

MARTY'S MEMORIES

Mrs E. M. ('Nell') Martin recalls life at Headbourne Worthy Church of England School in the years before the First World War.

This small school built on high ground with meadows all around it, was erected in 1870. It consisted of a large entrance porch with pegs around the internal walls for hats and coats, a classroom for children over eight years old, and a very small infants' classroom. No water, no artificial lighting, and no drainage, the only sanitary arrangements being two earth closets (ECs) at the back of the school. This all sounds very primitive, but the school cleaner kept the premises in spotless condition and the ECs were cleaned and disinfected every day. School hours were from 9 to 12 am and 2 to 4 pm. Children were accepted at the age of three provided they had older brothers and sisters at the school to look after them. I myself went to school at the age of three, having two brothers and a sister already there.

School days started with prayers and a hymn. The rector came in every morning at 9.15 am to give a half-hour scripture lesson, but as our rectors were from New College, Oxford, they found it difficult to get down to the level of small country children, and in turn the children found it difficult to follow, so that a big sigh of relief went up when the lesson was over.

As far as the Infants were concerned there were very few books, reading being taught by a large chart on the wall illustrating words of three and four letters. Slates were used for writing and sums. At the age of eight, infants moved into the bigger classroom, and here we had proper exercise books and pens and ink. Here again, there were very few books so that most of the teaching was done on the blackboard. We were taught the three Rs, a smattering of history and geography, a good deal of nature study, and religion. Being a Church of England school we were very much bound up with the Church, St Swithun's, and every Saints Day we would attend a Children's Service there instead of having the scripture lesson. We had no musical instruments of any kind in the school, but this did not really matter as the head teacher, Miss Ada Webb, was a good musician and she would sing a hymn or song to us, which we

quickly picked up, and all lustily sang unaccompanied.

Sometimes on a hot summer's day we would go outside the school and sit under a lime tree about 30 yards away, and here we would do our lessons in pleasant surroundings. I remember one day the teacher asked us to stay quiet for a minute or two and then write down all the different sounds we could hear. These were the larks singing overhead, the clicking of the grasshoppers, the ducks in the stream around the church, the clanging of the anvil from the blacksmith in Puddinghouse Lane and the clanging of the anvil in a different key from the blacksmith at the Racing Stables (at what is now The Manor House), the pigs and cows in the nearby farmyard, and the clip-clop of a horse and cart on the main road. I am glad to say that the lime tree still exists, but if you sat under it now you would sit on a forest of nettles, and all you would hear would be the incessant noise of traffic on the main road and the link road.

Some of the children attending the school had to walk two miles or more so they would bring their midday sandwiches with them. These probably consisted of bread and cheese or bread and lard, but some of these children were poor and hungry and would often eat their sandwiches on the way to school. The teacher realised the plight of these children and would often provide them with hot soup and bread, and sometimes a boiled pudding.

Under the original constitution of the school four local ladies (Miss



Headbourne Worthy school group, 1903, taken outside the schoolhouse porch. Miss Ada Webb, the headmistress, is at the extreme right, with the school cleaner alongside. The infant teacher, Miss Alice Kent, is on the left. Mrs Martin is in the bottom row, 3rd from right, with her brothers at each end of the row. Her sister Elsie is in the row behind, 4th from the right.

Sandell, Mrs James Harris, Miss Brown and Mrs Garrett-Moore) were required to pay periodical visits to the school to make sure that all was in order. This was the case when I was at the school, and these ladies took it in turns to visit once a month. They invariably brought a gift : sometimes their gardener would accompany them carrying a big basketful of oranges, or perhaps buns ; sometimes it would be a box of butterscotch, those lovely little slabs wrapped in paper. They would glance at the registers and selected exercise books, and someone (often myself) would read a passage from a book. This practice eventually died out, probably at the request of the County Education Office.

In those early days before 1914 it was not possible to take the examination for a scholarship to the Grammer School. If you desired this you had to attend a Winchester school for a year or two and take the examination there. I remember two such cases from our school, a boy and girl, William Herbert and Lilljan Marsh. But even when they won their scholarships their parents could not afford to pay for their uniforms and books. However the local gentry came to their rescue and continued to do so when they went on to train to be teachers.

The doctor visited the school once a year, mainly to look at heads and test lungs. The one bugbear in the school was the annual visit of the School Inspector. The authorities were anxious to close this small school and to send the children to the bigger school at King's Worthy, and a public meeting was held in The Hut at King's Worthy in about 1921 to discuss the matter. There were many protests and the idea was dropped, but the School Inspector did all he could to find fault with the school. However, he could find no fault with the standard of learning and so the school stayed. About 1912 some improvements were carried out : water was laid on and a proper cloakroom formed, and the infants' room was also enlarged. There was still no drainage and the ECs remained in existence until the closing of the school in 1952. At the outbreak of war in 1939 some 50 infants from a Portsmouth school were evacuated to Headbourne Worthy together with their teachers. The teachers were appalled at the primitive conditions which existed, particularly the lack of drainage, but they got over it and the Portsmouth children occupied the school during the mornings, the village children having it in the afternoons. I cannot imagine how they ever squeezed 50 children and six teachers into that small school.

Eventually this happy little school closed in 1952, having been in existence for 82 years, and the children went to the newly-built school at King's Worthy.