

# Memories of Shelford School

**Gladys Housden** was born in 1911:



**This is Gladys' class, which was called the Fourth Standard. She is the girl sitting on the right of the girl with the slate.**

## **The Maypole**

I loved school. We used to have the Maypole. Now if we was on the Maypole, we were dressed up, our mothers had to do our wreaths with real flowers from the garden. And there was a jester. That was held in the Vicarage grounds, the old Vicarage, where the pillar box is in the wall. Mrs Winderlow lived there.



**This is the maypole dancing in 1921. Some of the girls have wreaths of flowers in their hair.**

*Photograph by courtesy of the Cambridgeshire Collection*

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**Alice** was born in 1912:

My mother took me to school the first day. Miss Marfleet was the teacher, and there was a great big rocking horse, which we were not allowed to ride.



**A tortoise stove**

The classrooms were not at all warm, and were heated by tortoise stoves.



**Can you see the picture of a tortoise on the top of the stove?**

*Tortoise stove photographs by kind permission of CIBSE Heritage Group,  
[Heritage Group Website for the Chartered Institution of Building Services  
Engineers](#)*

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If we needed a drink, we had to ask for a key to unlock the porch where there was a sink and a tap. The playground was small, just a concrete affair and, at the bottom of it, the toilets.

The boys and girls were segregated at playtime. The Little Shelford people stayed for lunch sometimes, of baked potatoes in the ashes of the fire. The caretaker kept the fires going. He and his wife lived in the school and his wife gave first aid if we fell over. The dentist came once a year, and the nurse inspected for nits, which were not uncommon.

## **Punishment for being naughty**

Most children were well behaved, because the schoolmaster, Charles Smith, was very strict. But he never caned anyone. He was very fair, but very strict. If we were playing outside and it was time to go in, he just came and stood on the doorstep and every one got into their lines without knowing why. A very nice man. We did get some punishment. The teacher in standard 2 would come and rap you over the knuckles. We never told our parents, because they just said you must have been doing something to deserve it! I do remember one teacher caning boys across the legs.



**This is the headmaster, Mr Smith, and the boys in the woodwork class. You can see that he has a big moustache, and has a handkerchief peeping out of his pocket, which was thought to be very smart.**

You were never allowed to be late. The bell went a few minutes before, and you had to be there, punctually, no excuses.

The school catered for children over 11 years. In fact, children from Hauxton and Stapleford joined at 11 years. Boys used to walk all the way from the Gogs to School in Shelford. There were over two hundred pupils at the time.

The 11 plus existed, but I only remember one boy passing to go to the County School in all my time at Shelford, and he came from Hauxton. It wasn't free - you had to pay.

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The school was quite crowded, but the buildings were different than now. There was no upstairs and no hall. Only three different classrooms, and that was it, apart from the infants. There were probably eight teachers, plus the headmaster.

## Things we learnt

We started with prayers and a hymn, and then we did arithmetic. On Friday morning, every week, the Reverend Jeeves gave us a scripture lesson. We also had supervised exercise outside, weekly, by a teacher, and we had games and played netball and hockey. Art was held on Thursday afternoons, and we had nature study and we drew flowers and took them to bits and drew the parts. If it was good enough, it was displayed on the wall.



**Boys and girls gardening in 1948**

The Old Thatch was used for cookery and laundry, and the boys did the gardening.



**This is Old Thatch, the house next door to the school**



**The girls doing cookery in 1930**

*Photograph by courtesy of the Cambridgeshire Collection*

There was another wooden building in the garden where woodwork classes were held. We were taught how to knit, and always knitted black stockings. We made nightdresses and a boy's shirt with no collar, all hand sewn, and we were taught smocking. Sewing machines were acquired just as I left.

### **What we wore**

We always wore boots with laces up the front, and thick winter coats.

We wore combinations: a sort of all-over undergarment made of some woolly stuff with long sleeves and an opening at the back. We wore socks, because our legs got chapped with the cold.

Nobody went anywhere without a hat. The boys wore caps and short trousers until they were 14.

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**You can see in this picture from 1921 that all the girls have long hair, which is tied back, with big bows of ribbon (but not plaited). Several of them are wearing white pinafores. The boys and teachers have white collars and ties. The teacher is holding his hat because it would not be polite to wear it in the photograph.**

*Photograph by courtesy of the Cambridgeshire Collection*

The girls had short dresses, and you could have your dresses a bit longer and your hair up when you were 14. All the girls had long hair, which had to be plaited. When it was washed, there was only an outside tap to supply water, and I suppose we washed it with ordinary soap. The hair was brushed night and morning, and plaited at bedtime. On special occasions the hair was twisted round a long piece of rag and tied together to make it curl like ringlets.

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**Betty Kennedy** was born in the 1920s:

## School swimming



When we were at school, we would go swimming once a week on the Great Shelford Rec. We had changing huts down there. So we used to change into our swimsuits.

The swimsuits that we wore had to be knitted by ourselves, in the knitting class. I couldn't knit, so I got my knuckles whacked every time because I didn't hold the needles correctly. So I've never knitted since!

The swimsuits were made with wool. They had a sort of bodice part, and the base, with a crossover at the back. As soon as you went in the river, the straps stretched and the neck part dropped down to your navel somewhere! It was very heavy. They were terrible things!

## Fetching the milk on the way home



*Rectory Farm, painting by courtesy of Bob Whitaker*

The farm next to the school was Rodwell's (*now Rectory Farm*). We had to take a big jug, a metal can sort of thing, on the way to school, and leave it down at the

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dairy. Then we used to go and pick it up on the way home with six pints of skimmed milk. Ever so cheap. So we'd get the milk and take that home. Sometimes we fell over and dropped the whole lot and we'd go back to the farm. Billy Bye was in charge of doing all the milk. 'Come on', he'd say, and he'd give us another can, so Mum and Dad never found out about it!

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