

The Life of a Schoolteacher

Mr. Malpass, ex-teacher of Samuel White's School, relates how he came to Hanham, and describes the typical school timetable:

After being trained as a teacher at St Paul's College, Cheltenham, I commenced my duties in this capacity at the All Standard Department of Samuel White's School, Hanham, on the 1st of October, 1927. This school provided accommodation for mixed pupils from the age of seven to fourteen years. There were seven classes, labelled standards 1 to 7. The number of pupils reached as many as fifty in some of the classes. The children were placed in the forms according to their ability, ranging from 7 to 11 years in all classes. The school day started at 9 00am with registration in each class, following the assembly of all the pupils in the hall, where the Headmaster conducted a religious service consisting of prayers and the singing of hymns. The children then returned to their respective classrooms for a lesson of thirty minutes, based on the study of the Holy Bible. Every class then spent some forty-five minutes on arithmetic. At 10.45am the whole school took a break for a quarter of an hour. The period from 11.00am to 12 noon was chiefly given over to academic studies, comprising the teaching of English (reading and essay), History, Geography and Nature Study, interspersed with Physical Education in the playground, weather permitting. The dinner time from 12noon to 1.30pm followed. Most children travelled home to have lunch, but a few, particularly from distant parts, brought sandwiches. The only drinks available were from the cold water taps in the two cloakrooms.

The afternoon session, lasting from 1.30 pm to 4 o'clock, commenced with registration, and was given over to cultural subjects and crafts. This part of the curriculum embraced Music, Needlework, Science, Handwork and, in part, Physical Education again. Caning, which I regret to say was given chiefly for a low standard of work rather than misbehaviour, was administered by the headmaster. The conduct of the pupils was generally very good, and it was comparatively easy for the caring teacher — there were some exceptions to this label — to establish a friendly relationship with the children.

I made myself responsible for the promotion of sporting activities for both boys and girls. These comprised football for the boys and athletics for the girls. We competed on a friendly basis against other local schools on Saturday mornings and some evenings. An attendance officer, now known as a Welfare officer, and then called a 'Board-man' by the parents, checked up on absenteeism by the pupils. A father, always responsible for his child's attendance, was occasionally taken to Staple Hill Magistrate's Court and prosecuted for unsatisfactory attendance. At the age of 11 • children sat an examination which admitted a limited number to Kingswood Grammar School.

The Samuel White's Infants was a separate school, admitting children aged 3 to 7 years. They were mixed schools, joined together as one building. The site is now occupied by the Library and Youth Club.

Two similar Church of England schools lay at the junction of Church and Memorial Roads, whilst in Hanham Road stood a senior girls school, a senior boys school, and a mixed infants school side by side.



Samuel White's School — Infants 1933-

J Shepherd, L Cox, K Davies, J Burgess,
5 Holden, B Green, , D Beese, , , , J Hooper,
D Noble, K Comley, I Curtis, I Andrews, K Luffman, , R Davey,
P Baker, K Gerrish, P Hard wick, J Britton, , J Britten, V Willing,
F Hooper, , T Hooper, U Newman, U Bull, I Salter, I Godwin.

On the 1st August, 1930, the schools in the area were re-organised. Samuel White's Senior School became a mixed junior school, admitting pupils aged 7+ to 11+ years, whilst the Hanham Road Girls and Boys schools became purely Senior schools, admitting pupils aged 11 + to 14 years from the Samuel White's Mixed Junior School and Kingswood High Street mixed junior school. On the 15th June 1936, the newly built Junior School of Hanham Abbots was opened and staff and pupils were transferred from Samuel White's Junior School, when the whole of Samuel White's building was handed over to the Mixed Infants. Pupils at this period who passed a Scholarship Examination at the junior schools were admitted to the recently built Kingswood Mixed Grammar School.

Recollections of a First Day Pupil

What was school life like from the other side of the desk? Here, W W Brown recalls his first day at school:

Somehow the cross roads of the High Street and Creswicke Avenue provided a magic corner. Hanham was still a village, and here, where The tram lines ended, the four corners of the streets had their own identity and atmosphere. The 'Doctor's' was on the corner opposite the present surgery, and where the chemist shop now stands was a small paddock in which an old donkey grazed only to be disturbed by the local paper- man, Mr Daiziel, who had an almighty voice and who would call his customers to his wheelchair shouting the odds of the latest editions of the Evening World or the Evening Post Behind him, and much in his shadow, Mrs Hayman, the fish lady, would be offering her fresh hake and cod in a funny, stuttering staccato. On the opposite corner, across the end of the line, the 'Welcome Cafe' offered broken biscuits at a halfpenny a bag. The last of the corners was dominated by 'Sammy White's'.

I was introduced to Sammy White's at the tender age of three and half years, no apprenticeships in playgroups, they had not been invented. Teachers were 'paid by results', therefore, if you were fortunate enough to have an older sibling who showed promise, then you were 'called for'. It was in the company of my older sister that I was introduced to the wonders of the small, shallow baking tins tilled with damp sand in which we drew our numbers and letters with our forefinger, then to tap the side and like magic erase everything and start again with a clean sheet. We danced round the Maypole in the big hall and after a story in the afternoon it was arms folded and heads down for a sleep. Later we wrote on real paper, with awkward pens that were dipped into some nondescript liquid, resembling dirty water which issued forth from some kind of oil can carried by the ink monitor. Miss Mason would send us to the desk of Miss Fish the headmistress and tell us to stand on the right hand side of the desk or the left hand side of the desk. One side was equipped with large bottle of boiled sweets, and on the other side of the desk hung a cane with a curved handle. Each represented a lust reward; we all soon learned our right from our left

In the 'big school', which was the PNEU, we were trained for the scholarship with Picture Study, Copper-plate handwriting lessons, still the same ink, Paper Craft for the boys, Needlework for the girls, and Drill for everyone on the bumpy, uneven playground separated from the main road by stark iron railings. No wonder our imaginations ran riot when a new school began taking shape at the bottom of Creswicke Avenue in the large field we called 'thirty acres'. It was here that Alan Cobham brought his Air Show, with five shilling flights in Tiger Moths and we thrilled to the sight of the motor bike racing on a huge dirt track.

Would we be able to see all these marvels from our classroom windows? What would we miss? The sloping floor in the rear classroom of the old school, where the knots in the floor were raised well above the softer timber that had worn away around them. These proved to be one of our delights, much to the annoyance of the member of staff. A combination of the knots and the iron frames of our double desks made an ideal bagatelle board laid out like a large map on the floor. Therefore, if you were seated at the back of the room, which was the highest point, it was your duty, usually during the History lesson, to quietly place a large marble or ball bearing onto the floor. Gravity did the rest. It was a slow start with a tinkle, a rumble, a thud from a knot, but gradually the pace quickened and the music became more audible and the smiles on the faces would reach their limit before the offending object would finally come to rest near the free standing blackboard, or if you were really lucky, at the feet of the teacher.

March 1936 saw the scholarship come and go. We had written the essays demanded of us, completed the sums with fractions and decimals and some of us had been called to the Grammar School for an interview. Sammy White's had done all it could for us. It was now our turn to repay, and the new school offered the opportunity. A great deal of the traffic was still horse drawn, apart from the trams. The avenues on the left hand side of Creswicke Avenue as you approached the school were just being developed and all the land behind the school was the green of thirty acres punctuated only here and there with various modes of dwellings, like Johnny Salter's cottage, which stood across the road from Hanham Hall. The hills were green and untouched, the Little Woods capping the southern end; Fussells Field had not yet given way to the Tudor domination and Peacock's market garden stretched across the area now given over to Woodyleaze Drive. Victoria Road, like Beechwood Avenue, was a cul-de-sac. It was this quiet, village backcloth that enabled us to convey with a great deal of gusto most of the books that had to be transported down the Avenue to the new building. We brought our array of transport, handcarts and the like, but the classic way was the dilly. A board with a box on the back and two sets of pram wheels, the rear ones set but the front ones allowed to swivel and be manoeuvred with a length of rope. It was upon these 'Austin l's' that the insecure loads of learning were transported at a pace which took us through the school gates and up to the doors of the palatial building

We were the top form and I seem to remember that we moved in a little earlier than the rest because we could be of service in what we looked upon as paradise. The green of the grass, the new flat playground, the smell of new paint, the long, to us, endless corridors, and a Staff Room. We found out about the Staff Room later. Our year was governed by seasons: pecking with cigarette cards, marbles, conkers, dilly making, hopscotch, whiptops, and the inevitable cricket and football. All these we played in the street with no one saying when each season started or finished, except perhaps the lamplighter would give us a clue when, on the way home from school,

we would observe him with his bicycle and long flint pole which penetrated the underside of the glass hood to light the delicate gas lantern underneath. Our stomachs were our clocks, no one had a digital watch, for which you still require two hands to tell the time. "They'll come home when them's 'ungry'" was the order of the day, and it worked. No television as a distraction to our evenings, we could still listen to the radio if the battery and the accumulator were still functioning. We wanted to engage in all of our pursuits at once in our newly found space, but the first summer term we restricted ourselves to cricket in the wide open spaces and realised we could play "strong and weak horses" without being battered and bruised by an unyielding playground. A pattern began to emerge, a long walk to school sucking the spoonful of cod liver oil and malt that was given to us as we left home, morning lessons, PE in the hall, or games on the grass and then a new venture. It was decided that the school needed a good radio set and so the first public concert was arranged when we would perform part of 'Midsummer Night's Dream'. We played the play within the play. I do not remember that the play meant much to us but I do remember walking up and down to school and scuffing the blakeys in my boot heels so that they sparked on the flagstones, and this to the funny sounding lines of Bottom the Weaver. The Staff Room was our dressing room and, as I mounted the stairs to go on stage and wearing the asses head which was too large, very hot and with the eye holes in the wrong place, I wondered why I was not outside on such a glorious summer's evening. We raised enough money for the radio, everyone said it was a great performance, the Hall was packed, but I remember most of all the smell inside that papier mache head and the fact that I could not see the audience at all through the eye slits of the ass.

We travelled the avenue four times a day, no school dinners, so it was all home to lunch and back in time for the afternoon school, except the day when the tram ran through on the lines and we were transfixed by the efforts of the big burly men struggling to ease this ship of the line back on to course. We were twenty minutes or so late and it must have been one line of blakey sparks all the way down the avenue when we realised that the hush from the playground was rather foreboding. I do not remember the consequences.

In July 1944, Mr. Routley, who had been head of Sammy White's and now head of Hanham Abbots, asked me to go and see him in his bungalow at the top of Wesley Avenue. He was seriously ill, but still very concerned about 'his school'. They were very short of staff, most of the men had been called up, and as I had just completed my training at Loughborough, could I help? Later, in October of that year, in the top classroom nearest the cycle sheds, where we had played pecking with our cigarette cards, I took over a class of well over forty pupils from the lady who had trained me for the scholarship, a dear soul named Mrs. Williams. As a new teacher I was also responsible to Mr. Malpass, who was now deputy head and who had taught us how to play football in the playground at Sammy's.

Going into the army in the following December broke my ties with the school, but I was to return as a parent to observe my own children taking part in school productions and sports days. Thus, for me, the new school, Hanham Abbots, has always had a high place in my affection and some of the original magic will always remain.