

Dave Rumbold's Memories of East Clandon Village School

I attended East Clandon Church of England Primary School throughout World War 2. It was a two-room school for the education of all village boys and girls between ages 5 and 11. Its headmistress was a Miss Lake, who drove in daily from Godalming in her pre-war black Morris 6. The other teacher was a Miss Holland, but she left before I did.

As I remember, Miss Lake's desk was up on a low stage at the East end of the main East-West building, under the large window. She had an old two-piece black telephone with a separate earpiece and its mouthpiece pivoting on top of the base. This ancient relic was kept hidden under a yellow duster. It rarely rang, except when someone unknown checked to see if everything was OK after air raids. Being close to London, we often experienced several air raid warnings a week, during which we would all huddle under a large table set against the South wall. Miss Lake would distribute sweets for us to chew on while wearing our gasmasks (each child had to carry one to school in a brown cardboard box). As a precaution against glass shards from bomb blast, all of the school's windows were criss-crossed with brown-paper sticky tape. Although the village was never bombed in daylight, we certainly saw and heard the Battle of Britain going on overhead.

The school's North-South wing was separated from the main building by folding doors. It was used mainly by Miss Holland for teaching the junior children but, as their numbers dropped, so did the use of that room. Perhaps the diminishing student body explains why Miss Holland left.

Eventually, the school's eight or ten students were all accommodated in the main schoolroom. This meant that the younger children were able to listen to the older ones being taught. It also permitted greater-than-normal attention to individual students by the teacher. During my subsequent education at Guildford Grammar School, I was surprised to be taught very little more English grammar than I had first learned from Miss Lake at East Clandon School.

Heating for the entire building was provided by one small coke stove, located on the south wall of the main schoolroom. When the daily school milk delivery arrived in winter, your bottle could be placed on top of the stove if you so wished. I don't know which was worse --frozen milk or boiling milk.

Being a Church of England school, we were honoured by occasional visits from the Rector, the Rev. Arthur Plumtre Glyn. A sombre, tall, gaunt and very old man dressed entirely in black, he scared the living daylight out of us all with his heavy-handed Victorian lectures.

We had two playgrounds outside, each with its own set of non-flush toilets smelling heavily of creosote and other things. There was a small flower garden extending Westwards from the South playground, and a larger vegetable garden running south from that alongside the cemetery. Students planted vegetables there during the war. Our sloping North playground was used as a slide during winter frosts.

"The Rec" (the village Recreation Ground) was directly across the lane from the school. Like the school itself, 60 years ago it looked much like it does today. The walnut trees lining the road were a much sought-after so added calories during Britain's wartime rationing. Fortunately, no one was injured as we threw sticks up to down the walnuts, or as we climbed the branches.

I have a photograph of my wife's youngest sister, Yvonne, as East Clandon School's Queen of the May in the early 1950's, but other than that we have no photographs taken there. Photography was an expensive and rare luxury during the wartime austerity.

I was invited into the Old School a few years ago (after it had been converted into a private residence), and was surprised to see that its windowsills were much lower than I had remembered them. Perhaps that's because I'm now over 6-ft tall compared to my height as a boy.

Hoping that you will enjoy my childhood reminiscences as much as I have enjoyed recalling them,

Sincerely,
Dave Rumbold
Ottawa
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