



WORTON PAROCHIAL SCHOOL

The school was essentially one large room, divided by a partition. An old fashioned stove was found in the middle of each section. It was enlarged in 1896 and the alterations were undertaken by local builder James Holloway. The school house for the head teacher was also built by Holloway in that year. The house is now a residential one and known as the Old School House. It cost £250 to build.

In May 1909 there were 91 children on roll at the school. Three years later, the school log books note the loss of the Titanic in April 1912. At the turn of the century drinking water was provided at the school by rainwater collected in a barrel. This included all the insects and dirt which found its way in. There was one tin mug attached to the barrel for everyone to use.

Attendance was very important to those running the school for it had an effect on how much money the school received in grants. It is therefore understandable why the head teachers over

the years almost obsessively recorded how many children had attended school and noted down reasons for absences. The main reasons for mass absences were the weather, work and illness. In the autumn and winter of 1905, there was an outbreak of diphtheria in the parish, which meant there were several periods of school closure. Several children died. On 6 April 1908, the head mistress wrote: "Several cases of Scarlatina amongst the school children. The consequent unwillingness of the parents to send their children to school resulted in a very bad attendance the last two or three days." Whooping cough, mumps, measles and influenza were also very common. On 30 July 1920, a child called Eva Holloway, aged seven years, died from blood poisoning.

Children often had to go to work, especially in the hay making season and for picking and planting potatoes. On 26 April 1912, the head mistress wrote: "Several boys and one girl kept at home this week potato dropping for other people, contrary to the Children's Employment Act." There were

occasions when the school was shut for a half holiday; this could be because of a national event, or equally could be a local one. In June 1911 the school was shut for a week because of the coronation of George V. In February 1912, the children were given a half holiday so that they could go into Devizes to see the Town Criers' contest. In the autumn of 1918, the children had several days off to go "blackberrying".

Physical punishment was common. The head-teacher at the start of the 20th century frequently reports in the log books that she has caned the children, mainly for "disobedience and disorder". On 9 October 1907, she wrote: "Five boys were caned for throwing stones from the road in front of the school into the playground."

The various reports from visiting inspectors were extremely varied. His Majesty's Inspector in February 1914 wrote: "The main room is overcrowded and the desks are so arranged that the children cannot easily be reached by the teacher. The cloakroom accommodation is inadequate and unsatisfactory, and there is no exit from the playground or cloakroom for the elder boys except through the school room." A report from 1921 was much more positive and read: "At every visit of inspection paid since 1912 there have been the same marked features in this school - the energetic, carefully planned work of the head teacher and her assistant, the excellent order and pleasing tone of the children and their acquisition of desirable habits such as steady application to their tasks." The diocesan report from September 1930 was as follows: "A marked advance in religious knowledge was noticeable in this school since my last visit. Discipline was perfect, and answers to questions were intelligent, particularly in group 1, in which the scholars showed how perfectly they had assimilated the work of a very full and admirably presented syllabus."

There are only a few passing references to the two World Wars in the school log books. The first is somewhat vague and simply reads: "Chrissie Coleman at home nearly two weeks, because grandmother is ill and they have soldiers." In January 1916, "the children are sewing and knitting for the troops" and in September of that year: "Commenced 12 Red Cross triangular bandages and knitting unique socks for a London hospital for supplying artificial limbs." In September 1939, 12 evacuees arrived at the school from London.