

Miss Blanche Pye



**Pupil and long serving teacher at
Old Catton School**

Introduction

Miss Maire Booty, a pupil at what is now Old Catton Junior School from 1933 to 1939, who was interested in the life story of Miss Pye pupil and teacher of the school. Maire wrote this account in 1999.

Maire lived all her life in the village and died in 2016. Maire was a founder member of our society and co-authored another of our publications 'Old Catton in the Twentieth Century'. The photographs are taken from the Old Catton Society archives. Old Catton Society, 2020



Miss Pye, age 5, standing in front of the school in the mid 1880s

Blanche Pye is on record as the longest serving teacher at Catton School - a record unlikely ever to be broken, since teachers no longer start their careers until they are over 21 and now retire at 65 or earlier.

She was born on the 24th September 1881 and spent almost all her life at the school, starting as a child aged five and retiring as senior mistress in 1948. She lived for 14 years after her retirement and died on the 17th January 1962 aged 80.

In the 1891 census the Pye family was shown as living at 100, Lower Road - this being the road leading from Oak Lane to Angel Road, now renamed Catton Grove Road. Number 100 was one of several cottages, now long since demolished. Mr Pye is described as a 'shepherd' and his daughter Blanche as a scholar.

Miss Pye often spoke of her father and he was still alive in the 1920s. He may have worked in the village, but more likely he kept sheep on the estate of Mr Rackham, who ran the private lunatic asylum at 'The Grove', a large house which stood back from the present Catton Grove Road just past the Woodcock Road junction. The Grove estate extended from Mile Cross Lane down to Philadelphia Lane and included some 50 cottages on 'Rackham's Fields', part of which is now Rackham Road, where lime pits and brickworks provided employment for the menfolk. All this area was at one time in Catton parish and all the children there attended Catton School, as did those in the cottages on Mile Cross Lane, (near Vulcan Road junction) now demolished, and all the Spixworth children. Most of the latter, in the 1890s and early 1900s lived in the area of Spixworth Church.

School at that time was in the old school building, consisting of a large central room (not then divided) and the infants' room to the east; the room on the western side was the village reading room (a public subscription library run by a committee) but was frequently 'borrowed' by the school especially for cookery lessons. Gas lamps, lit by pulling a chain with the long pole, hung from the rafters (there were no ceilings) - they had by then supplanted oil lamps which had supplanted candles, except in the infants' room which still had candles in the late 1920s. Some 100 children aged between four and 14 were accommodated.

The girls' toilets - or closets as they were called - consisted of a brick and wooden structure with pails which were emptied periodically, as was the teachers' toilets which adjoined them. The boys 'offices' were an open-air drain and one similar 'closet', all of them behind the cloakrooms at the back of the school. One front porch led to the reading room and into half of the main room. The other was used as the infants' toilets and led into the infants' room and the other half of the main room. There was no water - it had to be fetched 'when required' from the blacksmith's house nearby - anathema to today's hygiene conscious mothers. Heating was by open fires, which warmed the teacher but not much else. There was a gas stove in the reading room, which the girls also used for cookery. The playground was coarse gravel, and the school floors wooden blocks over earth. With very little alteration, the school remained like this until after the Second World War. I can remember that I was seldom without a scar or bandage on at least one knee when I was there, through tripping over on the playground.



Catton School - date unknown

Catton School was built with money provided by Mr Samuel Gurney Buxton, the village Squire, it was a Church of England Endowed School, maintained by public subscription from the dignitaries of the village - besides those living in the big 'mansions' in Catton these included a number of semi-professional workers in the terraced houses on 'Lower Road', still standing on the city side of Woodgrove Parade of shops.

Catton School opened on January 5th, 1874 and its first mistress was a Miss Georgina Jackson, by coincidence the headteacher in 1999 was Mr Jackson. In the first few months after opening attendance gradually built up to 66. In the early days no 'mistress' stayed for long. Miss Annie Tarbuck, 'mistress' when Blanche Pye started school in 1886, was the 7th mistress in the 12 years the school had been in operation. Perhaps they were discouraged by naughty boys like Sheila Currell's grandfather (a Badcock), who is reported to have spent all his playtime chipping at the mortar between the bricks, in the forlorn hope that the building would fall down.

School settled down in the 1890s. Blanche Pye was not alone in her record of long service as there were others who spent many years at the school. Minnie Collin served as 'mistress' from April 7, 1902 to September 30th, 1921. Miss Louise Holmes, the infant teacher, served from January 9th, 1893 until her death on November 30th, 1931. Miss Ethel Woolnough, who joined the staff on May 3rd, 1912 stayed until July 30th, 1931 and Mr English, became headmaster in May 1928, retiring in December 1948 outlasting Miss Pye at the school by several months.

Miss Pye retired on March 19th, 1948, after 44 years as a certificated teacher, plus eight years of training. The first mention of her 'teaching' at the school was on December 14th, 1896, when the 'mistress' was Miss Poll. "Blanche Pye commenced work this week as a 'candidate'. She will help in the infants' room and when not there, with Standards 1 and 2."

She was then 15 years old, and that April, as a 'candidate' took a test for teacher training, but those who have also tried but been unsuccessful will sympathise – she failed. Nevertheless, the school manager and Miss Poll decided to keep her on as 'monitress'. On September 8th, 1897, Blanche Pye and Violet Catton, also a 'monitress', took charge of the infants as Miss Holmes had a holiday to attend a wedding. On October 11th, 1897 Blanche was again a 'candidate' for first year training, to be examined in singing and needlework, and this time she passed and commenced her pupil teacher training at the school.

She was a 'pupil teacher' for four years, (1898 to 1902) under Miss Poll who, having married one of the blacksmiths next door to the school, became Mrs Alice Badcock. Miss Pye obtained her 'certificate' in 1903 by which time, under Miss Collin, she was in charge of the 'middle group' of the school, a post she continued to hold throughout her long career.



School pupils circa 1900

By the mid-1920s she was living in one of the cottages near what is now Vulcan Road, in Mile Cross Lane, coming to school each day on an upright bicycle with a large chain-case and cords each side of the rear wheel, stretched from hub to mudguard, to prevent her long skirts from catching in the wheels. On Thursday December 15th, 1904 she and Miss Collin were granted leave of absence in the afternoon, by the school managers, to attend the concert by Norwich Philharmonic Society, of which they were both members.

There is a mention in the school logbook of the children going on a nature walk in 1910, and in 1911 the school started entering the 'Bird and Tree' essay competition run annually, and sponsored by Jarrolds, the Norwich printing firm.

Friday, September 23rd, 1910 - The mistress, teachers and 20 children attended the Bird and Tree festival at Norwich Hippodrome. Mabel Brook received a book and medal, Elsie Cracknell a medal, and a framed certificate of excellence was given to the school.

November 3rd, 1911 "At the Norfolk Amateur Work Exhibition held in Norwich this week Winifred Cushing, Standard V, was awarded 2nd prize for knitting, and William Bunting, Standard VII, highly commended for drawing and painting "(Winifred, later Mrs Gough) will be remembered by many older parishioners for her sterling work as a caretaker of the Village Hall, and also her many contribution to fetes and fundraising activities.)

However, it was not until the arrival of Mr English in the 1920s that Miss Pye's talents as a teacher of needlework, nature study and country dancing really came to the fore. Her enthusiasm for dancing was evident in many school concerts and was 'fired' by visits she made to Scotland and the Highland Games.



Pupils 1929

From the early 1930s school regularly took part in the Norfolk County Singing and Dance Festival at St Andrew's Hall each year. In 1930 the infants won a banner for 'choral singing' and the school won the County Shield for country dancing in 1939. Miss Pye, ever conscientious and thorough, made sure that the team would be dressed smartly, to the extent of buying navy trousers for the boys whose parents could not afford them - the girls wore navy gymslips which were the 'standard uniform' at school in those days. She also treated us all to Wall's halfpenny ice lolly afterwards - not much by today's standards but leaving a hole in her meagre weekly 'allowance'.



School Dance team 1939 – Maire Booty seated lower right

Few taught by Miss Pye will ever forget her love of the countryside which she instilled into us through our nature walks in the park. She 'jellied' set things we were likely to see and set off with us to find them. She took a whistle, and let us loose in the woods off St Faith's Road (Fiddle Wood) to play for some minutes - when the whistle blew, we had to stop and reassemble and resume our 'studies'. Who can forget too the country dancing in the Rackets Court or Parish Hall? One pupil would be deputed to be 'gramophone minder' and he or she would have to wind up to keep the record going while we danced.

Miss Pye was always kindness itself to her 'children' - she would dry our coats and shoes round the coal fire if we got wet on the way to school, and also warmed our milk in winter. (School milk, a third of a pint for a penny, started in November 1932 and finished in 1971). In her 60s she moved from Mile Cross Lane to a cottage on St Faith's Road, once part of a small terrace (now demolished) opposite Crome House.

After her retirement she gave reading lessons to children who needed help, but her life had revolved around the old school building and the children, and she was quite lost when she retired. Sadly she had few interests other than school and the children - and very little money as a reward for her long service as she was not in any pension scheme. She died in a nursing home in 1962 aged 80.

When Miss Pye commenced her training in 1896, the school register totalled 119. As a Church of England school, it was inspected annually for religious instruction. The report in of May 1897 states that "The repetition and writing from memory are very good throughout the school, and intelligent

answers were given by a fair proportion of each of the three divisions. The Prayer Book has been taught well in the Upper Division.”

School was visited in 1899 by an education inspector. *“It maintains its high character, and instruction and discipline are very praiseworthy. The use of the gas stove only in cookery deprives the lessons of some of their usefulness.”* – what this was supposed to mean I do not know, but later, in 1906, another inspector’s report states that *“The arrangement made for cookery class are most unsatisfactory to say the least. For at least the third year in succession a first-year course is being taken, although the registers show half the class took a similar course last year, while three girls have taken it twice before “.* Cookery must have been highly unsatisfactory in 1906 as the school had no water and only one gas stove in the Reading Room. I was intrigued as to how they managed, and asked Doreen Earl. She could remember that in the late 1910s they took it in turns to cook, baking cakes, buns and biscuits in the oven. The girls wore white overalls, whilst those doing the ‘Chores’ wore pink. Water was fetched from the blacksmith’s cottage originally, then from the tap in the cloakroom, and boiled in a large kettle on an open fire for washing up purposes.

The ‘Scheme of Work’ for 1901 recorded in the school’s logbook gives some indication of the narrowness of education at that time.

Class 1	Arithmetic Writing English Reading History Geography Common objects	dictation, essays, letters, accounts of visits rules of grammar geography and history books Stuart period, Hanoverian period British Isles, Colonies, map drawing one lesson each week
Class 2	Arithmetic Writing English History Reading Geography Common objects	dictation and composition formation of sentences the Ancient Britons, invasion by the Romans, Stories of Caractacus Boadicea and Alfred the Great, Introduction of Christianity, the Norman Conquest, Story of the White Ship, Thomas Becket, Conquest of Wales, Joan of Arc map of the school and village one lesson each week
Class 3	Arithmetic Writing English Reading Geography Objects Music Needlework Drawing Cookery	dictation, transcription, composition formation of sentences three reading books geographical terms, map of school and village lesson on common things notation mending garments boys only girls only

Recitation and copybooks to be used throughout
An inventory of the school's equipment in June 1903 is also revealing

6 easels	7 Blackboards
1 map pole	5 new maps
6 old ones	
1 demonstration frame for needlework	
1 globe	1 watering can
2 pen trays	1 inkwell filler
3 doz rulers	
cooking utensils for class of 18	
22 sets of reading books	106 library books
54 pairs of musical bells	6 doz bar bells
6 doz dumb bells	
11 sets of drawing cards	3 doz set squares
8 pairs of compasses	50 inkwells
14 doz slates	6 drawing models

Obviously, the younger children were still using slates. There was a little equipment for art, nothing for painting and no gym equipment. An entry on January 9th, 1903 states that the "*School library, closed for two years reopened this week with 27 new volumes brought with the proceeds of the children's concert given on breaking up day. The rest of the money being spent on drill apparatus - bar bells, dumb bells for the older children and musical bells for the infants*". We can therefore assume that prior to 1903 the school had no drill apparatus and precious few reading books.

In the early 1900s children stayed at school until they were 14, unless they could prove their ability at a younger age. *November 22nd 1901 - "Edith Seaman, Elizabeth Neville, Robert Read and Fred Tuddenham were examined in Standard 5 this afternoon. All passed and were granted labour certificates."*

The school was regularly visited by its 'manager', a voluntary position held by one of the village dignitaries. The 'manager' from the date the school first opened, was also long serving - a Miss Barbara Millard who lived on St Faith's Road, at the Red House and who stayed for almost 40 years until April 29th, 1911 when she and her family moved away. The manager's duties were to check the attendance register weekly; but Miss Millard did more than this, visiting the different classrooms regularly, helping with the girls' needlework lessons, and generally supporting the 'mistress'.

In 1903 a County Council directive established 'Board of Managers' Governors in the County's schools (now called governors). Regular 'managers' meetings started, Miss Millard becoming the first chairman. Their minutes of 1903 show a Mr Read being employed as school caretaker and cleaner, at a salary of 18 shillings a month, and Miss Collins been granted £85 a year as 'mistress'. On June 20th, 1904 a Mrs Smithson, of the Pump House, St Faith's Road, was summoned before the managers for an irregular attendance at school by her sons Herbert and Samuel. She pleaded that the boys had no boots and that her husband was unemployed but promised to 'reform'.

The managers duties were, however, more connected with maintaining and funding the premises. In 1904 they agreed the cost of gas for cookery classes should be refunded to the Secretary of the

Reading Room Committee, and the gas meter was installed outside the Reading Room to help assess this cost. In 1905 they decided to build a girls' cloakroom behind the infants' room at the back of the school, and in 1906 they requested the laying on of 'town water', as obtaining drinking water from the nearby house was not satisfactory. The water was installed, one cold tap in the sink, in the original cloakroom which became the boys. In 1907 the girls' cloakroom was added, to include another cold tap and sink, and the coalhouse at the back of the school was converted to a 'storeroom' for books with a doorway made into the main room, a new coalhouse being built behind the school and thus the school remained until the 1950s.

For a small school (the register normally around 110 – 125, though it peaked at a high of 155 in 1906) comings and goings were surprisingly frequent - perhaps not that surprising considering that most of the village people lived in tied cottages and came and went at the whim of their employers. Hardly a fortnight went by in the 1900s, 1910s and early 1920s without someone starting or leaving. Most of the village children came from or went to other villages around north-east Norfolk, though one boy left 'to live with his brother in London'. In 1911 three children left to go to Canada. The 'Fields' children, as they were known, from Rackham Fields, seem to have alternated between Catton School and Angel Road School - mainly through expulsions.

June 8th, 1899 – “Admitted Elijah Vincent, who has been turned out of Angel Road School. He is 11 but cannot do the work of Standard 3.”

February, 1902 – “Two little boys who left the school last harvest to go to Angel Road returned here on Monday, not knowing as much as when they left.”

Friday, November 5th, 1907 “James Rich, a boy from Rackham Fields, behaved badly this afternoon and when corrected by the mistress for hurting a younger boy in the playground he flatly refused to do as he was told, and wanted to fight to the mistress, very much upsetting her. Mistress told him not to come again.”

Friday, November 13th, 1907 - “The work of the school has gone on much more smoothly without James Rich. His brother, usually a most tiresome boy has been no trouble at all.”

Not that bad behaviour was the sole prerogative of the 'Fields' children.

Friday, February 9th, 1909 – “On Thursday morning, at about 11.15, Mrs Lord of the village, mother of one of the Standard 3 girls, walked into school uninvited and grossly insulted the mistress before the children, calling her a liar and also a coward and threatening to box her ears. On 9th Marjorie Lord had been very lazy and inattentive in the sewing lesson, and mistress had occasion to reprimand her. She also made her sew while the others were at prayers. She did not return to school, and mistress heard nothing until Mrs Lord walked in.”

Friday, February 26th - “Miss Millard attended school today, and took the opportunity to tell the children who were present last week that Mrs Lord had been guilty of an act of trespass and could be prosecuted for the same. She also said that Mrs Lord has visited her, and much regretted her behaviour, and Marjorie Lord had now left.”

Other misdemeanours where recorded:

May 29th, 1905 – “Mistress had occasion to cane Charles Blake on Wednesday for bad behaviour and his mother had kept him home since.”

Friday, March 4, 1910 – “Conway Bullock left for work this week, and Herbert -----, Standard 4, has been sent to a reformatory for three years.” (I have omitted his surname - most of the children named here were guilty of only minor mischiefs, which their relatives, if seeing their names would find amusing)

November 4th, 1912 – “Mr Fox, attendance officer, called and took names of absentees. On Wednesday morning the mother of Gladys Stannard sent word that the child was not coming again, on account of Mr Fox visiting to know the reason for her absence, as mistress had seen the girl after school on Monday morning paying club money in the Reading Room.”

Up to the late 1920s absences were rife – through colds, but also through epidemics of measles, whooping cough, ring worm and scarlet fever mainly, but twice of diphtheria. The school was closed for odd weeks on occasions because of these. When you think how far the children had to walk - from the far end of Spixworth, from the top of Mile Cross Lane, and from Rackham Fields, in all weathers it was not surprisingly that attendance was sometimes bad.

August 10th, 1910 – “Attendance has been bad throughout this week because of the wet weather. Many of the children have bad boots.”

March 28th, 1901 – “Only 32 children at school today because of deep snow.”

July 23rd, 1906 – “School closed today by order of the District Council, for 14 days because of measles. This means it will not now reopen until after harvest.”

August 14th, 1909 – “Ellen Wrench, a little girl in Standard 5, who had been ill for some weeks died, last Friday. She was one of the children who received a watch last year for five years perfect attendance. The children brought flowers to the school which the teachers made into wreaths for her grave.”

January 8th, 1918 – “Only eight children came to school today because of the snow.”

July 26th, 1918 – “Dorothy Pitcher seemed to be making good progress after diphtheria, but died today suddenly from a heart failure.”

From the mid 1920s illnesses became less frequent - possibly because of vaccinations, but also because of better housing, better road conditions etc. School will sound grim to many children of today but they were treats.

February 1897 – “Miss Lubbock brought oranges to school on Monday afternoon for Valentines for the children, and Miss Millard gave each child a halfpenny.”

August 5th, 1898 – “It would have been better to have given a holiday on Monday. Some parents did not send their children because it was a bank holiday. Many took their children out for the day, but this is particularly hard on those children who are trying to make perfect attendances and thus obtain a framed certificate. The parents went out for the day and the children had to be left at home to attend school.”

This must have been the start of bank holidays – by the following year we find that the August bank holiday was a school holiday.

February 14th, 1902 – “Miss Millard sent a quantity of gingerbread to be distributed for Valentines”

December 5th, 1902 – “On Monday afternoon four trees were planted in the playground in commemoration of the King’s Coronation. Eight children helped.”

Their names are listed in the school logbook and include Conway Bullock and Walter Wrench, both well-known village names. Conway was later to become the only village ‘recruit’ to return from World War I with the bravery medal. The trees, incidentally, were limes, two at each side of the playground. They were still there in 1948, but only one now remains - a quite substantial tree.

Friday 1st, July 1911 – “Mrs Dawson of the Manor House visited last Monday, and presented each child with a piece of cake and a box of sweets, to show her appreciation of their performance in the playground last Friday.”

Wednesday, July 21st, 1911 – “School was visited by Mrs Buxton and Colonel and Mrs Hanning-Lee (of Crome House) and Miss Watts. Coronation goblets were presented to the children by Mrs Buxton, and medals by Colonel Lee.”

June 15th, 1915 – “Miss Buxton and the children from the Hall visited this afternoon to hear the children sing patriotic and empire songs.”

Friday, 25th, November 1921 – “A meeting of the Huntsman and Hounds is due at the Maids Head today, so play has been arranged so that the children can see the hounds.”

The local government boundary change of 1907 took the Catton Grove area into Norwich. Some of the children in that area continued to attend Catton School, but the numbers dropped from 155 in 1906 to 108 in September 1907. The ‘Fields’ children from Rackham Fields seem to have disappeared by 1910 - I have a feeling that the area was eventually ‘slum cleared’ by Norwich City Council prior to the building of Mile Cross and Catton Grove estates. In any case this was all to the good since Miss Collin was complaining numbers were too high.

Friday, September 7th, 1907 “There are 54 infants in the classroom, is very crowded at present. When possible, mistress has let them go into the Reading Room.”

May 8th, 1908 – “Our numbers are getting too large, and children from Norwich who do not behave will have to go first.”

Catton had seen some increase in housing, on Spixworth Road particularly in the early 1900s, and Spixworth was becoming built up at quite an ‘alarming’ rate in the Crostwick Lane area from 1910 onwards. The last pupil at Catton School from Mile Cross Lane area, Jimmy Quantrill, youngest of a large family, left in 1934 or 1935 to attend the new school at Catton Grove. The Spixworth children were to continue here until 1956, when the new school at Spixworth was opened, serving both Spixworth and Crostwick.

Inspectors regularly called to inspect the school's premises.

March 1910 – “The main room which is very full should be partitioned. The question of providing less inconvenient accommodation for infants should be considered. The small porch used as infants' cloakroom is much too small. The ‘closets’ which are close to the school are not cleaned out often enough. The drain near the boys' ‘offices’ is blocked and whenever there is heavy rain the ‘offices’ are flooded. There is no urinal for the use of infant boys.”

Perhaps alarmed by this report, the managers debated the two issues for some weeks. Mr Osborne, the local builder, was asked to inspect the drains; he stated they were “very old and defective” advising their entire abandonment, involving the “considerable outlay” of £31.15s.0d. The managers felt this was well beyond their means - by this time the Hall no longer had a resident factor, the estate being managed by Mr Hansell, of the Norwich firm of solicitors. The managers appealed to Mr Hansell for assistance - presumably this was forthcoming as new drains were installed - but the partitioning of the main room, now separating the two classes by a curtain, had to wait until 1931 when the screen dividing the room into two was provided by subscription from wealthy families in the village.

The new drains did not really meet requirements - infant boys were still served by a drain at the back of the boys' cloakroom when I left, and the infants were still using the small porch as their ‘cloakroom’. The floors in all the rooms were never washed - it was said it would damage the wooden blocks - until Mrs Hunt was appointed cleaner on the 28th September 1942. She probably took bucket and water to them and scrubbed off years of grime, and also set about the girls' ‘closets’.

In October in 1911 the managers accepted the fact that the Reading Room had become part of the school - they took on the responsibility for maintaining it, and increased the caretaker's wages for the extra work involved in cleaning it. In July 1911 the Norfolk Education Committee asked the school whether it would provide evening classes - the reply was that owing to the village's ‘propinquity to Norwich’ such classes were deemed unnecessary.

Through all these years education, and teacher training was gradually improving, and Miss Pye continued to develop her career. The entry for Friday January the 4th 1908 contains the first mention of a trainee from the “Norwich Training School” at Keswick, which was later to become a Teacher Training College.

July 1st, 1908 – “Elsie Cracknell, aged 11, has won a County Council Scholarship, the first by a child in this school, to the Higher Grade School in Norwich”. The managers pleased at this success, authorised the child's photograph to be taken and placed in a frame on the wall of the main classroom, at a cost of 8s 6d.

November the 24th, 1911 – “Reuben Clark, Standard 7, who left in the spring to go to technical school for special subjects has returned for the winter, the distance is too much for him.”

Presumably, he had to walk to the Technical School in St George's, and back again.

On May 3rd, 1912 Miss Ethel Woolnough arrived from Mileham, taking up her duties as assistant mistress to Standards 1 and 2, Miss Pye by this time being the senior mistress. This was a very stable period in the life of the school, with Mrs Holmes taking the infants, Miss Woolnough the next two classes, Miss Pye the 8s to 11s and Miss Collin the seniors. The period which included the First World War, lasted until Miss Collin's retirement in 1921. The war had little effect on school life, although fathers and elder brothers left home to enlist. In October 1915, Miss Woolnough was absent for some days, her father having been killed in Flanders on September 26th. In July and August 1916 overnight Zeppelin raids on Norwich reduced school attendance figures, and on July 4th, 1917 an "air raid alarm horn" in the early hours caused very few children to be sent to school. After her retirement, Miss Collin lived on for some years at 1, Hall Drive, Church Street regularly helping out at school, always in a paisley silk two-piece, until her death on January 7th, 1942.

When Miss Collin left, Miss Pye became acting head for a spell from September 1921 until the appointment of Rev. S. Taylor in January 1922. He did not stay long - he was the first master to set foot in the school, but obviously did not fit in and was ousted by teacher power. Within weeks of his arrival discipline at the school had fallen to pieces - John Lane remembers "*We did as we liked while he was there.*" The managers' Minute Book contains two handwritten letters from Miss Pye counter-signed by Miss Woolnough and by Amy Noble, pupil teacher, complaining of his lack of authority. One letter describes him trying to cane a boy who grabbed the cane, two of his friends joined in a scuffle disturbing the whole school. The second describes a boy disturbing the class by persistently whistling, and another boy fighting Miss Pye, squaring up to Miss Woolnough and announced he would "*fight the lot on yer*", and complaining that Mr Taylor would not admonish the boy for his insolence. The managers responded by offering to accept his resignation and threatening him with dismissal, and on the 8th, June 1922 he did resign, being accepted as headmaster of Aldeby School, near Beccles.

In July 1922, Althea Milne became the temporary head - the incidents did not upset the whole of the school as Fred Hazell, in July of that year managed to pass the 'bursary' and be offered a place at the City of Norwich School.

On November 1st, 1922 Mr Jack Bishop arrived as head, from Swaffham Primary School. A dapper, polite, little man, he was well liked by the children. He stayed for almost six years, his most notable achievement being to start a National Savings scheme for the children in 1923 - which was still running in 1939. The savings were collected every Monday in the Reading Room by Mrs Wolsey, of the White House, St Faith's Road, who volunteered to act as cashier. Mrs Wolsey had a glass eye, and woe betides any young lad who dared to look in her face and grin - this was a caneable offence.

Frank Shorten remembers Mr Bishop giving him a sixpence – a lot of money in those days - for a pastoral drawing of a balloon seller. Frank was in Miss Woolnough's class at the time and she was particularly upset at this show of 'favouritism'. Mr Bishop also arranged for the senior boys and girls to go - on foot or on cycle - to Heather Avenue School in Hellesdon, a modern building, once weekly for woodwork and cookery. Frank Shorten remembers this, the boys were taught there by a Mr Mann.

Mr Bishop left for post in Beccles on April 30th, 1928 and Mr Phillipson arrived as a temporary head for a couple of months. It was about this time that the managers became concerned about the health risks of the open gas flares in the classrooms, and in 1929, they asked a Mr Vanstone to inspect them, his advice being that the lot should be scrapped. The managers asked the British Gas Company for a quote for replacement, the quote being £5.12s for five 'Purley' gas mantles. Feeling that electricity would be safer, they asked the Electricity Board for a quote, which was £10. This persuaded them to stick with gas, and they had the flares replaced by incandescent mantles in glass bowls, with nickel plated reflectors, taking the opportunity to install these in the infants' classroom which up to that time still had candles.

Mr English arrived as headmaster on June 4th, 1928, taking up residence at what had then become the 'schoolmaster's house', next to the Vicarage on the corner of St Faith's Road and Fifers Lane. A certificated teacher, trained at college, he was a strict disciplinarian, with a predilection for the use of the cane, and was disliked or feared by many of the children because of this. On reflection this was not his fault - children attending other schools at the time say the same thing of their head teachers, and it was obviously something instilled into them at training college. Miss Pye, many years afterwards, said to me that she disliked him because he was "brutal to the children", but he brought with him a much wider view of education than any of his predecessors. Art was one of his strengths, as were sports and games. He started competitive football for the boys, and in June 1932 had a concrete strip laid out in the playground for cricket practice. He 'marked out' Church Street from the school to Spixworth Road as 100 yards and to the Maids Head as 220, and there and back as 440 for running practice, and obtained the use of the pasture behind the school for long jump, high jump and hurdles. He was also very keen on music and would arrive at school early every morning to 'write' the daily hymn in music notation on the blackboard, thus striving to teach us all to read music.

June 30th, 1929 – "A useful lesson in musical appreciation was given to the children this afternoon by Mrs Tillet (of Greyfriars) whose string quartet visited the school."

May 13th, 1929 – "Competed in the Norwich Musical Competition, the Seniors gained 2nd place overall and the infants 5th".

In 1929 also came the first mention of planned teaching practice at the school by students of Norwich Training College.

The school punishment book reveals that Mr English regularly used the cane - some 50 occasions a year. He had his particular clients, including anyone named Steward or Quantrill. Sometimes the cane was justified, but other occasions are just plain funny:-

“For being noisy at dinner - Walter Shearing, two strokes”

“For talking - Douglas Day, two strokes”

“For playing conkers in the schoolroom - 2 boys, one stroke each”

“For calling across the classroom – Doreen Kemp, one stroke”

Frank Betts remembers his mother oversleeping one morning and getting up late. Being late for school was a caneable offence and poor Frank, fearing the worse, took the shortcut from his home in White Woman Lane by going across the allotments and through the Butter Close. On nearing the school, he heard Mr English ringing the bell, so he jumped over the school wall to line up at the back of his class in the playground. He wasn't 'late', but he need not have bothered, he got the cane for 'entering school illegally.'

Mr English's caning activities spilled over into sport - he is reputed to have lashed his own son Kit across the back with a stump, after catching him arguing with another boy after a cricket match. Any boy hitting the cricket ball over the school would be caned, and he had broken glass concreted along the back of the school wall, to prevent boys from climbing up to look over into the pasture. Frank Shorten says with some gusto that this was brought home to him in his later years, "As Ye Sow so shall Ye Reap", when during the war Mr English found himself in the Home Guard with some of his ex-pupils, not now little boys but grown men, who got their own back on him at will.

The other side off Mr English's nature was that he could be very kind and thoughtful, broadening the children's minds by taking them out at weekends on cycle rides to study the landscape and buildings of Norfolk, and by thinking up worthwhile activities - I remember the whole school making a highly prized model of the village. I was then only 6 or 7 and our class made cottages out of matchboxes, but the older boys made a beautiful scale model of the Church and Manor House. School was progressing well - Mr English took the 11 to 14 year olds, Miss Pye the 9s to 10s, Miss Woolnough the 7s and 8s and Miss Holmes the infants. In 1931 the logbook shows Miss Holmes "absent through illness" and on November 30th of that year "I have to record the death of Mrs Holmes. She died in the Norfolk and Norwich hospital after 38 years' service having started here in January 1893". This was sad ending to the worthy career. Miss Phyllis Badcock replaced Miss Holmes, daughter of the Alice Badcock who was 'mistress' went Blanche Pye was training in the 1900s.

Mr English gave free rein to Miss Pye on nature study, country dancing and needlework. No longer did we darn and patch - we made summer dresses, embroidered babies' clothes, knitted soft toys.... We went for nature rambles in Fiddle Wood down the Back Road. I remember finding a complete bees' nest (abandoned) in the hedge there one day, and carefully digging it out and carting it back to school to study it.

A 1933 report by His Majesty Inspector states *“Developments in the teaching of singing and folk-dancing continue. The older boys and girls now attend the centre for instruction in woodwork and domestic subjects. Better provision has been made for the teaching of elementary mathematics to the older girls. The main room has now been partitioned, and the two classes of older children are now taught under tolerable conditions”*.

February 9th, 1930 – “Charles Kemp has been chosen to play in an International Schoolboys’ Football Trial at Norwich, and again at Newcastle on February the 20th”.

March 9th, 1930 – “Charles Kemp played in a North v South trial match at Manchester.”

May 6th, 1932 – “Three teams of girls entered the County Folk-Dance Competition in Norwich.”

From then until the outbreak of war entry to the Folk-Dance and choir competitions at St Andrew’s Hall, were a regular yearly event.

July 15th 1936 – *“The school has been granted a half-day holiday by the managers, to commemorate National Savings in the school association reaching £1000”*.

Mrs Wolsey was no longer the cashier. Mr English would collect the money and entrust a pupil living in the North Walsham Road area to deliver it to the post office during his or her lunch hour. Daphne Sandle was so deputed and when she left, her sister Eileen was given the job. Eileen can remember being scared stiff because Mr Carver would keep her waiting in the post office while he served older customers, and she was worried she would be late back at school and receive a shaking.

June 7th, 1937 – *“School gained 2nd place in the Area Sports last Sunday.”*

May 11th, 1937 - *Mrs Buxton and Mrs McCready came to present the children with a Coronation plate and New Testament each, to mark the King’s Coronation.”*

From the early 1930s scholarships to grammar schools becoming more ‘available’ and one or two passed regularly each year. In 1933 Arthur Gallant passed the “Junior Scholarship’ (he came first of the whole County in the examination), and Alan Baxter passed the entrance exam to the Junior Technical School. Sheila Badcock (great-niece of Alice Badcock), passed to the Blyth School in 1937 became, I think, the first ‘ordinary’ child (as opposed to teachers’ children) to make it to University when she went to Reading in 1945. Colin Ranson, a bright boy nurtured by Mr English, passed to the CNS in 1948 and become came the first ex-pupil to make it to Oxbridge, becoming a University professor before his early death in 1980s.

Catton lost its older children in 1937, when Sprowston Secondary School opened in Recreation Ground Road. The school register dropped from over 100 to 85, and classes were redistributed, Miss Pye having the 9s and 10s and Mr English taking the ‘top year’. Miss Woolnough left for Sprowston Junior School in 1937 and on February 21st, 1938, Miss Kathleen Matthews began her long career at Catton, which was to continue until her retirement in 1974.

Mr English complained long and hard about conditions at the school, with little effect, although he did get the cycle shed erected on the west wall of the playground in January 1937. In 1938 the Norfolk Education Committee 'suggested' that improvements were necessary to washing facilities and that the playground surface needed attention but the managers decided they had no money for these items.

Both Mr English and Miss Pye were due to retire in the early 40s, but both agreed to continue until after the war, because of the difficulty in finding replacements during the war years. The managers were becoming desperate - many of the 'gentry' left the village in 1939, apprehensive of the dangers caused by the neighbouring airfield and instead of wealthy landowners the managers now included Booty, Eke, Badcock and the vicar - 'ordinary' householders unable to dig deeply into their own pockets. In 1943 Mr Buxton gave £50 to bale them out of financial difficulties, and in 1946 Mr Neville Howlett, of Eastwood, a long-standing manager, offered to pay for the new wash basins out of his own pocket. Mr Howlett died in 1952, having served the school as manager for 31 years.

In 1946 plans were drawn up for a school canteen, but were quickly rejected as too expensive. In 1948 the vicar, the Rev. Derbyshire-Bowles was instructed as chairman of the managers to 'interview' Mr Bell, Chief Education Officer for Norfolk, asking for immediate action to take the school over under 'controlled' status. The vicar, a well-meaning and kindly man, was surely no match for Mr Bell - he made no progress, so in 1949 the managers sent an urgent letter to the Minister of Education. There is no copy of the letter in the minute book, but it apparently achieved the desired objective, because the school became Voluntary Controlled in September of that year. The final balance sheet drawn up by the managers showed a deficit of £47.1s and they agreed to hold a sale and school entertainment to clear this off.

While these problems were occupying the minds of the managers, the war years passed with very little change in the running of the school. Outbreak of war caused the start of the autumn term in 1939 to be delayed until September 11th and even then only 68 children attended out of a total register of 110. When school resumed after summer holidays in 1939 some parents kept their children at home because of the lack of air-raid shelters on the premises. The first air raid warning in school hours occurred on October 16th, 1939, but the protest was quickly forgotten as the days remained fairly peaceful. Shelters (simple dugouts) were built during the Easter Holidays of 1940, Mr Buxton sanctioning the digging of the trenches in his field at the back of the school building. They were completed just in time for a series of air raid warnings during that year.

On July 9th, 1940, the first air raid warning occurred during school hours, and the children used the shelters for the first time, but prior to that, during June, attendances had been very poor because of the 'broken nights' due to air raids.

On January 21st, 1941, the shelters were in use for two hours in the morning and from 1:15 p.m. all the afternoon. On February 21st and 27th few children attended school as air raid warnings sounded at about 8:00 a.m. and lasted until mid-morning. On April 28th 'a severe air bombardment' the previous night again meant a low attendance, and Miss Middleton, the infants' teacher, was absent as her lodgings had been bombed.

On 26th November, 1942, a US officer from the RAF station visited to talk to the older children about Thanksgiving Day. On 23rd December, 1942 children from the top two classes were invited to a party on the airfield, and on 25th November, 1943, an American officer and WAC Sergeant visited to talk again about Thanksgiving Day.

On February 13th, 1945, at lunchtime, an aeroplane crashed at the bottom of Church Street, blocking the road and causing poor attendance in the afternoon - this was the plane which crashed on Beechwood, Anna Sewell's house, damaging the corner rooms and the cottage next door.

After the war school quickly returned to normal, but on September 16th, 1946, 30 Spixworth children were kept away by their parents in protest against the non-provision of school meals, which had started up in many larger schools during the war. The managers succeeded in quelling this revolt by asking the Parish Hall committee for permission to use the Hall for lunches – (the daily 'trek' there and back became quite dangerous with increasing traffic in the early 1950s).

On March 8th, 1948, the school was left unlocked by a member of the Sunday school, and a boy aged 7 and his 4-year old sister entered and caused 'considerable damage'. Mr English's cane must have been twitching in his hands, but he took legal advice and was told they could not be punished for the offence as it had taken place outside school hours. However, as the children had told lies galore in their efforts to escape punishment he 'punished' them for the lies instead.

Miss Pye's career was now coming to its conclusion and, on March 18th, 1948, she attended the presentation in the Parish Hall where she was presented with a cheque for £50 and a small album containing the names of the subscribers. She retired the following day. Later that year, on December 22nd Mr English also retired after the presentation of a cheque, album, and pipe.

It is remarkable that, throughout Miss Pye's long career, school hardly changed at all. In the early 1950s, however with Catton and Spixworth becoming 'developed', a new 'commuter' element with a somewhat higher standard of living demanded better conditions for their children and, with the school now financed by the Education Committee there was no lack of cash for improvements. Within six years of retirement of Mr English and Miss Pye the school had an asphalted playground (1949), wash basins and water heaters (1950), flush toilets (1951), plastic floor tiles (1951), electricity (1953) and slow combustion stoves (1953). By 1966 the new school building in Butter Close had been built. The old building has never yet become redundant, but if Mr English or Miss Pye were to 'come back' now they would recognise nothing but the outer shell.

The school has always been good to its pupils – Blanche Pye is a supreme example, having started as an infant and finished as a senior mistress, without having to leave for any formal training. However, we find several familiar names following a similar route over the years. Sylvia Dark became a ‘pupil teacher’ in 1906, and later returned as a temporary mistress, before going on to a teaching career in Wreningham. Sylvia became Mrs Day, and will be remembered by older residents as a bastion of village life, and particularly as a voluntary librarian when the County Library service opened a one day a week part-time library after the Second World war - fittingly in the old Reading Room. Florence Rolfe was a pupil teacher from January 1921 to December 1925: ‘Liddy’ as people later knew her, spent most of her teaching career at Crostwick and Horsford. Amy Noble was a pupil teacher from January 1920 to December 1923 - to return much later as Mrs Baker, senior mistress under Mr Deller.

Leonard Evans, from Dixon’s Fold, was a pupil teacher in October 1927 - he will be remembered as a music teacher at Alderman Jex Boy’s School. This tradition of helping village children to ‘flex their muscles’ continued throughout the century; on November 11th, 1946, Dick Lane is mentioned ‘observing’ in the school – Dick had returned to the village after war service, and took the opportunity to become a teacher through the ex- servicemen’s one year course laid on at the Training College at Keswick. Eileen Sandle appears as a ‘student’ under Mr English in July 1948 - later to teach at Wroxham before spending most of her teaching career in the Scottish Highlands. Jim Booty, too, tried his hand under Mr Deller in 1949. I mentioned my brother for one reason only, after short spells at Holt and Wensum View in Norwich, Jim became long-service headmaster at Northwold, the school which Mr English left in order to come to Catton way back in 1928. It’s a small world.

With thanks to Mr Jackson, current Headmaster, Church Street Middle School, for allowing access to the school’s logbooks and the Managers’ Minute book, and to the following ex- pupils, my friends, who have allowed me to use their memories:-

Doreen Earl

Frank Shorten

Frank Betts

Eileen Grant (nee Sandle)

John Lane

I am sorry I could not show the original transcripts to more of my old friends - time is limited

Maire Booty - November 1999

Revised March 2000

