

## THE SCHOOL

There has been a school in the village since the 1800's. A National School for boys was founded in 1821, another for girls in 1843 and an Infant School, on ground given by the Vicar, in 1849. There was also a small private school.

From some of the earliest records kept of the school, starting from the year 1894, we find a Mr David Mathews as Headmaster of the boys school until 1932. Mr Mathews was the grandfather of Mrs Alice Neal who lives in the village and whose family has a long association with the school. Mrs Neal's father, Mr Tom Eadon, was chairman and manager of the school for some time. Mrs Neal qualified as a teacher and, when she married and moved back to Napton, taught in the school for fourteen years. The house which Mr and Mrs Neal now occupy is the one which was originally the private school and from where her grandfather lived and worked.

We can begin to appreciate what school life was like by reading through some of the old logbooks and minute books of the school where we find comments recorded by Mr Mathews.

Attendance was often very irregular, mainly due to illness, but there are other causes too. The distraction of watching the hunt, Mop Day, working in the fields at haymaking, working on the allotments and picking blackberries to name but a few.

The following extracts are taken from the log book of the boys school...

Jan 28th George Badger came to school after

1895 an absence of six months.

Feb 22nd Attendance has improved but still several

boys do not attend regularly. Mr White,

School Attendance Officer, called last

Wednesday and took a list of irregular boys.

May 3rd Several boys absent through diptheria.

May 7th School closed by order of Dr. Wilson on  
account of an outbreak of diptheria.

### Summary of H.M. Inspectors Report for the year ending March 31st 1895.

The school has again suffered through illness and the consequent irregularity. Taking this into account the elementary work is very fair.

Dec 15th Mr J. Alsop visited the school and presented

1896 the Bible to George Shelton for regular  
attendance.

Jan 15th Admitted W. Neal who has been attending a

1900 private school. (This is Mr Neal's father.)

Summary of H.M. Inspectors Report for the year ending March 31st 1902.

Much creditable work is done here and very good order maintains, but the master, unaided, is not a sufficient or suitable staff for forty three boys and the grant may be reduced if a monitor is not provided.

June 25th Closed school for two days holiday.

1902 (Coronation.)

The following extracts are taken from the log book of the girls and infants school for the year 1903, when the headmistress was Nellie Watson...

June 18th Heard from Director of Education, Warwick,  
that Edith Mathews has passed her exam  
and is now a first year P.T.

Extract from Manager's Minute Book, September 1903.

It was agreed that the correspondent write to the Education Committee suggesting that the schoolmaster's daughter be appointed monitress.

November Schoolmaster's daughter appointed as  
1903 additional teacher, at a salary of £12  
per annum.

January Mr Mathews to get a raise in pay as he  
1904 has been master of the boy's school for  
over seventeen years. The managers consider  
he is deserving.

Going back to the girl's log we find the following...

Sept 21st May Mathews has started work in  
1906 the infant's room as monitress.

April 30th Edith Mathews finished her time  
1907 here today. The girls subscribed  
and gave her a clock as a farewell  
gift.

Feb 16th I punished Alice Meredith today by caning  
1909 her with four strokes on the hand as she  
was rude to Miss Mathews in the playground.

The next mention in the log of Alice Meredith was when the headmistress reported her death a few months later.

E.M. Mathews resigned her post as uncertified Assistant in the Infants school on September 30th 1913 on account of her marriage, which later took place on October 8th 1913.

Jan 29th May Mathews is at present supplementary  
teacher. If a new certified teacher is  
appointed to replace Edith Mathews, then  
unfortunately there will be no need to  
keep the supplementary teacher. This is very  
hard on May Mathews to have to leave after so

long a service.

May 27th Re-appointed May Elizabeth Mathews as  
1914 · Assistant Teacher to commence July 1st.  
Salary to be at least £35.

Mrs Neal remembers that her grandfather was very strict. She tells us...

"He was very strict, he used to walk around the classroom swinging his cane. One boy ducked so he struck him and said, 'I didn't want to disappoint you', so he gave him one."

For a long time Mr Mathews was in sole charge of the school, looking after forty to fifty boys, all in one room. He has listed the dimensions of the room as thirty six feet in length, eighteen feet in breadth and twelve feet in height.

Mr Gill describes the boys school room as...

"A barn, with a fireplace either end of the room."

In these conditions, with everyone in the same room, discipline would have to be strict to keep good order.

Bill Young was at school when Mr Mathews was headmaster and remembers...

"He was very strict, he'd come behind you and if you were doing a bit of copying or the like, he was at your knuckles. If you pulled your hand away you'd get an extra one. He used the cane. He was a good old soul. After Mr Mathews there was a Mr Payne as schoolmaster. Now we used to play football in the road and it's true, he'd keep you out till his side were winning, then he'd let you in. You'd got to stop out and win."

Sam Gill also remembers playing in the road as there was no playground...

"The boys school playground was on the road. We hadn't a playground, only on the road. When a car came along we just moved out of the road. Only occasionally a car would come.

We had a schoolmaster called Mr Payne. He was a reporter for the Advertiser and the Observer and on Thursday, I think it was, a man came on his motorbike to collect news for the paper. One thing he used to do, which I didn't like, was he used to say 'Now I'm going out and I want you to all behave yourselves and come out you', that was to one of the bigger boys, 'stand out the front, anyone talking he's got to come out, then you go and sit down.'



"This went on each week, you know, Well, the bigger, bully lads would call you out, the smaller ones, and you didn't dare say anything so you hadn't got a fair set up there at all, 'cos the ones who were the stronger and the bullies of the school took advantage and then whoever was out when he came back in got the stick. You know he had a cane then, the cane was used a lot. I remember he spelt PRETTY on one of the lad's hands 'cos he couldn't spell it you know, so he gave it to him each time to spell it out.

Don't get the idea that our schoolmaster was a terrible man, he was just what masters were like."

Gladys Gill interjects...

"If you got the cane your parents wouldn't dare go and complain."

Sam takes up the story...

"There were fights with the master, because Mr Payne had fights with the parents who went, and the parents would fight with the teachers, actual fist fights."

Extracts from Manager's Minute Book, 1923.

February Mr A. Payne appointed as Headmaster.

Mar 24th Mr T. Eadon replaced Mr Hemmings, on his death, as Chairman.

Apr 24th Miss M. Eadon proposed for position of uncertified teacher.

May 1st Mr Alfred Payne commenced duties as Headmaster of the boys school. Fiftysix boys present.

M. Eadon commenced duties as uncertified teacher.

In June 1924 there is the first recorded discussion concerning the prospect of a Central School in Southam.

At this time the main concern was the standard of work and attendances of the children. Also causing concern was the lack of facilities, namely the playground area and toilets. Several attempts were made, over the next few years, to obtain more land to provide a playground area and, generally, improve conditions.

Copy of report made by H.M. Inspector after visit on July 8th 1924.

Attention was directed in the last report to the lack of playground accomodation but nothing has been done. Physical exercises have to be done in the narrow public highway in front of the school.

There is only one closet for the use of the boys and no provision at all for the teachers. Indeed the outside accomodation at this school is altogether inadequate and unsatisfactory.

Extracts from Manager's Minute Book.

Aug 1st Proposed that the Chairman interview the owners  
1924 of gardens near the school with the idea of purchasing the upper portion as a playground for the boys.

Oct 8th There is no possibility of obtaining a playground  
1925 near the school.

Jul 7th The Vicar suggested building on school land at  
1926 the Girls and Infants school to accomodate the boys.

Mar 1st Joint Managers Meeting. Discussed proposed building  
1927 and alterations. The cost of alterations is estimated at £955. An offer of £800 has been made for the boy's school and the Diocesan Fund promise £100 and a grant towards the balance. After a lot of debating the proposal was opposed and dismissed.

Feeling was that the schools should stay as they were. The main argument was that there would have to be alterations made amongst the staff for a joint school and not all of the present staff could be employed.

At the end of January 1929 it was eventually agreed that the plans made by the Education Authority, for extending the Girls and Infants school to accomodate the boys, be carried out. For that purpose Glebe land, consisting of the playground, Piper's Close and the yard adjoining, be purchased for the school from the Vicar for the sum of £20.

The decision was carried unanimously.

The Managers and committee arranged for tenders for the building work and approached local builders to provide estimates. While the new work was being carried out school life carried on as normal...

Jan 11th School prize presented to Harold Eadon,  
1932 County Minor Scholarship. (This is Mrs Neal's older brother who went on to school in Rugby.)

On June 9th 1932 the last entry in the Manager's Minute Book was recorded. It read as follows...

A meeting was held in the boy's school, Present Mr T. Eadon, Chairman, F. Duckett, J.T. Alsop and H. Griffin. Closing of the school. A letter was read from the Director of Education re the closing of the boy's school. It was proposed by Mr F. Duckett and seconded by Mr H. Griffin that the managers of the boy's school agree that the premises shall be closed when the extensions at the Girl's school are completed.

By the end of 1933 the new school was completed and in the early part of 1934 arrangements were made for the official opening. It was suggested that this take place on June 30th and would precede the entertainments planned for Empire Day. The Archdeacon of Warwick was invited to officiate and guests were specially invited to join in the village festivities.

Mrs Nora Balsom remembered a visit she made to the school in the last few years and the awkward questions the children asked her...

"I went up to school not long ago to talk to the children. The first question one little girl asked was, 'what I didn't like most about school dinners.' Well, we never had school dinners. We used to walk home for dinner. Then she said, 'Which teacher did you like best?' Well, I didn't like any of them, not one of them. But I daren't tell the kid that. We went till we were thirteen. It's still the same school. There was the Infant teacher and another one inbetween her and the big girls. The boys went up to another school when they were seven. It was up on the hill, along The Butts. We learnt writing and arithmetic that's all, and to sew and knit."

She was also asked about her clothes and what she would have worn as a young girl...

"When we went to school we wore black stockings and button up boots. We had navy blue knickers where you could keep your handkerchief tucked up the leg."

Mary Fell's early school life suffered because of illness. She started school at the age of four but when she was eight it was necessary for her to go and live with her Aunt in Birmingham for twelve months because she needed an operation on her tonsils and adenoids. Shortly after returning to Napton her schooling was again interrupted, this time by an attack of pleurisy.



Mary then had rheumatic fever when she was eleven and eventually resumed her schooling at the age of thirteen. Her teachers then tried to teach her everything she'd missed over the years in the twelve months remaining before she left school at the age of fourteen. She remembers a very amusing story, which happened when she was young, about a plant she had taken to school...

"There was a little plant called 'Mind your own Business' and I took it to school with me, ever such a pretty, tiny plant. I took it to school and the teacher asked me what it was. I said, 'Mind your own Business', so I had a good clout for saying that. I had to write out a hundred lines after all the kids had gone, 'I must not be rude to my teacher'. Anyway, apparently one of my sisters had gone down and asked where I was and she said I was being kept in for being rude. 'Right' said my Mother, she was only little but a fiery beggar, so up to school she came. I was at about seventy six lines and she said, 'I hear from Sissy that you've kept our Mary in for being rude'. The teacher said that I had told her to mind her own business so she was keeping me in. 'Right' said my Mother, 'you can take those lines off her now and you can apologise to her, that IS a 'Mind your own Business' plant.' That's the first time I'd ever had a teacher apologise to me."

The village school is still thriving in the eighties under the leadership of Headmistress Mrs T.M. Houghton. She tells us a little about the work of the school...

"The school became a first school in September, 1979, taking children from the age of 4+ to 8+. All areas of the curriculum are covered, the emphasis being on investigation, whereby the children can discover and solve problems for themselves, with the teacher's guidance. Parents are invited in to help with various activities such as crafts and gardening. A rockery, an annual flower bed and a herb and vegetable garden are being developed. Through these activities much mathematical knowledge is acquired and this is carefully structured with a published maths scheme. Each term a visit is made to a theatre, another school or a place of interest, thus gradually widening the children's experience.

Most children become avid readers and to keep this interest alive we continually add new books to the school library, children choose books to read at home with their parents and a school bookshop is run through which the children can save to buy their own books. Links with other village groups, such as the Darby and Joan Club have been established and with other first schools feeding our middle school."