

Honor Benton (nee Dawson)

This document was found in the old school as it was being converted to the Village Hall and was written for a school project in the early 70's after she retired in 1971. She was awarded the MBE for services to education. She was born at Brown Edge in 1901 and lived at Brookfield, St Anne's Vale, and taught at Brown Edge for over twenty years, until re-organisation took place in 1939. She then moved to Endon Secondary School. She married Mr John Benton, also a teacher at Brown Edge and Endon. After the death of her husband in 1963, Mrs Benton continued to live at Brookfield with two of her sisters, Eunice and Mary. She died in 1983.

If you were to read in a book about what happened in Brown Edge 60 to 70 years ago, you would have no idea how far back that was, but if I told you that I was a child in this school over 60 years ago, you might get a clearer picture of time. I once asked a class in this school to write what they thought Brown Edge was like 100 years ago and I was astounded to find that they thought people would be running round in skins of animals. I soon explained that my father and grandfather were living 100 years ago and didn't wear skins. 60, 70 or 100 years isn't a very long time but a lot of changes have taken place.

I suppose, really, I should begin to tell you a little of what I remember about my earliest days at school. Today children don't go to school until they are 5, but I went when I was 4 **Y**ears and 1 month old so I don't remember much about it.

The Infants School was in Church Road, or Lane Ends as we called it, and it is where Merle Harvey now lives. There was no playground, so we were sent into the road to play. There was no supervision but there was not much danger as there were no motor cars. Occasionally a horse and cart could be seen but they moved slowly and we could easily get out of the way.

When I was 6 years old I left the Infants School and came to the Big School. I suppose was called Big because bigger children attended it. In those days children didn't go to Endon Secondary School when they were 11, but stayed until they were old enough to go to work. As soon as a child's 13th birthday arrived, he would go the headmaster and say 'Please sir, will you look to see if I have made my times?' Then the headmaster would look in the registers to see how many attendances had been made and if the correct number had been made, the child could leave. My parents left school when they were 10.

This school was very much smaller than it is now. The present hall was one classroom containing about four classes and there were two small rooms. The entrance to the school was facing School Bank. In one room was the school bell, pulled by a rope, to ring twice in the morning, once at a quarter to nine and again at 9 o'clock. As it was a Church school the Vicar came every morning to open school and every evening to close school. The children were divided into classes called standards ranging from Standard 0, which contained the backward children, many of whom stayed there until they left school, to standard 7 or Ex.7.

The rooms were furnished with long desks each holding 4 or 5 children. In these desks were slots in which slates were placed, for most of the written work was done on slates to save the expense of paper. There wasn't much money allowed for education and so paper and books were very scarce. The work on slates was done with slate pencils, which was a piece of slate in the form of a pencil to write down our sums. The teacher came round with a piece of chalk and marked them right or wrong.

While I was at school, slates were banned for health reasons. To clean a slate, you need a duster but this does not fetch off all the marks so children used to spit on the slates and wipe it off with their own duster, but if they hadn't one the boys would use their jacket sleeves and the girls used their pinafores. This of course, was unhygienic, and so slates were banned. When the slate pencils became blunt they were sharpened by rubbing them on a stone window sill and this made grooves in the stone. There is one of these sills showing the grooves in the hall but it has now been painted over. The slate pencils had another use. There were no school meals provided so the children who lived a distance from the school had to bring sandwiches. The children didn't like this in the cold weather so they used to bring bread and butter sandwiches, take a slate pencil from the cupboard, push it through the bread and toast it in front of a big blazing fire. This was called French toast. There was no supervision by the staff.

There was no water laid on at the school and if we wanted a drink we would take a medicine bottle to Stone House well and fill it with water and drink it. Again there was no supervision although it was an open well.

The lessons at school were very different from what they are today. Every morning for the first lesson we had Scripture or Religious Instruction, the rest of the morning was spent with the 3Rs. For most of the other lessons we had to learn by heart. Our geography lessons consisted of learning the names and locations of capes and bays, tributaries of rivers or the peaks in the mountain ranges, e.g. Flamborough Head and Spurn Head in

Yorkshire, Lowestoft in Sussex, the Naze in Essex, North Foreland and South Foreland in Kent. or Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe, Aire, Don, Calder (tributaries of the Yorkshire Ouse).

I had a sister much older than I who told me that when she was at school only boys learnt Geography while the girls did Needlework. This was understandable in a way because Needlework was very important to a girl then. Remember there was very little entertainment for people in those days. There was no radio, no television, no cars or buses to take them out of the village, so in the evening the girls spent their time in knitting, darning and sewing. If they wanted new clothes they couldn't jump on a bus and go to Hanley to Marks and Spencers because there were no buses and no Marks and Spencers as such. Even if they possessed a horse and trap, the only clothes they could afford to buy would be badly made or of poor quality so usually the clothes were made at home or by the village dressmaker.

Children in school were not as fortunate as children today. The girls didn't have two or three summer dresses and two or three winter dresses. Because money was very scarce, and there were no family allowances, girls would have one thicker frock in the spring and this would last all the year for best wear, and then be taken for school-wear the next year. It was very necessary to keep these frocks clean because if they were washed they would shrink badly. So every child wore a print pinafore. The boys wore short trousers, jackets without a collar, and stiff white collars. Eton style.

No boy wore long trousers until he went to work. The girls wore long hair, tied back with a bow of ribbon. Almost all the boys and some of the girls wore clogs because they were cheap, waterproof and durable and were suited for the rough stony roads. The clogs had iron tips renewed by the village clogger.

When the children were ready to leave school, the teachers would know what the children would do. As there were no buses or cars, the work for the boys would have to be within walking distance. It was no good getting a job in Leek or Hanley or Burslem because it would be too far to walk there in the morning and back again at night, so apart from the odd butcher's boy or farm labourer, all the boys went to Whitfield, to work in the coal mine. They came home with black faces because there were no pit baths.

If a girl could not stay at home to keep mother, there was nothing for the girls except domestic service. This meant that a girl would get a job as a domestic servant at a house, perhaps in Endon or Leek, or Burslem and she would live in, coming home perhaps every other Sunday, but even then she had to be back by 9pm. She had to work hard, scrubbing floors, washing or cleaning grates, and for very little wages. There were no washers or vacuum cleaners, or any other labour saving devices. When the buses came after the First World War all this was changed.

Nearly all the people in the village spoke dialect. In school proper English was spoken but the moment the children were released, dialect was used. Some of the older people couldn't speak English as it is used today. It is only since people have been able to get out of the village that dialect has become less frequently used and although many people still use it, they can also speak correctly.