

## *Memories of Bicton School* by Dorothy Lewis

Dorothy Lewis was born at Milnsbridge, Shepherd's Lane in 1920. She is almost certainly the oldest Bicton resident who attended Bicton School, as recognised by the plaque which was unveiled when the new school was formally opened in 2007. Recently she reminisced about her time at the old school which she entered in 1925.

My eldest sister, Mary, three years older, was already a pupil there as had been my brothers Walter, Herbert and Alan. I have very fond memories of my first teacher, Miss Helen Davies who was a very young teacher indeed. Miss Dutton was Headteacher but I don't have such fond memories of her! She used to cane 'naughty' children across the hand. She lived in the Headteachers house and had a maid. If children were feeling unwell, they'd be sent to the maid for a spoonful of ginger in hot water! I also remember Miss Bradfield who used to cycle from Shrewsbury. Every morning we had to recite the Catechism and there were regular visits from the Vicar, Mr Lawson who had a large family - but they didn't attend the village school. Miss Davies taught us to read and luckily I was quick to learn to read. We were given beads to thread and there was a sand tray for us to play with. We learned to knit and to sew with coloured wools and coarse hessian. We used to go home for dinner and I remember on one occasion we were asked to see who could bring back the biggest spray of blackberries. I was very proud when mine was adjudged the biggest and I was very flattered when Miss Davies asked if I minded if she took of the blackberries - I'd never been asked before if I minded about anything.

We used to have milk from bottles with a real piece of straw, not a plastic one. It was 1/3rd pint and cost a penny (an old one that is)! The milk was delivered by the farmer, Mr Alf Clarke, who also had the job of collecting and returning children from Isle Park, for which he was paid £2 a week by the council - big money in those days. I can remember to, my big disappointment at Christmas when we were lined up to be given an orange each by Miss Dutton. When she got to me, last in the line, the box was empty and she said "I'm sorry, they've all gone"! One was found for me subsequently. The classmates I can remember were Margaret Bailey, Phyllis Morris and Denis Brown (who, poor man, was drowned when HMS Hood was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck in 1941)

In 1927 I was placed in Standard One. We started every piece of work with the date - and I still start my letters as I was taught. We wrote with scratch pens with ink which was made with water on powder ink wells.

It was the job of the ink monitor to fill the ink wells. We had to moisten the pen nibs and we got mucky hands. We had PT, drill and we played rounders.

The boys sometimes went up to Mr Buckley at the blacksmiths shop for some tuition. One memorable occasion was when a student teacher, Miss Turner took two of us to the West Midlands Show and my mother made me a dress of Green voile for the occasion. Some years ago, Miss Turner, aged 90, returned to the school for a special occasion. She was now Mrs Garside and had become headteacher. After Miss Dutton left, Miss Chidley became Headteacher and I didn't like her! I remember still when she said to me "You'll never be a lady like your mother", which was very hurtful. There were special days eg Empire Day and there was a Sunday School party on Holy Innocents Day when we had bread and butter, a piece of plain or slab cake and a cracker. We also received a present from Miss Millbank of Bicton Hall. The school was used for whist drives (organised by the Sandfords of Udlington) and any sandwiches that were left over were eaten by the children the next day. Traffic was light in those days, of course, and we used to play 'whips and tops' on the main road. My whip and top used to be hidden in the hedge because I might have been told off if my parents knew! There were visits from the Medical Officer which was quite something because we couldn't afford to have a doctor at home (hurrah for the National Health Service!); and twice a year a dentist came to school and carried out treatment at the school, including extractions. He was a nice man and I used to enjoy his visits because of the attention I received! Other visitors included Mrs Davey to inspect PT and drill, the Attendance Officer and Mr Richard Sandford who was, I think, a Governor.

The other 'medical event' I can vividly remember has nothing to do with school apart from the fact I was away for a time. I was admitted to the Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in 1927 to have my tonsils out. My mother took me on the 3 o'clock bus from the Four Crosses armed with a towel and a slab of carbolic soap. This was on the Wednesday. The operation was on the Thursday and on Friday morning my mother and sister came to collect me, still seeping a little blood. They brought a little drop of milk for me to sip in a whiskey bottle of granny's. We went home on the bus because we couldn't afford a taxi.

I failed the scholarship for the Priory where my sister went (Mathematics let me down) and I went to the Lancasterian School which has no fond memories for me. I envied the Priory girls in their uniform and with their longer holidays. To this day I feel bitter about the separation of children into sheep and goats at eleven. I felt a sense of shame because I didn't go to the Priory.

After I left school in 1934, I stayed at home for a time helping my mother, but in 1937 I started training at The Royal Salop Infirmary to become a nurse.....but that's another story."