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Lakenheath  
~ School



A Centenary  
~ Poem

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Our School.

In eighteen hundred and seventy-seven our dear school was built,  
 Its seen two wars both come and go, and still its walls don't wilt.  
 But let's go back to the very beginning; let's see what stories we  
 can find;

Let's unfold its treasures, here and now for all mankind.  
 Early in January 1878, the Mistress began to fret,  
 She had 108 children in her class, teachers were difficult to get.  
 Work was out of the question until some help could arrive,  
 The School Board was sympathetic but thought that she'd survive.

On February 1st in that very same year, the weather took a turn  
 for the worse,  
 Many of the children were absent otherwise the Head might have  
 left in a hearse.

Still no teachers came to assist which might appear to be a little  
 unwise,

But the School Board seemed quite happy, and averse to advertise.  
 On one occasion, after a fleeting visit, the School Board made a  
 note of what it had seen,

It immediately appointed two pupil teachers, one aged twelve, and  
 the other fourteen.

By April, progress was still very slow, a teacher hadn't come yet,  
 But the two pupil teachers did a useful job, 36 children had  
 learned the alphabet.

One day in May, attendance dropped, only 64 out of 120,  
 A storm was raging across the fen, of rain and mud there was plenty.  
 Two days during the middle of June, the children went home in a  
 dream,

They'd been dismissed early to make their pleasure -- some surely  
 had strawberries and cream.

On Wednesday the 20th, another half holiday, the children again  
 went home in a hurry,

This time to celebrate the Golden Wedding of Captain and  
 Mrs. Murray.

March 14th, 1879, no coal in the school we were told,  
 Lessons were omitted, children were marched, the weather was  
 bitterly cold.

Another entry, in praise of all, about the 16th May,  
 It reads "Teachers industrious, children painstaking" -- they're  
 still the same today.

June 13th, exams completed and work ceased altogether, whilst  
 children of all shapes and sizes

Were kindly greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Howard who were there to award  
 the prizes.

Only a month later, a boy severely punished, the crime was stealing  
 a scarf,

"But if it please you, Miss, I'm ever so sorry, I only did it for  
 a laugh!"

Nevertheless the Mistress thought, it was a sin for all to see,  
 She thereupon delivered a lesson on morals --- especially honesty.



As we continue to turn from page to page, Our School is two years  
 old,  
 But let's read on a little bit more, a few more leaves unfold.  
 During these initial early years, Our School in two parts was  
 fixed,  
 A Mistress in charge of the infants, and a Master in charge of the  
 mixed.  
 About this time, epidemics were prevalent, many children at home  
 ill in bed,  
 One little lad was sent home from school with a ringworm in his  
 head.  
 School would be closed for two weeks at a time, because of  
 measles or other spots like these,  
 But soon the children would be back again, hopefully free from  
 disease.  
 Tragedy struck in the month of March, 1882,  
 Two little girls died, the school closed its doors, and reopened  
 in June to start anew.  
 School wasn't always a happy place, of this I feel absolutely  
 sure,  
 As little Charlie Fincham played truant three times in a week  
 in 1884.  
 The late 1880's, and October it seems, is the month where there  
 appear rows,  
 Of empty desks, the children are absent, the reason, picking  
 potatoes.  
 1888 and there was an awful shindig, the Mistress was on the  
 brink  
 Of belting a girl who had clumsily upset, on the registers,  
 a bottle of ink.  
 As it was nearly Christmas, you know, "Peace on earth, goodwill  
 toward men,"  
 The Mistress remained calm, kindly said to the girl, "My dear,  
 please don't do that again!"  
 Many children strived to achieve good attendance throughout a full  
 school year,  
 The Goward & Evans prize was held in high esteem and this was  
 abundantly clear.  
 February 19th, 1892, the Reverend Scrivener came to say  
 That 33 pairs of new boots were to be given, to children on that  
 day.  
 6th July, 1893, and for months there had been much talk  
 As to whether the school would have a holiday for the marriage of  
 the Duke of York.  
 Speculation was right, an afternoon off, in order to celebrate,  
 But before they went home, Mr Kershaw informed them "Tomorrow,  
 don't be late!"  
 One of our teachers lost her patience, and suddenly from out of  
 the blue  
 She actually hit one of the children, and this caused a right to do!  
 She received a caution, and was told that this was not the way to  
 educate a child,  
 Be firm by all means, but also gentle, meek and mild.



April 1894, and Mr. Kershaw resigned as Head,  
Mr. Williamson was appointed, almost at once, to take up the post  
instead.

February 1897, areas of land under water stood,  
Attendance was poor, children at home, because of the Fens in flood.  
In the month of June this very same year, Queen Victoria's Diamond  
Jubilee,

Two days holiday, the fair was here, the whole village went on  
a spree.

The Government Report which came in July, was greeted like  
treasure trove,

Discipline was at last satisfactory; it had taken 20 years,  
by jove!

Our School now moved from strength to strength, standards were  
given much thought,

A number of books were purchased, and nine dozen slates were bought.  
The vicar of Worlington came along, to hear the children read and  
sing,

He wrote in the Log Book how pleased he was; delighted with  
everything.

1900 and the drums were beating in a distant land, a message was  
coming our way,

To commemorate the relief of Ladysmith, yet another half holiday.  
Now was the time when Mr. Williamson left, he felt his work was done,  
Mr. W.H. Gilbey became the new Head, in January 1901.

1902 and the Boer War was over, there followed a Proclamation of  
Peace,

Yet once more an afternoon off; temporarily work was to cease.  
June 24th, still 1902, and the coronation was nigh,  
This time Our School closed for the whole of the week, the children  
heaved a sigh.

1903 and the West Suffolk County Educational Committee took control  
of the school,

The Committee controlled many others of course, this appeared to be  
the rule.

Her Majesty's Inspector, in 1904, sent in a detailed report,  
That a glass partition was very necessary, and the matter should be  
given more thought.

For with 200 children, and only one classroom, chaos might probably  
reign,

And Mr. Gilbey, against his desire, might have to use a cane!

1906 and the partition arrived in the form of a moveable screen,  
The children were separated, order restored, once more life became  
serene.

November 20th, 1908, and a girl called Mabel Grey,  
Completed seven years perfect attendance, what a memorable day!  
December 1909, George Lummis returned to school quite bright,  
He'd been absent eight weeks with a broken arm, but had forgotten  
how to write.

He went to Mr. Gilbey and said, "Please Sir, hear me out I beg,  
My brother Edgar can't come back yet, because of his broken leg!"  
Edward VII, the Peacemaker, had ruled for eight years as king,  
But the school was closed on the 20th May, the whole country was  
now in mourning,



The scholars assembled; they walked slowly to church, the memorial  
 service to attend,  
 They knew that this was a sign of respect, as King Edward had been  
 everyone's friend.  
 One month later, children home again, this time in celebration,  
 For this was an occasion they would all remember, King George V's  
 Coronation.  
 About this time, in 1912, it was suggested that "warning signs"  
 Be placed on the road, a short distance from school --- a far cry  
 from today's yellow lines.  
 Trees should be removed on the eastern side, to allow for more  
 natural light,  
 Although it was necessary, the children were sad to see them taken  
 from the site.  
 Reginald Coleman was absent from school, but it wasn't his fault  
 you see,  
 I think he'll remember that his sister had fever, even now when  
 he's 73.  
 He made the most of it whilst he was away, and he really felt quite  
 grand,  
 Little did he know in these early years that he'd become lead  
 trombone in the band.  
 1912, the month of July, fruit picking the seasonal task,  
 Some children fell asleep in school, the reason you shouldn't ask.  
 September 16th was a unique occasion, the Managers gave the children  
 a treat,  
 Our School was closed for the whole of the day, and the children  
 lined the High Street.  
 Several thousand troops were passing through the village on their  
 way to we know not where,  
 Many of the Village folk clapped and cheered, some were mesmerised  
 and could but stare.  
 Mr. Gilbey, the Head, was a very keen gardener, for years he'd  
 wanted the subject in school,  
 Hard though he tried, he had no success, they hadn't a single tool,  
 Until one day in 1913, the Managers finally agreed  
 That a rood of land should be secured, for the boys to sow some seed.  
 Mr. Creek, County Gardening Instructor, as he dug he wore a frown,  
 "Come on you lads, up you jump, you won't get it done sitting down."  
 The boys were now well catered for, all the girls too could be seen  
 Working with their lovely sewing machine which they received in 1915.  
 I nearly forgot, let's go back a year, or the story will surely be  
 marred,  
 In 1914, a significant event, the playgrounds were newly tarred!  
 Sorry friends, but back one more year, the galleries we are about to  
 remove,  
 Whether this will eventually be valuable, only time itself will prove.  
 Writing of time let's move ahead, to Miss Rolph when she was winding the  
 clock,  
 She'd finished her task, and in stepping down, fell and had a  
 dreadful shock.  
 This severe fall caused her absence from school, she really was in  
 pain,  
 The children missed her but soon she returned to be with them once  
 again.



1915, the country at war, the whole nation as busy as bees,  
 Supporting the Christmas Pudding Fund for our soldiers overseas.  
 The Head addressed the scholars in 1917, on the 24th May,  
 About the many things which they should think, especially on  
 Empire Day.

It's true that fuel was expensive, an ever increasing cost,  
 44/- a ton was the price of coal, but without it the school's  
 warmth would be lost.

November 11th, 1918, news of the Armistice came through at noon,  
 What a joyous occasion this turned out to be, the signing wasn't  
 a moment too soon.

Exactly the same month, only two years later, the attendance was  
 unbelievably poor,

A circus just happened to be visiting the village, this was the  
 reason for sure.

Two young girls were ill with influenza, 30th January, 1922,  
 One was Olive Hanslip, and the other was Eva Drew.

This was the year Governess Rolph retired, for the infants she'd  
 done her best,

After such devoted service to our dear school, she well deserved  
 a rest.

The Mixed Department, 1923, Mr. Gilbey was absolutely certain,  
 That after 22 years as Headmaster, he would take his final curtain.  
 Now Mr. Bolton and Miss Cooper when all is said and done,  
 Took charge of the children in Our School, you see, two heads are  
 better than one.

1924, what a calamity, the water supply ceased to flow,  
 The school pump had broken, but the reason we don't know.  
 Honesty, we were told by the vicar, is better by far than a sin,  
 When a schoolboy aged nine who found a pound note, truthfully  
 handed it in.

The Head had discovered that the vicar, was the rightful owner of  
 this pound,

And when Young Tom Flack had been suitably rewarded, there were  
 obviously smiles all round.

December 17th, the first time it's mentioned, parents invited at  
 their leisure

To wander round school, see exhibitions of work; they expressed it  
 had been a pleasure.

I felt rather sorry when I read this next bit, but now see the  
 humorous side,

Of the man who had taken the clock for repair, and brought it back  
 with pride.

"Thankyou kindly" said Miss Cooper, "Would you please hang it up in  
 its place?"

"I will that Maam" but in so doing, he went and cracked the clock face.  
 1925 and Phyllis Hammond, in her exams had proved to be a grand little  
 lass,

And little Reggie Morley was top, of the boys, that is, that  
 happened to be in his class.

A September morning, and the cartman on delivering coal to Our School,  
 Suddenly felt his cart disappearing, and said, "Oooh, I am a fool!"  
 The cartman asked Mr. Bolton to come and see what he had found,  
 Together they went to see the cart, stuck in a hole in the  
 playground.



Just how deep the hole really was, would be difficult to tell,  
But one thing on which they both agreed, was that the hole was once  
a well.

No doubt at last they got the wheel free, no permanent harm was  
done,

But whilst that wheel was stuck in that hole, I'll bet the kiddies  
had some fun!

The children couldn't write on the 15th December, so cold they  
couldn't think,

The previous night there was frost about which had frozen all the ink.

Saturday, 30th October, 1926, I'll try to be fairly explicit,

5 members of staff and 20 boys went to Ely on an Educational Visit.

22nd February, 1929, and 14 girls, excited, rushed to the hotel,

They knew they were starting Domestic Subjects with Miss Roberts  
down at The Bell.

16th July, 1930, and Mr. Leonard said it was too far to hike,  
He wouldn't be in to teach that day, he'd had a bit of trouble  
with his bike.

1931, Geoffrey Coleman whilst playing, tore his finger on Arras  
Mackender's belt hook,

It must have been a very bad cut, otherwise the note wouldn't have  
been in the book.

Aeroplanes at Mildenhall, ready for the Melbourne Air Race,

October 19th, 1934,

The King, the Queen, and the Prince of Wales were there to see them,  
also children galore.

1935, and not only teachers came to school on bikes, children were  
cycling too,

A plan for a cycle shed was received from the architect, this was  
something new.

Many teachers had been in school to date, some stayed and others  
went,

But from 1936, the Head remained for years, his name, Mr. R.B. Dent.

The childrens' clothes were saturated, one day in September,

So much so he lit three fires ---- a day perhaps he'll remember!

1937, and whether it was because the children were looking thinner,

Hot soup was sold at 1d per half pint to those who stayed for dinner.

4th October, Milk in Schools, this was another new scheme,

86 children drank their milk and thoroughly enjoyed the cream.

February, 1938, another teacher came; guess his name if you can,

You don't get a prize for completing this rhyme, his name, Mr. C.G. Mann.

September, and two Air Wardens arrived, with a rather difficult task,

It was time to measure the children so that each could have a gas  
mask.

3rd July, 1940, and it was plain for all to see,

Our Jack was going for Military Service, he left school in the  
afternoon at three.

He was about to defend his country, to protect Our School from  
attack,

The children wished him luck as they waved him goodbye and said they  
hoped he'd soon be back.

Registers were marked late on the 25th September, there'd been an  
air raid during the night,

What with all the flashes and thunderous bangs, Our Jack was putting  
up a fight!



7th January, 1942, and the school canteen opened for lunch,  
Hot dinners were served to 26 children, and it wasn't chocolate  
crunch.

One month later the cook was absent, Mr. Dent signalled S.O.S.,  
As if by magic, two ladies came to help, they were members of the  
W.V.S..

When Miss Cooper retired in 1943, the date being the 7th June,  
The two departments would now become one, and this would be fairly  
soon.

The 8th in fact, the very next day, was when Mr. Dent knew he  
hadn't to share

The children in Our School with anyone, they were now to be all in  
his care.

It was during the summer of '43, when little Roger Crane tried to  
flee

From the clutch of his pals at playtime, fell, and badly grazed  
his knee.

Almost a year later, the same again, it becomes a bit tedious to  
the reader,

Another boy, similar accident, this time young Mick Leader.

6th October, 1944, a day we must never forget,

Into the school came a piece of apparatus, it was called a wireless  
set.

Bought from the proceeds of salvage collections, made throughout  
the year,

Broadcasts for schools will now be followed, these the children  
will hear.

The war was over, there were times of course, when the country had  
been in a fix,

But Our Jack had saved us, he was with us once more, April, 1946.

June '47, and a fleet of coaches left Lakenheath in rather a hurry,

They were carrying over 200 spectators to the football final in Bury.

What a match it turned out to be, the opposition was certainly tough,

But try as they might, Elmswell lost, they just weren't good enough.

"Well done chaps," said Colonel Chase, "I can see you've had some fun,

So remember this; if nothing else, it matters not whether you've  
lost, drawn or won.

But pitting your skills against one another and always doing

your best,

It's the pleasure you derive from such a game, not really winning  
the contest."

As our lads travelled back to Lakenheath, with cup and medals in  
hand,

They thought long and hard about the Colonel's words --- they were  
difficult to understand.

When Mr. Carter, C.E.O., came to school to congratulate the boys,

He knew that they'd rather win than lose, hence the cheering and all  
the noise!

19th July, 1949, and up to now the entries have been made in ink,

I note the first entry in biro, at least that's what I think!

It wouldn't be fair not to mention the first netball, it was a case  
of what might have been,

For when our girls played Brandon school, they lost, 6 goals to 14.



27th May, 1952, a visit to Windsor by the top class,  
They were hoping to see our future Queen, they'd heard she was a  
gradely lass.  
The next 25 years we must remember quickly, or this ode will be  
too long,  
And to keep you people sitting here another hour, would, I'm sure,  
be wrong.  
During this period Mr.Manders came, Mr.Dent retired, and then so  
did Our Jack,  
Mr.Manders moved north, and I turned up, I've enjoyed trying to  
put the clock back.  
The parents worked hard, a swimming pool built, a really  
marvellous asset,  
And had it not been for this beautiful hall, where today, I ask,  
would we have met?  
More recently we had installed a form of central heating,  
We're never satisfied, today of course, we would have liked  
more seating.  
The time has come for me to conclude, having recalled the  
"Good Old Days",  
But as you reminisce, let's not regret the changes, they've been  
a help in many ways.  
And now, at last, a silent prayer, to the Heavens way up high,  
Together, we ask of Thee, Oh Lord, never let Our School die.  
Please let the children sing with glee, and learn to play  
their part,  
For whilst our village has Our School, it will always  
have a heart!

Wally Hebden,  
15th October, 1977.

The information necessary to compile this Centenary Poem has been taken from the School Log Books from 1877 to the present day. All proceeds from the sale of this publication will be used to help finance the Centenary Celebration Party, given to the senior citizens who were former pupils of "Our School".

Thankyou for your support.