

## Measles, mumps ... and frozen ink

**K**IDS today – they don't know how good they've got it! That goes for teachers too! That's the conclusion I came to when looking through Lamyatt School Logs. The following notes are taken from the years 1873 to 1931.

For those who don't know, Lamyatt is a small Somerset parish near Bruton and what was once the school serves now as the village hall. The first headmistress in the books was Ann JENEWAY, who taught until 1891. Then came Mrs TAPLEY (1891-1901), Georgina GREENWOOD (1901-1906), D. BEILBY (1806-1914), A. M. ROACH (1914-1918), Ada BUCK (1918-1930) and Annie G. RICH (1930-1931).

The number of children varied from about 25 to 62. How so many could have fitted into such a small building is difficult to imagine. Certainly overcrowding was one of the problems faced, with all children residing outside the parish having to leave in 1903 to reduce numbers.

A report on the school in 1909 finds the work was carried on under depressing and uncomfortable conditions, with no cloakroom, lavatory or playground. These were, however, added at a later date. It was also noted that the paint needed washing. The dirty conditions were still prevalent in March two years later when the floor hadn't been cleaned since Christmas.

The cold was a continual problem for the school, with frequent low temperatures being recorded. On 5 March 1909 it was 32 degrees Fahrenheit at 9.30 and it hadn't reached 40 by the end of the day. In February 1895 "the ink in the wells being frozen and the children's hands so cramped with cold, they cannot use pens or pencils". After this in 1891 a boy was paid to light a fire but this often did not happen and then the stove smoked badly when the wind was in a certain quarter. This of course did not help problems of damp and thus we read of the necessity of drying the books out before use. The children must have been a hardy bunch. In 1903, however, William GARLAND was absent with chilblains as he was unable to put on his boots. In 1931 Jack Garland was away as he had developed blood poisoning from a chilblain.

Throughout this period various other reasons were given for low attendance. There were frequent outbreaks of whooping cough, measles, mumps, scarlatina, ringworm and chicken pox, not to mention of course the colds, which are ever present today. In 1898 13 children

were away with ringworm. In 1901 the NEWPORT family were all absent "with dirty heads". In 1903 Eric NEWTON was away with a boil on his cheek! In 1896 Job SHEEN broke his arm and was exempted for 5 weeks. In 1903 Lily WHITE was absent – both her feet were badly scalded. Other reasons include bad weather, flooding and heavy falls of snow, haymaking, apple picking and picking up potatoes. In 1897 Mr COX withdrew Frederick, Ernest and Reginald White during the playtime "without my knowledge and kept them apple picking until 11.40."

During much of this time the school was visited by the GUYON family. In 1898 Rev. Guyon recorded his concerns about the effects modern practices were having on country life. He deplores the "present craze for teaching children things they do not want to know". This prevents "them from learning, at the only age when they properly can learn, the duties of an agricultural labourer," which in turn is "gradually but surely depriving the country districts of the best labour and leading to the universal migration to towns. It is surely advisable that boys should be fitted for a useful and healthy life when they grow up". He doesn't mention the girls!

The children were taught about our major British historical figures, as well as

object lessons on eg cotton, the elephant or coffee. At one time geography was "inexcusably weak" (1909) and still in 1930 "even senior children did not know how to find Somerset on a map of England". They learned many songs, including what would be considered today a most politically incorrect action song "10 Little Niggers". Empire Day in 1916 saw the children hoisting the Union Jack, singing songs (patriotic), marching past the flag and saluting. During World War I the children were busy knitting the soldier's socks and scarves and giving money for Christmas puddings. They were given an extra week's holiday in 1918 in honour of the celebration of peace.

In this way the children were educated to go out into the world – like Grace GOODLAND who went into service in Batcombe Vicarage, aged just 14 years.

This is just a fraction of what can be found when we start to delve into the historical sources, some of which can bring on a sense of nostalgia for years gone by, some the exact opposite!

*Jennifer Richards, Montgomery, Lamyatt,  
Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6NH  
jenniferarichards@yahoo.co.uk*



*Taken around 1920. In the picture (back row) Violet Hix, Edna Richards, Gladys Gillian, Frances Goodland, Mildred Goodland, Winnie Isgrove.*

*(second row) George Griffin, George Ryall, Alf Isgrove, Maurice Richards, Austin Kelly, William Baker*

*(third row) John Hix, Emily Goodland, Olive Garland, Jessie Richards on lap of Bessie Goodland, Mollie Thorn, Miss Buck (headmistress), Winnie Goodland, Margaret Baker, Dora Richards, Florence Baker, Reginald Padfield*

*(front) Violet Stephens, ? Painter, Mary Ryall*