; later he was returned to his family in Islington. Many must have thought it was safer there than in Elsworth. The first air raid warning in the village came on 10 November 1940 during morning school. The work was stopped and "the children dispersed quietly and orderly to the houses they had arranged to go to. The Head Teacher went to the British Legion Institute, but the evacuees had not heard the warning. The children were dispersed immediately and the Head Teacher then went to the Warden's post to keep in touch with developments. The All Clear was not given until 11.50 a.m". However, it was a yellow, not a red, warning and the alert should not have been made public. Far from being put out by a wasted morning Mr Addy welcomed the exercise as being "a useful rehearsal for dispersal of children".

In the second half of 1940 air raid warnings and the sound of bombs were heard on several occasions during the night. On 16 November "at 2.05 a.m. this morning an enemy aeroplane dropped 10 high explosive bombs on this village, the nearest one to the school being about 50 yards away. Some damage was done to house property but there were no casualties. One window in the door of the Infant Room was cracked as a result. The main road near the Rector's drive gate was littered with debris, which was cleared by members of the Home Guard." Mr Addy was the local organiser of the Home Guard for the district, having set it up earlier in the summer under its original name of Local Defence volunteers.

Less alarming than bombs and flares was the installing of electricity in the village in 1940. Electricians started wiring the school at the beginning of the autumn term and they must have disrupted the normal routine. On 5 January 1941 electricity was switched on for the first time, but the improvement in street lighting could not be seen because of the blackout. Another important benefit affecting the school was the provision of hot midday meals for children. The meals were brought out from the Over Civic Defence Cooking Centre in insulated containers. " 12 September 1942. Meals scheme started today. HM and Mrs Addy served the meals and took their meals with the children. The meal was good and popular and quite warm. Washing of dishes etc. proved quite difficult as there is no water supply laid on at school and all the water required had to be heated on a Primus stove. There is no facility for heating plates so much heat is lost in serving food. Charge: 1 child 5d a day, 2/0 a week; more than 1 from a household, 2/0 a week for the first child. 1/8 a week for second and others." Mr Addy had to wait nearly

a year before the County Canteen Organiser delivered an electric copper "for use for heating water and for washing up after mid-day meals" (1 July 1943). Some months before then, however, he was complaining about the food. "14 December 1942. School meal today was much below the standard with which the scheme started. Peas cooked with very little meat and potatoes insipid, unattractive and not sufficiently cooked. Rice not sufficiently cooked and was hard. Reported to Education Secretary."

By this time so many of the Popham Road schoolchildren had returned home that the British Legion Institute was no longer required as a classroom. The remaining pupils were integrated with Elsworth School and Mr Stevenson, their teacher, was considered to be an Assistant Master there. They all took part in various war-time activities such as collecting money in War Weapons Week; collecting rose hips for making syrup; entertaining the parents at end-of-term concerts; collecting for the Red Cross prisoner-of-war fund; and Digging for Victory in the school allotment.

Victory came and 8 and 9 May 1945 were declared as National Holidays. These dates coincided with the County Youth Festival and there was a whole week of activities starting with a service on Sunday 6 May. A week later the last two of the original party of unaccompanied evacuees of 1 September 1939, Ronald and Derek Hardcastle, returned home. They were followed in June by Frances Ellis who had come up later and had perhaps stayed on for the village victory celebrations in the Grass Close, which were declared a great success.

Now came the dramatic decision by the County Education Committee to close the school. Mr Addy was informed on 2 September 1946 that--"the school premises must not again be used as a school. The County Architect's report indicates that the structure is dangerous." Visits were made to the British Legion Institute, the Chapel Schoolroom and the Prisoner of War Camp in a search for accommodation, but none was found to be suitable. The Infants were therefore moved into the Practical Subjects room up The Causeway; and the Seniors and Juniors attended the school at Childerley Gateway; and were taken there in Mr Brand's bus. School meals discontinued; Mr and Mrs Addy left the village; the school and the school house were put into the market. It was the end of the one hundred years of education in Brook Street. A sad time for the village, perhaps, but the phoenix arose in September 1954 in Broad End, and is today a very vigorous bird.

The quotations are from Elsworth School Log Book III

Elsworth School 50 Years at Broad End

50 years back, on October 9th 1954, Elsworth School was officially opened on its present site by the Bishop of Ely. To mark the occasion this year, Catherine Lofts, the newly appointed Head at that time, joined children, staff and former staff for coffee and birthday cake on the afternoon of Friday the 8th and enjoyed being taken back half a century in the morning as staff and pupils, many attired in the style of the 1950s, rocked, rolled and jived through their assembly. Another marked highlight of the day was a most interesting exhibition embracing activities at the school over the period, which was enjoyed by many former pupils, proud parents and other interested villagers. In the evening a bonfire party, of particular appeal to many appreciative children, concluded the day's celebrations.

Of course, the school's history goes back over a further 100 years, the first building having been opened in 1847 in Brook Street, when 114 pupils were enrolled to be taught in two classrooms. However Betty Evans, in her most interesting account of this period in her series of articles in earlier editions of this magazine, noted that school attendances fluctuated wildly in the first 25 years - from 101 down to a low of 16, depending on the weather, time of year, illness and whatever was going on in the village. She quotes from the log book May 1864 -

"Very few children present, only three in 2nd class. The remainder gone to procure wheat for the Feast."

Children were admitted from two years of age and left between nine and ten years of age, when they were considered old enough to work on the land.

In the 1860/70s behaviour in the classroom was sometimes rough and unruly and could lead to on occasions to accidents. Thus Betty Evans notes that on June 19th 1864

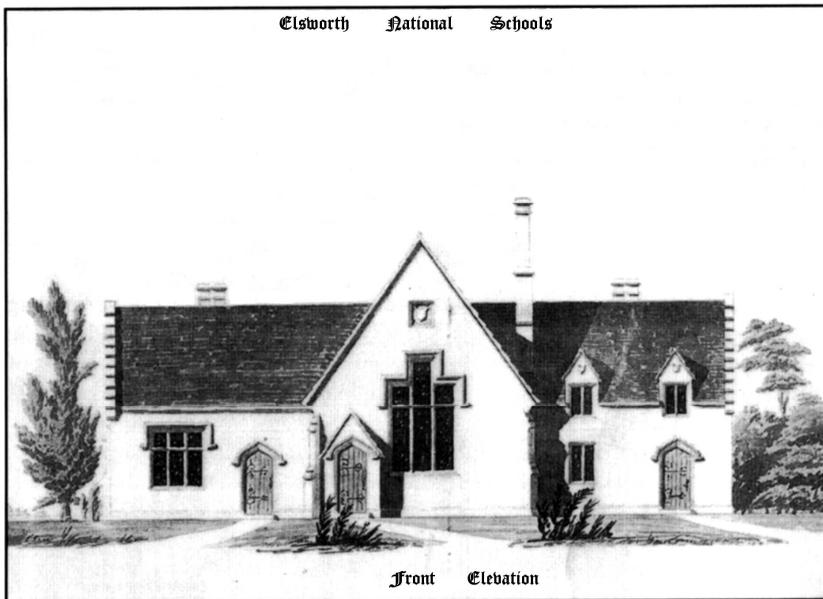
"William Childerley was hurt by falling from the first group of desks into the Second Class."

An example of parental involvement from the same source makes interesting reading - on October 23rd 1873

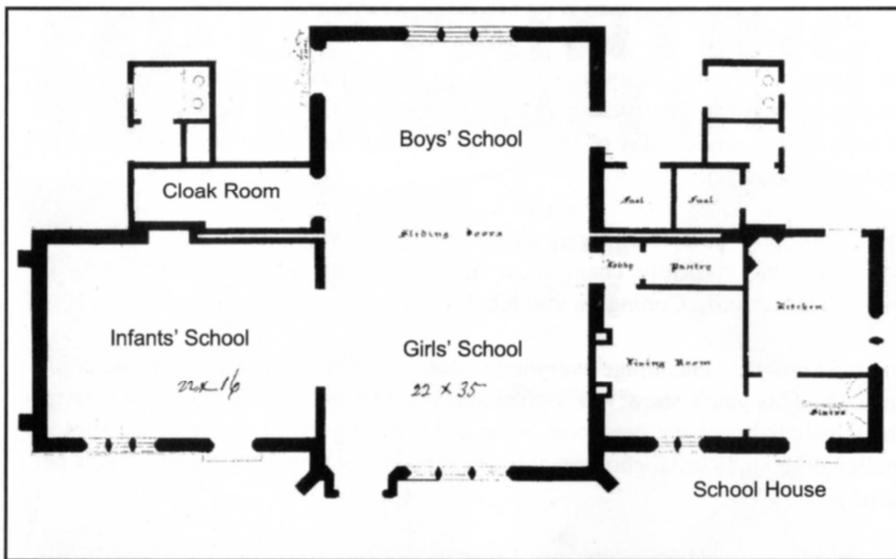
"Minnie, Eliza and Martha Lovell home again from school, the mother having behaved in a very uncivil manner to the Mistress for having punished her child Minnie for inattention to lessons. The mother acknowledged herself wrong and they were readmitted".

When the present building was opened in 1954 to serve not only Elsworth, but Knapwell, Boxworth and Conington as well there were 82 pupils on roll; to-day there are 140, with pupils coming not only from the villages noted above but also from Hilton and to a smaller extent from Papworth Everard, Gravely, Hemingford Grey, Over and Cambourne. The demand for places in the school is not surprising, for the quality of the education provided is recognised not only by parents, but also on national rankings - at the last SATS [school attainment tests] 100% of the pupils attained level 4 - the national target - at key stage 2 in all the subject areas, namely English, Mathematics and Science. A superb achievement. But it is not only at imparting knowledge that the school may be measured as a great success. No one entering the building can fail to be impressed by the warmth and friendliness of the school community. The school has clearly much to celebrate to mark this 50th anniversary of its opening on its present site.

Alan Farrow



Drawing of the Schoolhouse as Originally Built



Plan of Original Schoolhouse



Pupils in the new School in 1954