

# Treats and Holidays

Glemsford children were fortunate in the number of reasons for days off. Not being affiliated to the church, the school treated each denomination equally. Thus there were regular midweek holidays for Sunday School treats in the early summer, whether at the Church, the Chapel or the "Ebenezer".

Elections were another excuse, since the school provided suitable premises; but elections were not confined to General and Local. The School Board had to be elected and that occasion provoked intense local interest. At the turn of the century, the school was used for a series of Water Works enquiries, the first being in 1898. The Annual Inspection was, for many years, an excuse for another day (earlier on half-days were given). This practice lasted until 1900, when the holiday was refused by one member of the Board, Mr Oscar Clarke. On that occasion the teachers tried to make up for the disappointment by allowing extra play and other diversions from the normal time table.

Mr Clarke made himself unpopular at other times, too. The Relief of Mafeking, Ladysmith and the "Queen's Birthday" were all occasions of flag-waving, patriotic singing and the day holiday. Strangely, the end of the Boer War in 1902 did not merit the same treatment. This episode unleashed unusually strong feelings which creep to the surface of the logbooks.

There are consecutive entries in the Infants' School log which are longer and more formal than usual, especially for Miss Bowrey: May 30th 1902 "In honour of the King's Birthday celebrations, the children stood after Registers were closed this morning, and after a little talk on ordinary birthday doings, and an explanation of the difference in date between the celebrations and His Majesty's actual Birthday, sang the National Anthem, and their new Coronation Song, in His Majesty's honour. They then gave 3 cheers and a good clap for "The King", and the ordinary lessons were taken up, at 9.45 a.m. instead of 9.40 a.m." June 2nd 1902 "In consequence of the teachers' petition for a half-holiday in honour of the Declaration of Peace, being negatived, the children had 15 minutes extra play given them this afternoon, to fix the event in their minds; the Time Table was also altered slightly to admit of Kindergarten Work only being taken instead of the usual routine. As all the other schools in the district had either a whole or half-holiday, both children and teachers were disinclined for strenuous work."

The Mistress of the Girls' School made a similar note. Neither entry impressed the Board. On 1 July "Mr Ezra Game gave notice ... that he would bring before the notice of the Board an Entry in [ the Girls' School] log book respecting a holiday for the peace Commemoration." Obviously, teachers could not be seen to go against the Board's wishes, and could expect trouble if they did, but what did the Board have against a peace commemoration? Why was no holiday granted when the village's close neighbours all celebrated the event? Why did Mr Game never, in the end, raise the issue again? Why was Miss Bowrey's inflammatory note not mentioned as well? Strangest of all, what were Miss Bowrey's motives in adding to the margin of HER log a neatly-drawn flag, against the entry relating to the King's Birthday? A flag, moreover, in full colour; but not the Union Flag; the flag she drew is a tricolour, in green, yellow and orange, which seems to represent the Boer colours!

Many other holidays were less controversial. Immediately before the Easter Holiday a Prize Distribution took place. The non-prize winners benefited because lessons always finished half a day early to allow for the preparations. 9 April 1897: "9th School closed for the afternoon, on account of the annual Prize Distribution. Average attendance for the week = 92.8." A local newspaper records that "The eighth annual prize distribution took place on Friday last at the Board Schools. For this purpose the children of all three departments were massed in the large Infants' room. The chair was taken by Mr. E. Underwood ..."

It is more surprising to find the school opening its doors to the general public. From the earliest times, the Board was willing to allow outside organisations to use the premises. Soon after the school opened, the Board agreed to let the school "for the purpose of a lecture on Australia" in April 1875. It is possible that this was more than an educational exercise. Emigration was becoming a possibility, and as unemployment and rural poverty remained a fact of life, it may have proved attractive. (Evidence of actual emigration is limited in the log-books to one reference at the turn of the century).

The buildings were also used for "a Rectory entertainment", "for a Church Choir entertainment", "by the Good Templars" and for the regular practices of the Perseverance Brass Band. Occasionally the Board charged for the cost of cleaning after these lettings, but that wasn't usual. The original Board intended that the school should be well utilised.

The early Mistresses were expected to run a night school on top of their ordinary duties. This duly opened in October 1875 with 33 students, and "Evening Continuation School" was still in operation at

the end of the century. A newspaper report comments: "The chairman remarked that the number attending the school was small, yet scholars came regularly..."

During the 1890's and early years of this century, the school was put to two other, more familiar uses. Starting, apparently, in 1893, the school was closed for half a day each February or March to allow for a Sale of Needlework prepared by the children. What the precise object of this exercise was, is not made clear. There appear to have been some problems, particularly in the Girls' School, with the supply of materials, so perhaps this was a fund-raising exercise. There is a clue in the first (1893) reference to the event. Later references are to a "Sale and Exhibition"; the first entry refers only to an "Exhibition". It might be that this began simply as an "Open Day" event in which the staff saw the possibilities and decided, the following year, to sell off some of the items on display. By 1898, the event was simply a "Sale", but had been expanded to include "kindergarten" items. Presumably this meant items of art and craft.

Glemsfordians have always enjoyed visiting the school to listen to the efforts of their children "in concert". The packed hall of the present day, on the occasion of the Christmas concert, is nothing new. It maintains a long-established tradition. "Annual" concerts are recorded on several occasions from 1893 onwards - again, we have Miss Bowrey to thank. These events took place in the evening and began as "end of term" concerts. In March 1898, the "school closed at 11 a.m. for the children's annual concert" on 8th, but on 9th, "owing to the large number of people unable to gain admittance last evening, it was decided to repeat the Concert tonight. A half-holiday was granted this afternoon in consequence." The event was an outstanding success. Any form of outside entertainment would have been welcomed in the village at a time when little else was provided. (Not that Glemsford was entirely off the beaten track. A circus visited the village in September 1896 and again in 1899 causing, on the one occasion, attendance to fall and, on the other, the school to be closed for half a day. The visit of a photographer to the school is already referred to in Mr Deeks' "Glorious Glemsford". That visit, on 16 June 1898, caused the suspension of the timetable from 10.45 until the end of lunchtime.) In March 1899, the Concert was scheduled to last two evenings to avoid the previous year's crush, but the hard work was almost ruined by a very heavy fall of snow which kept a lot of children away for the next three days. Nevertheless, in April 1900 the concert, or "Entertainment" as it had become, was scheduled for two nights and "as ... the children need resting-time, the Board granted a half-holiday on these two afternoons in

consequence." This brief note underlines the concern the staff had for the comfort of their pupils.

There were standard periods of school closures at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and for "the Harvest". In the early years, the school also closed regularly one day each month. Local fairs, in Glemsford or Melford, sometimes merited a closure; the Fair Holiday of 1897 was actually extended by a week to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Boxted Flower Show and the Glemsford Cottagers' Show sometimes provided a separate excuse for a day's or half-day's holiday. The Harvest Holiday was normally a month long but varied in its timing, for obvious reasons. The end of the holiday was particularly moveable, and special notices would be published to announce the re-opening. The log book records of the Harvest Holiday throw an interesting sidelight on the vagaries of rural life in the late 19th century. 1879 was a notoriously bad year for farmers. Some accounts describe how the foul, wet weather throughout the year prevented crops even germinating, let alone being harvested. In Glemsford, the Harvest Holiday began on 29th August and finished on 22nd September. This fits in with the national picture. Earlier comments in the year reflect the same picture of poor weather. 1879 was exceptional. In 1880, the Holiday began on 20th, suggesting two bad years on the trot to compound the problems of the farming community; 1891 and 1892 were similarly late - 21st and 19th August respectively, following wet Springs and severe Winters. By contrast, 1893 saw the earliest Holiday on record, beginning on 21st July and ending on 21st August. Often, the Holiday was not long enough, because there are many references to "a large number of absences on account of children still being required to go gleaning". This is a comment typical of so many village schools, and emphasises the harsh realities of rural life at that time. The collection of the remnants of the crops from the fields could make a lot of difference to the winter diet of a typical family, whether the gleanings were used to make bread or to feed the family hens or pig. Although the incidence of children being kept at home to work is confined mainly to the Girls' School, there is one reference, in July 1882, to Infants being absent "flax-pulling". Children being what they are it is also unsurprising that on two occasions when fires broke out in the village, attendance slumped.

School was thus not a matter of all work and no play.