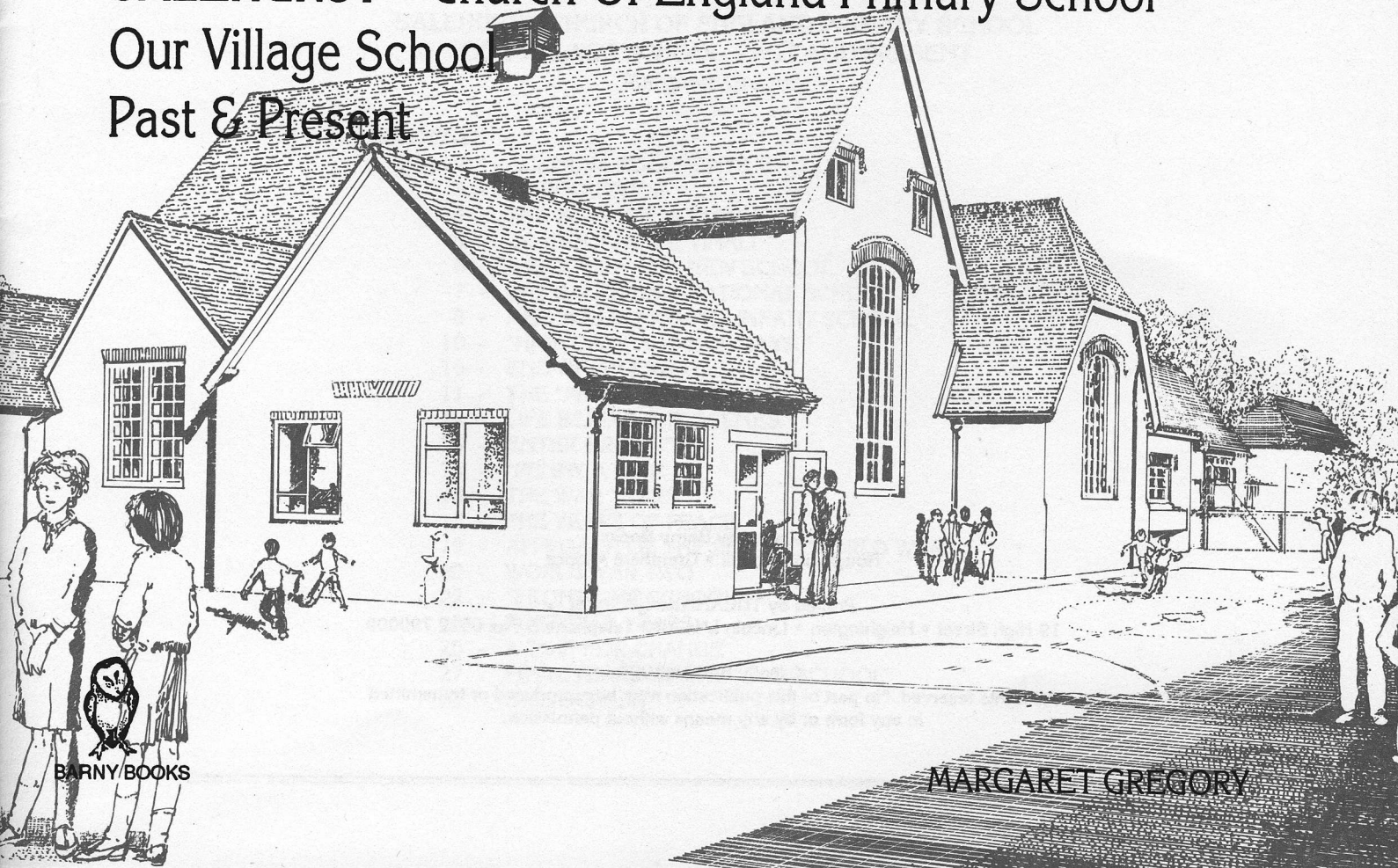


SALEHURST - Church Of England Primary School

Our Village School

Past & Present



BARNY BOOKS

MARGARET GREGORY

SALEHURST CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL
OUR VILLAGE SCHOOL, PAST AND PRESENT

Margaret Gregory

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first became interested in the history of the Salehurst Village School as a result of writing an article about it in the parish magazine. The Revd. John Lambourne had suggested that a piece should be written on the subject as the old school buildings had been vacated and their future was uncertain. This suggestion came to me via Mrs John Ward, who also lent me the invaluable book by L.J.Hodson, A Short History of the Parish of Salehurst and F.A. Fisher's booklet, "Penny a Leg." I have been most grateful for having access to these sources.

The former headmaster of Salehurst C.E. Primary School, Mr Mitchell, kindly made early Log Books of the school available to me shortly before he left. The Deputy Head, Mr Dixon, has shown the same kindness in lending me more recent volumes. Without these mines of information, to be used at my leisure, I could not have written this brief history.

DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Frere-Smith for his help with the illustrations; to Mrs Lynette Hardwick for the loan of her drawing of the old school building; to Mrs John Ward for lending me the drawings by Mrs Agnes Ward of the Salehurst Parish Church and school. For the loan of photographs and postcards my sincere thanks go to Mr David Allen, Mr C. H. Mabb, Mr Michael Slater, Mr and Mrs C. Woodgate and the Courier Newspapers.

SALEHURST C.E. PRIMARY SCHOOL OUR VILLAGE SCHOOL PAST AND PRESENT

INTRODUCTION

The Village of Robertsbridge has at present two primary school buildings; one, now four years old, standing off George Hill, is a welcoming one-storey construction of red brick and grey roof tiles. Inside it is embellished with automatic lighting operating on movement sensors and, amongst other facilities, a library with temperature and humidity-controlled ventilation. With its spacious play areas and airy classrooms the school exudes an atmosphere of cheerful activity.

The other school building, overlooking the roundabout serving the new village bypass, stands empty, with little of its Victorian dignity in tact. But in contrast to its broken windows and current neglected look, its history speaks of years of valued service, and a contribution to village life that surely should not be forgotten.

This was not in fact the first school in Robertsbridge. L.J. Hodson's book, *A Short His-*

tory of the Parish of Salehurst, reminds us of two earlier references to local schooling. In 1652, for instance, a parish register recorded the burial of a schoolmaster's wife, Ann Audrey. So we can infer that her husband offered some form of education to the young of the locality during the troubled times of the Civil War. If typical of his day Ann's schoolmaster husband would have taught the sons of those able to pay. Wealthier landowners usually had private tutors for their boys; others sent them to the long established grammar schools. The very poor had no book-learning at all.

But one John Cooper sought to remedy this by leaving land in 1699 for a free school for poor children of Salehurst and some adjacent parishes. But because of an additional clause in his Will, this plan never took effect. It was not until a century later that practical steps were taken to provide the village with a school for the poor.

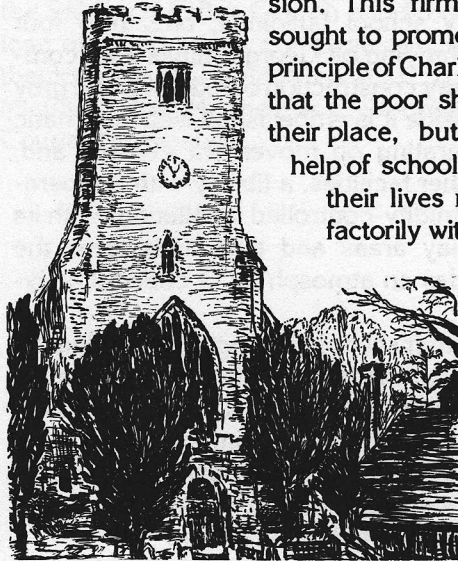
THE SUBSCRIPTION SCHOOL

This village school was to be a Charity school and subscribers were to give a guinea for a nominated poor child to receive a year's education. The boys would learn "to Spell and to Read, and also Writing and Arithmetic; provided the subscriber of a child shall think it proper to find books and slates for the purpose." It was a step forward for the times that girls also were to receive the same basic instruction as the boys, with the addition of knitting and simple needlework. The children attended between the ages of five and twelve and parents had to see "that every child be sent to school perfectly free from vermin, their Hands and Face washed clean; and as neat in apparel as the circumstances of their parents will admit."

Thirty-eight children were sponsored when the school first opened, their morning session running from 8.00 to 11.00am and in the afternoons from 1.00 to 4.30pm for the spring and summer terms; the times being later and shorter in the autumn and winter. The school minutes show that pupils had to attend church regularly on Sundays and every week day when services

were performed at Salehurst Church; for the many Charity schools founded in the eighteenth century aimed to secure the allegiance of the poor to the Established Church.

Any bad behaviour was to be reported to the parents, a second occurrence resulting in expulsion. This firm discipline sought to promote another principle of Charity schools - that the poor should know their place, but, with the help of schooling, live out their lives more satisfactorily within it.



Portion of a drawing showing Salehurst Parish Church.

SCHOOLMASTER VINALL

The first schoolmaster of the Robertsbridge Charity school, a Mr George Vinall, must have felt comfortable with this brief, for he appears to have held the post for nearly forty years. The position of his school was indicated in an old map of the village that showed a building bearing the title, "Subscription School;" premises which were later used as a bootmaker's and adjoining barber's shop.

Mr Vinall attended the subscribers' meetings usually held at the George Hotel. The minutes give fascinating glimpses of some aspects of the school's life, for certain disciplinary problems were highlighted. There was the case of one Edward who, for foul language, was "to be flogged and to be confined for an hour each day after school." Another boy had evidently kicked the master and it was ordered that "he do receive two strokes on the back with a cane," he too having to stay for an hour after school for some days, in his case, learning a task by heart.

There was also an instance of a girl being convicted of stealing a shilling from a school fellow. The matter was a cause for deep concern

amongst the subscribers for the girl was sent "to the House of Correction at Battel for a fortnight and during that time," the verdict continued, "to be kept in solitary confinement and to be fed on bread and water." So Mr Vinall's life as master of the Robertsbridge Subscription School must have had its painful moments. And by 1828 it was also lacking full public support. The Committee had to appeal for benefactors, circulating "A Plain Statement" of "its claims on Christian Benevolence."

But times were hard. The Napoleonic Wars were not such a distant memory. The Corn Laws were causing much hardship and hunger. Against this social background the Subscription School was about to enter a new era. For in 1834 the school took the important step of becoming affiliated with the National Society. This body, together with the British and Foreign School Society, had become aware of the great need to educate the artisan population as a whole.

A NEW ERA AND NEW SCHOOL

So, with the encouragement of the National Society, and after prolonged local discussion, a site was chosen for a new village school in Robertsbridge. It was a portion of workhouse land, and during the school's early years, workhouse premises like the Round House and the Engine Room, remained in the vicinity. By January 21, 1841, with the aid of the National Society, the ground was purchased, and Salehurst National School was well established in its mission of disciplining "the infant poor to good and orderly habits, to train them to early piety," as well as instilling some simple schooling.

The school consisted of a two-storey building, the upper floor for the girls and the lower for the boys. There was no division of space into separate classrooms. The method of teaching practised then was based on the monitorial system. This relied on teaching pupils in groups of ten, but sometimes rising to twenty, under the supervision of monitors. The latter could be young children with little more knowledge or ability than their charges; though in the best run schools the monitors themselves received further lessons

from the schoolmaster. The small groups of children chanting out their catechism or spellings would be under the supervision of the master, surveying the whole room.

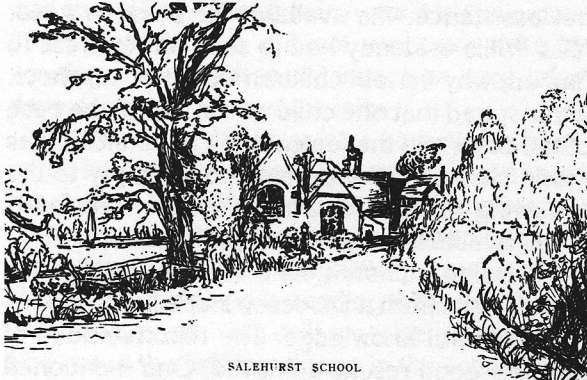
The school minutes of the mid-nineteenth century shed interesting light on the life of a schoolmaster at that time. In 1846 the minutes give directions that "the Master's bed be repaired and new hangings provided for it." The sitting room also required to be white-washed. In another instance £3 were allocated to the Master for a kitchen table and four chairs, carpet for the parlour, fender and fire irons.

Another note indicated that the combined salary of master and mistress in July 1846 was £60 per annum. The following year two additional teachers were appointed at 3d a week, to superintend the girls' sewing; the salary to increase with any improvement in the teachers' performance.

Various appointments to the positions of master and mistress were made after Mr Vinall's long reign. But the minutes on one rare occasion in July 1845 referred to the anguished debate concerning the dismissal of one couple. It followed on the receipt of a letter from the Lord

Bishop of the Diocese and resulted in the then master and mistress being given an ultimatum: that "unless all attendance at the disputing place of worship be discontinued on their part by the end of the month, their services be dispensed with in their several offices at Michaelmas next."

The master and his wife were not prepared to compromise, what one assumes were their nonconformist beliefs, and accepted a notice of their dismissal, written in tones of genuine sorrow that the practice of a common Christian faith should be the cause of dissension.



SALEHURST SCHOOL

Salehurst School, taken from a postcard illustration.

THE SALEHURST NATIONAL SCHOOL

But whoever was the master in charge of Salehurst School the monitorial system despite its disadvantages was a means of spreading at least the rudiments of education to poor children, in premises designed for the purpose. By 1862 government legislation had established that state support for a teacher's salary should depend on his pupils' examination results in reading, writing and arithmetic. This too concentrated the mind on imparting the basic skills.

Parents had to make a financial contribution to their children's education. But the very poorest families needed even their children's tiny earnings, made perhaps from scaring birds or herding cattle, and so schooling was an unaffordable luxury. Other parents who could provide the school fees had no hesitation in withdrawing the children from school if help was needed in the home or for harvest. This inevitably disrupted the pupil's education.

So while the Salehurst National School did offer village children the chance to learn the three R's, there were certain haphazard elements involved. The failings of the system as a whole

became the subject of much parliamentary debate, and in 1870 the foundations were laid for free, compulsory education in England and Wales.

To accommodate future intake the school premises were enlarged and an Infants' Department was established. There was a growing recognition that smaller children had different needs from the older boys and girls. A certificated mistress was appointed in 1871, a properly trained member of staff being an important step forward. School records in 1877 stated that both the master and mistress received a £5 donation, following a good inspector's report.

MISS WILLIS AND THE INFANT SCHOOL

By 1880 the Infants' Department had become a separate school under the headship of Miss A.M. Willis. She continued in this position until her sudden death in June 1905. Children came into her care as young as three years of age, but they received a thorough education in the basic disciplines and scripture, and in addition much loving care. The school Log Book covering this period speaks of 69 children being on the register in 1880, when Miss Willis took over.

Education at this stage was still not free, but assistance was available for those in need. Miss Willis evidently had to send a mistress to find out why certain children were not in school. It transpired that one child was ill, but in the case of the other two the fee couldn't be found. It was made clear that the parents could apply to the "relieving officer" for a subsidy, or from funds made available by government legislation.

Being a church school Salehurst also received visits from a Diocesan Inspector to examine scriptural knowledge. The reports spoke of the very good results achieved. One mentioned the accuracy and intelligence of the children's

answers, their pleasing originality.

Entries in the Log Book over the years give telling insights into the joys and sorrows of teaching. Today's teachers might feel sympathy with some of the complaints - like children returning to school after holidays having apparently forgotten every scrap of what they had been taught earlier. Other entries bewailed the difficulty of giving consistent education to children frequently sick - with whooping cough, chickenpox, croup, even a strange malady called glass pox. Sometimes there was so much illness about that the school was completely closed as in August to November 1882. Parents also did not run extra risks by sending their children to school on very rainy days or other inclement weather.

Teaching progress was sometimes hampered because the monitors or monitresses could not cope with their charges, and discipline became impossible. But one senses that when Miss Willis herself moved through the groups, - testing tables here, listening to reading there, teaching a new song, organising drill practice, all was well. She noted the improved tone in the school from time to time - the steady work accomplished and

progress made. But even Miss Willis at one point showed a little quiet desperation. A Log Book entry for Class 2 boys, doing needlework stated: "They seem almost incapable of using either needle or thimble the way they should be used."



Salehurst School Children, about 1889.

"HIGH DAYS AND HOLIDAYS."

But life was not all work for Salehurst scholars, large or small. Particularly in the summer months the Log Book recorded a number of school closures for outings, including the "annual treat" to Higham. There were bank holidays, short Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide breaks and the long holiday for hop-picking.

Within school Miss Willis knew the value of incentives. In a later Log Book entry in January 1903 she mentioned promising the scholars of the 3rd Class that they "should make a pair of cuffs for themselves," when they could manage to knit evenly. Pupils of Class 4 had the pleasure of making balls for the little ones to play with. Children who were too small to knit, "contributed their share by fraying the cloth to fill them. So great pleasure has been given to this class simply by utilising old material and making something to carry home."

One particular report made towards the end of Miss Willis' headship read: "Infant School. This school is well managed and taught by Miss Willis. The children are alert, intelligent and well-advanced. They are also very happy."

END OF AN ERA

At all times Miss Willis showed her sensitivity to the children's needs. In February 1904 the children went down with very bad coughs. When they did return to school, their improving health was noted with pleasure. But "To avoid any unnecessary weariness, at the first sign of flagging, work has been stopped," she wrote, "and an entire change of occupation in the way of a chat, a little singing and drilling has been given. Some classes had their choice of lessons and drawing or embroidery were chosen. So in some form or other, all were employed, irrespective of the timetable."

Countless young children must have benefited from her firm, compassionate approach. In May 1905, just the month before her untimely death, Miss Willis remarked in the Log Book how keen the children of Class 1 were to master writing capital letters because the promise of writing on paper (as against slates) was held out to them - it certainly proved a good stimulus, she wrote. In this entry she also noted that "Work is going on very favourably and there is a bright brisk tone throughout the school."

It is not surprising to learn that the managers of the school, teachers and scholars, erected a marble tablet in one of the classrooms as a memorial to this fine teacher. The school continued as an independent entity until February 1908 when it was incorporated into the main school.

THE "MIXED SCHOOL"

Over the years it became the established practice to send seven year old infants up into the "Mixed School" for the new school year beginning from the end of February. In her earlier years as headmistress Miss Willis would have passed her charges over into the hands of Mr George J.T. Waite, headmaster, and Miss Emma Sercombe, assistant mistress. In the year 1886/87 there were 124 children on the register of the upper school and the average attendance for the year was 98 . 36.

The school was divided up into Standards 1, 11, 111, 1V, V and VI. It was intended that children complete their schooling at the age of thirteen. The weekly school programme included visits from the Reverend R.W. Loosemore to teach scripture, usually on Wednesday and Friday mornings. A sergeant (Battle Company of 1st Cinque Ports Rifle Volunteers) was employed to instruct the boys in drill. He did this on Tuesday afternoons in the road in front of the school. The boys had geography lessons, with map-reading from memory, while the girls took needlework and knitting. They came together for the 3 R's,

singing and recitation.

As the years progressed the curriculum widened, but in the middle eighteen eighties, establishing basic literacy and numeracy appeared the main aim of Schoolmaster Waite. His chief obstacle was irregular attendance. No progress was possible if the children were not sitting in front of him. Sometimes it was simply bad weather that kept the children away. At others the weather was good, but his pupils had gone mushrooming, "primrosing," or getting "couch" out of the grass, "acorning," hay-making, "beating," preparing the hop poles, harvesting; girls were simply "wanted at home."

As an inducement to come to school more regularly Mr Waite introduced the incentive of "attendance certificates;" 43 children obtaining these for full attendance at the end of the first week. It was also proposed that children gaining 12 out of 13 weekly certificates should receive a purse at the end of the quarter. Certificates were given too for passing the required standards at the annual Inspectors' examinations.

LIFE BEHIND THE SCENES

Names of persistent absentees were sent to the school attendance officer to follow up, but at this stage nothing much seemed to result. In fact the headmaster noted ironically that some of the absentee children were being employed by members of the Attendance Committee. Mr Waite was left to bemoan poor attendance in the Log Book, using such terms as "abominable," "wretchedly poor." On a rare occasion he also mentioned a problem of discipline, one boy being severely punished for refusing to hold out his hand to be caned.

Over the years Log Book entries concerning the register or examinations revealed tragic circumstances. One girl left the parish to go and live in the Union (workhouse) as her mother had deserted her. Mention is made of a child being withdrawn from the Inspector's annual examination, because he was a "poor paralysed and deformed boy." Another was exempted from examination as she was a delicate child, several sisters and her mother having died of consumption.

But these were happily the exceptions. By

and large the school's creditable progress must have given Mr Waite much satisfaction. Occasionally we learn of him having an afternoon off to sing with a choir at Crystal Palace or less enjoyably suffering from a poisoned finger. Following the Inspector's report of March 1891 the accommodation for the girls and infants had to be enlarged. This resulted in a nine weeks school closure, and consequent difficulties in getting the children back "even into school habits." Some meantime had completely forgotten their multiplication tables and the pupils were generally so behind schedule, that history could not be introduced into the curriculum, as had been suggested by Her Majesty's Inspector.

But another innovation of that year must surely have been very welcome. July of 1891 was marked by some high temperatures in the main school hall which had little ventilation; so the children were given a ten minutes break in the playground during the afternoons. In addition drawing, apparently just for the boys, made a welcome appearance in the school timetable. But this proved to be the last change introduced by Mr Waite, for in September of that year he resigned

from his post as headmaster, leaving it in the capable hands of Mr William N. Potter. So the "mixed school" embarked on a long period of stable headship for Mr Potter remained in this position until March 21, 1921.

Salehurst School, Robertsbridge.



Salehurst National School at the turn of the century.

ENTER MR POTTER

At the beginning of this period, lasting nearly thirty years, Mr Potter, assisted by his wife taking needlework, would have had little inkling of the intense experiences that lay ahead. True, small changes were gradually infiltrating school life - exercise books were now used, and pen and ink, as well as slates. Drawing was fully established in the curriculum, and in February 1894 mention is made of a boy receiving a Card of Merit for passing successfully "Freehand, Solid Geometry and Model Drawing." Later shorthand was also taught to the boys of Standards V1 and V11. About this time there was a rare reference to a child classed as an imbecile and placed in Standard O.

As the Log Book had to record any school closure and the reason, it also gave a picture of the growing variety in the children's lives. Sometimes school closed for excursions to Hastings, to Tunbridge Wells for the Girls' Friendly Society, or Athletic Sports in the village. There were occasional treats arranged by the Band of Hope, the Temperance Society and Sunday School. Children took time off school for their own reasons -

on one occasion to see soldiers passing through Hurst Green, on another to go to the circus..

But absenteeism was treated more rigorously as the years passed, and in March 1894 the Log Book recorded that parents were summoned before the magistrate at Hurst Green, because they had taken their daughter away from school before she was thirteen. One day, however, Salehurst scholars were given a quite unexpected holiday when two school managers came rushing over with the news in June 1900 that Lord Roberts had occupied Pretoria.

But the children were more likely to be affected by local events than happenings in the far away Transvaal war. This was certainly the case when the Reverend Loosemore died suddenly from heart disease by the school door on February 1, 1901. The Log Book entry read: "The children were immediately dismissed for the day, as everyone seemed broken down with grief at the sad occurrence."

"PENNY A LEG."

We are fortunate to have a pupil's view of school life at the turn of the century in F.A. Fisher's booklet, "Penny a Leg." She started at Salehurst school in 1899 and writes of sitting on wooden benches with no back rests, and desks for five children together. The teachers worked under difficult conditions at times, with a large class room divided up only by baize curtains. Discipline was strict, pupils had to concentrate hard on their work, but none, she felt, was any the worse for that. By 1902 an Inspector's report commented on the attentive, orderly behaviour of the children, the effectiveness of the teaching, despite the difficulties arising from three classes being taught in one room.

The annual examination by Inspectors had been abolished two years earlier, and schools were financed, not on examination results, but by a "block grant" of 17s or 16s per head in Infant Schools, and 22s or 21s per head in other departments. Inspectors now appeared on an unannounced basis. Their assessments related to the general tone of the school, as well as scholastic achievement. They made recommendations on

accommodation, levels of equipment and staffing.

Around this period changes were made in school administration, an Education Act providing for the replacement of the Charity commissioners by four foundation managers and two other managers, appointed by the Parish Council and the County Council respectively.

Local Authorities were authorised to supply or help supply Secondary Education in their areas. They were empowered to levy a rate not exceeding 2d in the pound for this purpose. So the early years of Mr Potter's headship were set against a background of much change in the educational scene. Four years after his own appointment he was to lose the services of Miss Sercombe, who, on leaving, received a purse of money subscribed by managers, teachers and scholars, as a small token of their appreciation for her fourteen and a half years service.

The years preceding the First World War followed their appointed course in school life at Salehurst, against the background of the seasons. The Revd. E. J. Sing now visited the school on Wednesday and Friday mornings to give reli-

gious instruction. He also distributed prizes for full-attendance from time to time.

By contrast mention is made of a boy attending "Truant School" and later being readmitted on the Salehurst register in June 1902, no doubt in a chastened frame of mind. But he had the pleasure of two extra days holiday that same month for the Coronation celebrations of Edward VII, which may have sweetened his return a little.



Salehurst school children take a break.

THE WAR YEARS

By the outbreak of the First World War scholars at Salehurst School were enjoying a wider curriculum than ever before. History and geography were taught to both girls and boys; senior girls also now learning to draw. It was advised that girls should bring clothes to school that needed mending as part of their needlework instruction. Gardening was recommended as a school subject together with organised games and cookery. Shorthand was dismissed as unsuitable for children destined mainly as land workers or domestic servants. General knowledge was increased in "object lessons" which might include occupations like The Lamp-lighter or Postman, natural objects like trees, flowers or vegetables.

Drill to music took place indoors if the weather did not permit it on the school playground. Mr Potter received dumb bells from educational suppliers for this purpose. Physical exercise was gaining importance as a means to good health, and in one report it was stated that the drill was not sufficiently advanced and not enough attention was paid to breathing exercises. Epi-

demics of measles, for instance, could still cause a school closure for a fortnight, so the emphasis on good health was well-placed.

The Inspector's Report of 1914 promoted a more creative approach in education. It spoke of offering imaginative topics for composition in the senior classes "with a view to encouraging more freedom of ideas and expression." The assistant teachers in the junior classes were recommended to seek a "broader point of view" and the headmaster's examinations should "stimulate the development of intelligence," mechanical accuracy not being the only criterion.

There were no further Inspectors' reports until after the war. The Log Book had certain telling entries like the absence in 1915 of Mr C.H. Fisher for a medical examination prior to joining the army. One of the assistant teachers, Miss Swaffer, was absent one afternoon in May that year as her brother was going to join the Expeditionary Force.

Towards the end of 1915 the scholars themselves had a minor excitement on the outbreak of fire in the roof around the stove pipe in the Infants' room. But in general the school

routine presented a stable background for Salehurst children during those tragic war years. A holiday was given in June 1916 for a Girl Guides and Boy Scouts Rally at Ewhurst. Children were kept away from school for less happy reasons later that year as some cases of impetigo were noted. In early 1918 the school's 229 pupils had to stay at home because of flooding, and chickenpox was the cause of closure when the Armistice was signed. Happily in 1919 Mr Fisher was able to resume work at school after four years of war service.

THE YEARS OF PEACE

Despite the financial difficulties of the Twenties and Thirties efforts were made to improve the health of the nation's children. The Salehurst Log Book, reflecting this trend, recorded eye clinics in school and dental treatment, in addition to established medical inspections. These were steps in the right direction, but the problem of infection was still significant; in July of 1924, for instance, the school was closed for a fortnight because of an outbreak of Scarlet Fever. In February of the following year there were three teachers and sixty children absent due to influenza and the school was consequently closed again. A further hazard was appearing even on the quiet roads of Robertsbridge, for a child was injured, but not seriously hurt, by a motor car in 1928; four years later a boy died in a motor accident.

By 1927 there were 164 children on the school roll; they were housed in four rooms which were considered by the Government Inspector as "depressing and inconvenient." Teaching and learning must have been very difficult, seen from a modern viewpoint. Nevertheless, teachers and pupils evoked mostly satisfactory comments from

the Inspector, the main weakness of the school lying in the small proportion of children over 13 doing work above Standard 6.

Some children did, however, take advantage of the pupil teachers' scheme introduced as far back as 1846, whereby thirteen year olds could be apprenticed and, after training, take part in instructing the pupils. These apprentice teachers were examined themselves annually and in due course worked fully as teachers. The assistant teacher, Miss May Swaffer, was taken on in this capacity at Salehurst in August 1913. By 1915 the Log Book recorded her absence for a week, sitting the Cambridge Senior Local Examinations. As the years passed there were references to pupils gaining scholarships and free places in secondary education. Salehurst School could be seen increasingly in context with this next stage of education.

Familiar names appeared. The Revd. C.E. Ward began to give religious instruction in the school as far back as 1912. By 1928 Mrs Violet Bashford had started as a supply teacher, only four years before a Gold Albert was presented to Mr Chas F. Golding as his leaving present after

serving almost eleven years as Mr Potter's successor. The school now had its own library, for at one annual prize-giving it was mentioned that a complete set of encyclopaedias and other books were presented to it. Salehurst School won the district cricket shield in the year before Mr Golding left, no doubt affording him much pleasure.

His place was taken by Mr Herbert W. Price who commenced his duties in February 1932. Later that spring several interesting innovations occurred that had a modern ring. Fire drill was introduced for the first time and the children started to wear school caps and berets. Various classes took suitable work out into the open air during the hot days of that June. At the end of the summer term reports on each child's progress, work, behaviour and attendance were issued to the parents for the first time ever.

APPROACH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the middle and later Thirties, Salehurst School had an increasing sense of its own identity. Extra activities like cycle trips and paper chases were organised in the holidays. School concerts and evening performances of a play - Alice in Wonderland - were given, with staff help, in the Institute Hall by the scholars. The play provided £19-11s-7d for the school funds.

In this period the pupils enjoyed a number of holidays resulting from royal events, beginning in May 1935 with the Jubilee celebrations of H.M. King George V and Queen Mary. All the children received a Jubilee spoon and a copy of the New Testament. As a further part of the celebrations running water was installed in the school from the recently laid mains. New hand basins were introduced in the lobbies. Although the complete school was still housed in four classrooms, they were now described in one report as "bright and cheerful." Further progress came in 1938 when electricity was connected during an extended summer vacation and additional drainage works were undertaken. The latter were particularly necessary as some years earlier the headmaster

had arrived at school to find it flooded from a nearby stream.

The children enjoyed amenities like buying milk at break and as a treat they received chocolate and oranges after the yearly prize-giving at Christmas. On the Coronation Day of H.R.H. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the boys were given a mug and the girls, a beaker.

The Diocesan Inspectors, who visited the school usually on an annual basis, often wrote very detailed and perceptive reports. These reflected a desire to show the Christian way of life imaginatively and convincingly - not just to impart religious facts. The Inspectors made practical suggestions in terms of books, pictures and hymnals, which were largely implemented. It was against this background of progress and optimism that world events were shortly to erupt into school life.

WORLD WAR TWO

In the August preceding the declaration of war the headmaster returned to school, recalling his staff from their holidays, and made preparations to meet the influx of evacuees, - 273 teachers and pupils from the London Technical Institute, followed by other parties of mothers and children. The school re-assembled in early October, with 260 scholars on the roll, including an extra 67 evacuees, distributed throughout the school in suitable age groups. But the daily routine proceeded as normally as possible. A note in the Log Book mentioned that Mrs F.A. Fisher had joined the teaching staff. She was a former pupil, and the author of the booklet, "Penny a Leg." She, like the other teachers, would have remembered to celebrate Empire Day in May 1939, a practice which was not to survive the war.

Many changes were to be introduced as the months passed. The school windows were treated with gummed paper strips, the stirrup pump was tested, the children were instructed to carry their gas masks around with them. Shelter trenches were dug and the children practised evacuating into them from the school buildings.

Air raids were becoming a frequent feature of school life by the summer of 1940 and alternative arrangements were made for the children's safety. Windows were protected with metal netting and staff and pupils gathered in the main room of the school to continue working there while the raid lasted. Teachers supervised the children's journey home if a raid warning was operating and no-one had come to pick them up at close of school.

By the end of 1941 the trenches dug in the nearby fields were filled in, no longer being required. In the following spring Mr Price had to relinquish his duties as head teacher, which war-time and other reasons had made particularly difficult. After a temporary headship of a few months Mr A. Wawne became the headmaster of Salehurst School, steering it safely through some of its most eventful years.

One of his first actions was to arrange the school's air raid precautions. "Two blasts on whistle means danger imminent and children take cover under desks in own classrooms. Three blasts, all clear." But even if A.R.P. drill was to become a regular feature of school life, the main

elements of the curriculum had to continue as consistently as possible. Mr Wawne also managed to introduce innovations like a "Parents' Day," with an exhibition of the children's work in all subjects, P.T., singing and poetry demonstrated. Other new features, of a more basic nature, were the immunisation against diptheria, and the school lunch service brought from the Battle Emergency Feeding Centre.

"FRONT LINE SCHOOL"

A particular phase of the war developed in 1944 with the advent of the flying bomb. Fourteen Morrison Table Shelters were erected in the classrooms as a protection against this new type of raid. The Log Book recorded that the children had to take to the shelters six times during July 3. The headmaster devised a scheme whereby certain children acted as "spotters", the rest of the school taking shelter when the signal "'Doodle-bug' (flying bomb) approaching, sir," was received. This unwelcome variation to the normal routine did bring the Salehurst School suddenly to the nation's attention.

Representatives of The Evening Standard, News Chronicle and Daily Express each came to report on this "Front Line School" and take photographs of a "spotter" at work, wearing the headmaster's steel helmet. A BBC Recording Unit was not far behind and, in addition to interviews with Mr Wawne and some children, was able to record an impression of a singing lesson being interrupted by a "spotter's" message, and then the lesson continuing after the raid.

A few days later Salehurst pupils them-

selves were offered Government Evacuation, twelve out of 160 children on the roll officially taking advantage of this scheme. Others, on arriving at school on the morning of July 26, were sent home as a flying bomb exploding over the village had damaged some ceilings in the school. Although the premises were opened the following day the Managers decided to give a two weeks holiday.

The Log Book entries of this period recorded details of attendance and school closures as was their purpose. But even these understated comments gave a moving indication of the stress and disruption endured by staff and children alike at this time. As one entry stated: "The work this term has suffered as a result of flying bombs. Nevertheless the school has continued cheerfully and bravely through distracting conditions."

The spring of 1945 brought severe difficulties for Salehurst School - fuel shortages, lack of teachers and low pupil attendance because of illness. But early in the summer term peace in Europe was declared and scholars and staff enjoyed two days holiday for joyful VE celebrations, with a similar break in August for VJ Day. "World

Peace at last," was the Log Book's entry. There was a note too in the spring of that year that the 1944 Butler Education Act had come into force with its aim to provide secondary education, appropriate to the needs of all the nation's children, whether in grammar, technical or secondary modern schools.



Salehurst School Football Team in the mid-Forties.

*Back row left to right: John Pennells, David Fellows, Steve Martin, Bob Wood, Pat Turk, Clive Suggill.
Front row left to right: Bob Crouch, Gerald Crouch, Cyril Woodgate, Roy Thompsonett, Charlie Wilmer, Peter Marden.*

POST-WAR YEARS

Though this re-organisation of senior education was far-reaching, the physical circumstances of Salehurst children were not greatly effected until the Robertsbridge Secondary Modern School was opened in 1955. Until then some eleven year olds, and occasionally older children, transferred each year to Bexhill Grammar School, Hastings High School and others, as a result of selection in the Annual Schools' Examination. The remainder continued their education at Salehurst, the school-leaving age being raised to fifteen in 1947.

Despite the shortages and staffing difficulties of the post-war years, pupils at Salehurst were entering a period of widening opportunities. At first, though, in October 1945, there was a considerable sense of loss when Miss Bailey retired after forty-three years of faithful service, teaching the younger children of the school. She received a cheque from the School Managers and a handbag and bouquet from scholars and staff. Her retirement must have been full of memories of two world wars, but more happily of many fresh young faces.

One innovation of this period was the introduction of free milk in September 1946. A 1947 report mentioned subjects now in the curriculum, - woodwork for the boys and country dancing for the girls, in addition to cookery, that had a well-established tradition. In time metalwork and swimming were added and for senior pupils the Headmaster introduced lessons on Local Government supported by appropriate visits in the area. Singing was promoted by the School Choir's annual attendance at Music Festivals held at Bexhill and elsewhere. The 1947 report, mentioned earlier, spoke of the well-planned and thoughtful schemes of work for the senior classes, the desire to excel shown by both boys and girls. Teachers and pupils were still working in what were described as "old-fashioned premises." The report continued, "there is no hall, and of the five classrooms, two, both passage-rooms, are the curtained-off halves of a big room."

But these disadvantages were eventually righted. The first stage came when Salehurst School was selected as the Practical Instruction Centre for the surrounding schools. In the summer holidays of 1948 a start was made on two

pre-fabricated buildings on a site by the school. They were equipped with central heating, the first break with direct heat from coke and coal-fed stoves. The rooms were officially taken over from the Ministry of Works in 1949, for the purpose of instruction in Woodwork, Metalwork and Domestic Science; Miss M.A. Bryson teaching the latter and Mr A. Bean, the first two subjects. For a brief period one of these rooms was used as a classroom. The Log Book noted, "How the children enjoyed its space and airiness and peace and the teachers!"

A TIME FOR CHANGE

But the main school building was in need of much urgent repair and in the following year the Managers decided to apply for "Controlled" status for the school. Though this later gave the majority voice in school management to the County Council, it enabled the school to receive greater funding.

In January 1954 the school was faced with the recurring problem of flooding. The culprits this time were heavy rain, and a forty gallon empty oil drum blocking the culvert under the school. A temporary classroom was set up in The New Eight Bells. By October of that year this extra classroom was still required because of overcrowding. The school had 201 pupils on roll, the highest for nearly twenty years. The stress due to lack of space was considerable. It was noted in the Log Book, "This is placing a great strain on staff and scholars alike and the school cannot help but suffer educationally despite the increased efforts of the staff."

Re-organisation was essential and relief came at last in September of the following year. The new Robertsbridge Secondary Modern School

was opened and Salehurst School became a primary school for children aged 5 to 11 years, after over a century and a half as an all-age Village School. This change resulted in much improved premises, with over £11,000 being spent on school improvements. There were now a self-contained canteen kitchen, oil-fired central heating in the main school building, one enlarged classroom in this block, a Headmaster's Room, a Staff room, Staff cloakroom and toilets, scholars' new cloakroom and lavatories for boys and girls. Two old classrooms had been made into a hall for assembly and dining room combined. These rooms were all contained in the main school block while the pre-fabricated building was converted into four classrooms with additional clockrooms.

So the school had assumed the style of premises remembered by both adults and children in the village today. And what a splendid improvement the facilities must have been in the mid-fifties. But even working under the earlier difficult conditions so much had been achieved. School life now included educational summer outings like the one to the Festival of Britain, and

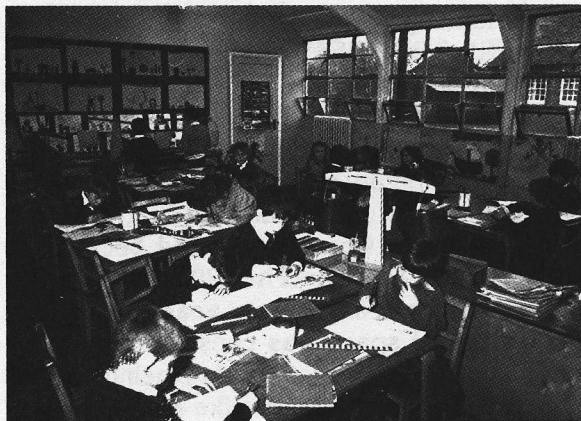
others to Windsor and Runymede; Sports' Days, later holidays in the Isle of Skye, trips to France, Belgium and Scandinavia. A school magazine was issued when possible and older children performed in playlets and mime in Mr Wawne's garden before invited parents and relatives. Student teachers from various training colleges came to the school for periods of teaching practice, receiving valuable experience.

The educational objectives extended far beyond the necessary tools of literacy and numeracy. A report in 1959 spoke of the "high standard of presentation of written work," the confidence that the boys and girls displayed, their good command of language and firm knowledge of arithmetic procedures. This applied to the Junior School children taught by the Headmaster and his two assistants.

The Infants' Department was not so fortunate in its staffing position, having no full-time teacher at that point. But the school had a faithful supporter in Mrs F.A. Fisher who, though retiring in the spring of 1959 after twenty years of continuous service at the school, worked on supply when required, later coming in regularly to act as

piano accompanist.

Another milestone was reached in December 1953 when the Revd. C.E. Ward retired, having been a School Manager for forty-one years. He was presented with a bedroom clock and cheque from the school staff and scholars.



Children at work in a pre-fabricated school building in 1988.

FINAL YEARS OF THE "OLD SCHOOL"

So, under Mr Wawne's firm but kindly guidance, Salehurst C.E. Primary School passed through the Fifties and into the late Sixties. On 26 July, 1968 the Headmaster and Mrs Wawne, who was also the Deputy Head, retired after twenty-six years of service, years that had included war, Flying-Bombs, floods and "other impediments to Education but also more pleasant and peaceful times." The Log Book recalled "all the pleasure that one enjoys working with children and the many educational successes for the pupils throughout these years."

It fell to Mr E.R. Carey to take on the mantle of headship and build on the firm scholastic foundations that had already been laid. On the social side in 1970, the Log Book recorded a Beat Dance organised by the children's Dance Club! There was a Harvest Festival held in the church and in the following year a school fete organised by a committee of parents and teachers, a now familiar source of co-operation.

In 1973 Mr Segwick replaced Mr Carey who became head of Bexhill Down Junior School. The following year the school was saddened by

the sudden death of Mr J.L. Ward, a foundation manager for nearly twenty years.

In the subsequent decade both staff and pupils were affected by the need to repair the school fabric and overcome yet again the effects of flooding. But a note in the Log Book on July 1982 indicated that an end to these troubles was in sight. "Two representatives from County Hall met Governors and Headmaster to discuss site of the replacement school. The present school will be demolished to make way for Robertsbridge By-Pass. The new school will be sited along Fair Lane with a new access road opposite the George Hotel."

But as Mr Segwick retired in 1984 he had no more than a glimpse of the "promised land," and it fell to his successor, Mr Mitchell, to see out the final years in the old building and move to the new. Just before then the school lost the services of Mrs Barber, who retired after thirty-seven and a half years of service working with the younger children.

The day for the move came on 25 May, 1988. The school was closed for three days to complete the packing and transfer to the new

premises, and the school re-opened on 6 June. At the opening 150 pupils held a huge ribbon going all round the school. Mr Wawne was called upon to cut the ribbon in four places and each child took a piece home, as a reminder of this historic event.

But they and later generations will have many more memories of their days in Salehurst C.E. Primary School. Present-day pupils in their smart navy and grey uniforms start their education in the pleasantest surroundings, backed up by the most modern of equipment. Though changes in educational life still lie ahead, the future of the school with its many advantages, looks bright. And beneath it lies the foundation of an honourable tradition of dedicated service.



*Celebrating the opening of the new school in June 1988.
Picture by courtesy of Courier Newspapers.*

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