



ST. MATTHEW'S C. OF E. SCHOOL, CAINSCROSS.

Cainscross School

60 years ago

SO THE old stone Church of England primary school at Cainscross is coming to the end of its career in the world of education. The "News and Journal" has informed us that because work on constructing a new C. of E. Junior School was ahead of schedule, it might be possible to transfer pupils there before the end of the 1984 summer term and either sell or dismantle the old building for housing purposes.

All this immediately set my mind working on childhood memories of school life at Cainscross, a feeling not entirely without sadness for dear, dim days beyond recall. And what days some of them were.

I was just five years old and the year 1916 when, shepherded by an older brother and sister, I was taken to school for the first time and enrolled in the infants department. It was not many days later when I removed myself at play-time and set off home, determined to end this school nonsense for good. Naturally, I was found and brought back and it was not long before I had, with all the others, become accustomed to the routine and began my introduction to the "Three Rs".

Miss Hopson, who shared a home at Paganhill with her builder brother, Fritz, was in charge of the department and I recall that among her assistants were Miss Sophie King and pupil teacher Margaret Hemming.

TAUGHT TO SING

Memories of those early days are nebulous but I do recall vividly the singing lessons in which we were familiarized with the Tonic Sol-fa system of musical notation.

Music played a big part in daily life at Cainscross School thanks to the encouragement given by headmaster A. J. "Johnnie" Dee, a great man in his way.

Mr. Dee ruled his school firmly but fairly. There was no nonsense while he was around but those fortunate to come

However, we children were encouraged to help the war effort by being given time off to walk up to Randwick Woods — which were being stripped of timber — and there fill our boxes and baskets with the luscious blackberries which were covering the freshly growing brambles. These blackberries were, we believed, to be turned into jam for our soldiers.

Back at school Mr. Dee would preside over a set of scales in an outhouse, weigh our spoils and pay a few coppers each by way of reward. My own efforts amounted to little largely because of my extreme youth and an insatiable appetite for the delicious blackberries.

I never entered Mr. Dee's class because of my age but I do recall the extraordinary quality of the information the hard-working staff tried to drum into us.

We were given novels by Sir Walter Scott to read and generally hated them, although I do recall some interest in the odd goings-on of the Cornish gentleman Tressilian and the magic Wayland Smith. Quite recently I went back to "Kenilworth" the novel in which these characters appear, and read it once again. Not bad, but not a patch of the tales woven by another Scots author of a later period — Robert Louis Stevenson.

more senior school I was not too badly equipped by my years at Cainscross C of E Elementary School. Certainly I could read with ease by the age of six and I could also write but never, in spite of all the years which have passed since, have I really developed "a good round hand".

External events in those war days were exciting. We could see the flames shooting from the furnaces at Dudbridge Ironworks as we made our way to school and, sometimes, our ears were assaulted by the roar of aero-engines on the test-bench. I believe I am right in saying that this was the only time when such engines were manufactured in Stroud. One model coming from Dudbridge was the French Salmson and there is one bearing a plate indicating its place of origin in the Science Museum.

WILD EXCITEMENT

Although children were well aware of the great events going on in the wider world and there was wild excitement at eleven o'clock on the morning of November 11th, 1918, when the Armistice was announced. Boys rushed into the yard and the bigger ones threw their hats in the air.

We were given the rest of the day off but not before we had been marshalled into St. Matthews Church across the

all were seeing at the hours of twilight. We children knew better. The glow came from the burning of huge dumps of cordite at the Quedgeley filling factory where so many of the female population had found well-paid work in the latter part of the war. No heavenly sign this but an accurate indication that the war was truly over.

At this point I would like to mention that across the road from the church, behind a high brick wall, was a house of a gentleman who ran a successful toy-making business in Gloucester. It was to his garden that I went as a child to a fete on a scale beyond my wildest dreams. It was a lovely day and, on one lawn, suitably costumed boys and girls were carrying out the manoeuvres involved in "Living Whist". The same gardens have long been turned over to housing.

FULL OF ACTIVITY

Our daily walks to school from Paganhill were always full of interest and sometimes excitement. Cuckold's Brook, emerging from the pond at Carpenter's Brewery, could always guarantee some excitement and the comings and goings at Cainscross Co-operative Stores then ruled by Branwell Hudson and at the height of its prosperity, had

while he was around but those fortunate to come under his sway went away enriched with the basics of a good education. Music, and especially choral singing, was one aspect of the curriculum.

Just fancy. I was ten when sent to another centre of learning but, by then, I had learnt to sing or hum snatches from the "Huntsman's Chorus" from Weber's "Der Freischutz", several settings to lines by Shakespeare and some of the sea songs of Charles Dibdin including everyone's favourite, "Tom Bowling". There were many other songs and ballads to delight us in our young days which have never been completely forgotten. I must confess, however, that the part Weber and Charles Dibdin played in all this did not dawn on me until years later.

UNDERNOURISHED

The year 1916 was set in the middle of the devastating First World War. I have in my possession school photographic groups taken at that time and it is obvious that many of the children were undernourished. This, no doubt, was due to a generally low standard of living amongst working class people and the absence of a proper system of food rationing until the last year of the conflict, 1918.

— Robert Louis Stevenson.

ANOTHER DISCOVERY

Shakespeare was another discovery and, generally, much disliked. Some bits stuck including a song from "Cymbeline" and odd lines from "The Merchant of Venice". All this was before one had reached ten years of age!

History was not neglected. "Our Sea Power" was an early paper-back written by H. W. Household, the country's secretary for education and illustrated with pictures from the respective period. The one which fixed in my mind depicted Horatio Nelson boarding a great Spanish four-decker in the Battle off Cape St. Vincent in 1797. Just as well I remembered. It was the fight which made the little admiral a national hero.

Nor must I forget "Picture Study" for whose bright idea was it to try and introduce us poor little mites to the world masterpieces of art by means of small poorly printed black and white reproductions? The only one I remember was the "Adoration of the Lamb" by Hubert van Eyck. Probably this was because of its extraordinary subject and amazing composition. As a child it repelled and fascinated me.

So, when the time came for me to go to a

— Marshall into St. Matthews Church across the way, there to hear a suitable address, by the well known bachelor vicar, the Rev. Wilkinson Storey.

At Christmas that year came a celebration much more to the liking of a child and especially one who had lived through the rigours of the greatest war in history. This was the Cossham tea to which all the scholars were invited and which was served in the largest classroom area of the school.

Many years before a worthy citizen named Cossham left a sum of money to produce income sufficient to give a tea, each Christmas, to the children of Cainscross. The occasion I remember was at the end of 1918 when the good things piled on the tables, and especially some fine, fruity buns, were treasure indeed.

Eminent citizens from round about came to view the scene and to make suitable speeches. One such was Mr. Curtis, partner in the Dudbridge textile firm of Apperley and Curtis. He lived in a big house in the Cashes Green road and was driven round in a horse-drawn carriage.

NOT FROM HEAVEN

This Mr. Curtis saw heavenly intervention in the wonderful displays of glowing light which

— Hudson and at the height of its prosperity, had much to take the attention of a child. This was scarcely less for Mr. Mabbett's butcher's shop on the opposite side of the road.

Back on the other side, and a few yards nearer school, was the penny bazaar with its wonderful collection of sweet things including enormous "gob-stoppers" and occasionally, dried locust beans on which, we were told St. John the Baptist lived when in the desert. We liked the sweetness but felt sorry St. John could not benefit from good English fare!

One more memory of my Cainscross C of E days . . . we arrived at the Whitehorse crossroads one morning to find the place crowded with uniformed policemen. Never had we seen anything like it and curious young enquirers soon elicited the reason for their presence. Topless, one of the very first car bandits had been seen in the area and "they" the police, were out to get him. Actually he was caught some time later in Border country.

My memories cover but a short period in the history of this fine old school which, I imagine, corresponds in age with the parish church. It would be interesting to hear what other readers recall of their time there.

J.B.J.