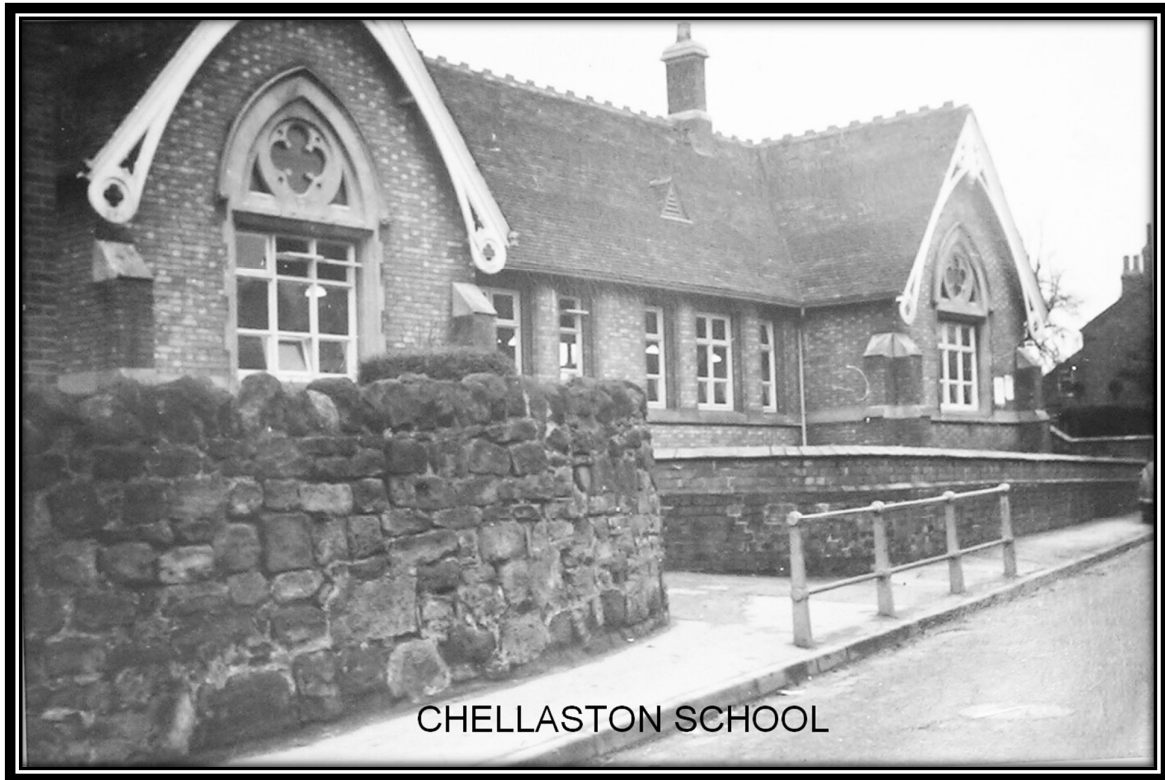


## Memories of Chellaston Village School in the 1940s



In the 1940's the school only had 4 classrooms with about 140 children registered. During the war Mr Slater came to be the headmaster due to Mr Percy Willis Francis going into the Royal Air Force. Mr Slater lived near Alfreton, and he didn't own a car (not many people did in those days) he lodged in Chellaston from Mondays to Fridays. He was a kind and well liked teacher and was very fond of music. Unfortunately he had to leave the school when Mr Francis returned to the village after the war. The children collected, to buy him a leaving gift of music.

As a matter of interest, in those days, the teachers were paid their income in cash, delivered by an official who came from Duffield.

My first teacher was a Mrs Hodgkinson. She was very strict and sometimes would grab the hair of naughty pupils and give them bit of a swing round. How that would be looked on nowadays, I dread to think!

A 4" dia. hot water pipe ran around the room, a foot from the ground, connecting to the radiators. If a child was unfortunate enough to wet his or her pants, they would be told to sit on the pipes until dry!

Mrs Hodgkinson retired from the school in 1943 (I was chosen to present her with a bouquet and a little boy stood with me and said "These are from all the children with all our love" she was replaced by Mrs L. Gallagher who travelled by bus from the Kedleston Road area of Derby. She a was very popular teacher and stayed at Chellaston for many years.

Mr & Mrs Francis and their chow dogs lived in the school house. If we saw them in the street out of school hours, woe betide us the next day if we hadn't addressed them with "Good evening Madam – good evening Sir." She would nod her "Blonde" head and he would touch his peak.

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At least once a week after tea, you would see him walk down High St. to catch the bus into Derby – wearing his long RAF type raincoat and peaked hat, with a cane under his arm – on his way to train recruits. Gold rings and a bracelet adorned his person, plus a strong aroma of Cologne. In summer he never wore socks, and his hair colour matched “Madame”.

We had prayers and hymn singing each morning and a prayer at the end of the day. On Fridays we had to lift our chairs onto the desk tops so that the caretaker could clean the floors. Some of the girls would polish their desk lids, to see who got the best shine.

The “babies” as the 5 year olds were called, had twin desks on an iron frame, similar to the old treadle sewing machines. Ink wasn’t allowed until we were older, and it came in powder form which was mixed by the “Ink Monitor”, who then did the weekly top up of inkwells. A monitor also cleaned the blackboard. It was horrible if you were chosen to wash the dirty milk bottles every afternoon. The hot water soon got greasy, as “liquid bubbles” weren’t invented then. We also washed and dried the cardboard bottle tops so that we could make wool pompoms. There were always 2 milk monitors as the crates of “Empties” had to be carried outside, and they were quite heavy.

If you were a bright pupil, you could find yourself in the same class as children up to 2 years older than yourself. This was one way of “moving up” as there were not enough rooms to keep you all in age groups.

Each class had a Nature Table and would display jars of frogspawn, then we eagerly awaited the birth of the tadpoles. Sticky buds and catkins were always popular. We grew mustard and cress on damp blotting paper, kidney beans in old jam jars which were lined with blotting paper, and carrot tops sprouted as they floated in saucers of water.

On fine days, we sometimes went to Pit Close for our Nature lesson. The exercise books were ruled on one side for notes, and plain paper opposite for our drawings of flowers etc.

We also picked rosehips on “Pitty” and got paid 1d a pound for them. These were made into Rosehip Syrup for babies.

School dinner arrived about 10.30am in big metal containers which had to be re-heated by the 2 dinner ladies. I never had to stay at school for dinner as I only lived a couple of minutes away.

Twice a year Miss Avery (known as the Nit Nurse) would pay a visit to inspect our heads with a tweezer like object. She would always lift the hair of the girls up at the back to see if their necks were clean – or dirty in a few cases! Anything she “found” was noted in her record file. I think most children had a Friday night inspection with a toothcomb, bending over a page of newspaper. Nurse Avery later ran the baby clinic in the Methodist School Room.

The School Doctor also used the same room when he paid the yearly visit to examine and weigh us. It was very embarrassing for a little girl having to stand in just a vest and knickers, as one of the “Big Boys” (aged 10-11) was in charge of the queue. I can picture the scene now, as if it were only 1st year instead of nearly 50 years ago.

The school dentist was a big Polish man and we had to go to the clinic at the bottom of Walker Lane on the Trent bus. It cost 4d return (a pale green ticket) for children and 7d return (air force blue) for adults to go into Derby. A “Workman’s Return” ticket cost 6d and was pink. They travelled to Derby early and came back after 5pm.

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Some of us enjoyed going to the dentist as we were given a treat afterwards for being brave – in the form of a 6d jelly with a blob of mock cream on the top, served in Marks and Spencer cafeteria which was at the end of the shop where the Food Hall is now (1994 in St Peter's Street). In those days a 1<sup>st</sup> floor sales area didn't exist.

Going back to school activities – we had games lessons on the Flatts in summer and in the playground in winter – weather permitting. Sports days were also held there where we had such things as egg & spoon, sack and three legged races. Mr Walker kept his cows out of the way on such occasions!

At playtime we skipped, played with whips and tops, carefully chalking coloured patterns on the tops (window breakers and beehives), hopscotch, snobs and "marlies." The boys played a lot of football in their own playground & if the ball happened to go over the wall into Mr Harold Gresley's garden, they were lucky if they saw it again, as he kept all the stray balls in his shed. I've often wondered what happened to the collection over the years.

Concerts and Nativity plays were rehearsed much the same as today (1994), but we had to improvise more on costumes, as clothes were rationed, and "Make do and mend" was the norm. but we had such fun, and "boredom" was a word unheard of.

There was no such thing as a First Aid Room and if anyone had a broken bone etc. a teacher would take the child to the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary by bus! Up to the time of writing this article (1994) one teacher in particular can verify this as she personally took a boy there with a broken wrist. They set off at lunchtime and got back to his house at 5.30pm – by bus!

The toilet blocks were outside near a big sycamore tree, and the leaves and keys from the tree would land in the toilets in the autumn. The W.C.'s were very small, and the seats were just two ½ horseshoe shapes of wood, screwed to the pan rims. We had to trundle there in the snow, wind and rain, but no-one seemed to mind it was just accepted. It had to be, as there was no alternative, but many of the children were used to outside toilets at home.

The boundary line for pupils attending the school was Chestnut Ave. anyone beyond the canal bridge at Shelton Lock went to Carlton Ave school where Mr Rex was the Headmaster. Everyone walked to school, and back, and a lot went home at lunch-time, so they got good exercise. One family lived over the Bubble Fields at Swarkestone, and two more lived down Moor Bridge Cottages by the canal down Sinfin Moor Lane, so they all had a good walk.

On Monday mornings we took 6d or multiples of 6d to the teacher to buy National Savings Stamps. These were stuck onto a card or booklet until enough were saved for a National Savings Certificate – I think these cost 15/- each and were stuck into a blue pass book at the Post Office.

Apart from the regular school holidays we had half a day at Pancake Day, the same on Empire Day and on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> May we took Union Jacks to school and sang patriotic songs. May Day was celebrated with songs and flower-covered boughs. Two days in October were given, supposedly for Potato Picking – but I don't recall many doing that back aching work. At Halloween we would make lanterns out of mangolds and swedes which were given to us by Mr Harold Hicklin of Whitehouse Farm. If the string handles didn't cut through the lanterns, we would use them again on Bonfire Night, but if they split, we would patiently start carving out again with new ones.

There was always a large bonfire on the Green for Station Road children, but round the High Street area, we shared small ones in our gardens with neighbours, aunts and uncles etc. homemade toffee

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apples and baked potatoes were the order of the day (or night!) and 1d and 2d fireworks were about the limit to pay for each – a 4d one was really posh! A half crown box ordered from the paper shop weeks before the event was a treat to look forward to. The paperman was Jack Richards who lives at Shelton Lock, by Chestnut Avenue. He would arrive on his big delivery bike on Sunday mornings bringing not only papers, but comics which we always swapped after reading. For the adults, packets of Woodbines or whatever was available at the time, were hidden under his pile of papers for the “regular” customers.

After the excitement of the fireworks was over, the serious task of making paper chains from coloured gum squares was next on the list. We would spend hours cutting the paper into narrow strips, then licking and sticking until long lengths of garlands were complete. We made Chinese lanterns, Christmas cards for “Mum and Dad” and calendars for special aunts and grandparents – all very big secrets, although we went home covered in glue and glitter. In between all this activity, carols and plays were being rehearsed and old sheets or clothes begged or borrowed for the dressing up. After Christmas, the next treat on the calendar was the Panto at the Grand Theatre up Babington Lane. If the main seats weren’t available or were too expensive, people would queue for hours to sit up in “the Gods”. Dozens of stone steps had to be climbed to reach the top, and seats were just wooden boards in a semi-circle, also used as steps to climb down to the front row which had railings all round. The safety curtain was covered in coloured adverts of local shops. One that most people will remember was a man up a ladder sticking up bill posters. The curtains would rise, the lights go down – apart from a few gas mantles for safety round the walls, the band would strike up, and for the next couple of hours we were in another world of make believe.

Concerts and plays were also performed in the Methodist School Room. Only one set of scenery was available for everything – that consisted of a centre fireplace painted on the board, and a brown door each side of the stage which opened onto the “wings”. There was also a very old piano. This room was used for quite a few activities, including a Youth Club, Scottish and Country Dancing, The Produce Club Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Show, Library, Baby Clinic, Drs Surgeries, The National Deposit Friendly Society Insurance collected their dues on Saturdays each month, Sunday School, parties and of course the main one of all, Sunday School classes. The Anniversary was held in the chapel, and a platform was erected a week before the “Big Day” and we would proudly sit upon these wooden seats in our best dresses and shoes. The boys would have their hair plastered down, and best suits on. We sang our hearts out to our parents, with Mr Allsop beating time and beaming at us in thanks for many weeks of practicing, we then had the Sunday School Treat, we didn’t go anywhere, but had a party with food laid out on long trestle tables, followed by the usual games – the brass collection plate was used for Spinning the Plate game. We had our yearly prize giving of books, allocated according to how many stars you had stamped on your star card for attendance.

At the back of the chapel there was a nice tennis court (where the top of Manor Road is now). We spent hours watching the adults play – it was always the same group of about 8 that I recall. We didn’t associate the word “love” with the score – we thought it referred to the illicit romance that was going on between 2 of the members – as is usually the case, everyone knew about it but the poor husband! The courts were locked up after each evening’s play but some of the boys could climb over and have a go at being the future Fred Perry. That was until they were spotted by a certain lady from a back bedroom window – one look from her and a knock on the pane of glass, and they would scatter in seconds.

The Institute held Whist Drives, Dances and once a month on Monday evenings a film show was given – old Laurel & Hardy ones were popular. The film invariably snapped part way through, and

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clapping and stamping would begin. Most years a pantomime was performed by a group from Barrow on Trent. The same person played the good fairy every time, and the final song was always "Goodnight to you all, Goodnight, Goodnight". We always enjoyed it. St Peters Church Harvest Suppers were held there, followed by a little concert. At Christmas time the Bazaar always had a 3d Bran tub near the doorway, so everyone went home with a gift.

*Val Beniston*



The rear of the school 1998

## Memories of Chellaston Village School in the 1940s



The School House 1998



## Memories of Chellaston Village School in the 1940s



The School House with the school in the background 1998