

Round and About in the Parish- Twyford School

I have been researching Twyford School - [the School Log Book starts from 1870 although there is evidence the school was in existence in about 1840] and a surprising number of pupils from Danehill and Chelwood Gate ventured to Twyford School. Among them was Eva Levett whose family had a boarding house (The Whim) at Chelwood Gate; a family of Streeters who had recently moved to Chelwood Gate from Nutley, a family called Martens from the Isle of Thorns, together with Turner's, Pollard's and Gasson's , whose surnames are still familiar today.



During the year 2020 schools were closed and on looking back about 100 years or so , it was very common for Twyford school to also be shut down. Sometimes this was due to lack of teachers, but more often than not, it was due to epidemics. In 1874 there was a very meagre attendance caused by a measles epidemic and for some unspecified reason from July until December 1875 there is no record of any school attendance.

1876 saw rumours of scarlet fever raging near Chelwood Common, numbers at the school plummeted and the school was closed for many months. In 1878 the annual Summary Report noted that the school had been closed for several months. A damning remark was that "At present the children seem very backward."

I just wonder if researchers 100 years from now will look back in amazement that schools were just shut down. Will they too remark that when schools re-opened in 2020/1 the children were behind with their learning?

Continuing throughout the years there were many instances of outbreaks of measles, diphtheria and scarlet fever, and they were all treated very seriously. In 1883 William Durrant died in an autumn epidemic and in 1890, which seemed a particularly bad year, Lily Gasson die of flu with about half the school away and others were really quite poorly. In September of that year many children were found educationally unfit to go into a higher standard.

1894 saw the school closed immediately in September because an outbreak of mumps was diagnosed and in November the school again closed for a month, again due to a measles epidemic.

Chicken pox sometimes described as 'glass-pox' frequently broke out and during 1908 all the teachers were ill, along with many pupils. May and September of that year saw outbreaks of measles and diphtheria.

In 1911 diphtheria was again raging with half of the school absent and Albert Styles died. At the same time German Measles and whooping cough outbreaks occurred. By December of that year only 18 children present out of a total of 73, and Dr Stott ordered the closure of the school. It was not much better the following year as whooping cough was still rife throughout May - August and in December Emily Marten died of scarlet fever.

1916 saw outbreaks of Measles and Scarlet Fever and the School was forced to close.

In 1918/19 the Spanish flu pandemic was in full force and during 1918 the school was closed because of outbreaks of flu. The following year 1919 saw outbreaks of flu, chicken pox and German measles. - not a very happy time.

Of course children in those days of course lost all chance of any education during the school closures whereas now most children are able to have home-lessons courtesy of the internet and on-line tuition. Also how fortunate we are to have vaccinations against many of the diseases, which have largely been eradicated.

Who would ever have thought from 100 years ago that school closures because of a pandemic would be happening all over again?

When I went to The Keep to access the log books, Allan dropped me off and said he would be back for me in 4 hours. The gentleman at Reception straight away told me I could not have access to the records as they could not be released. As I had 4 hours to wait I stood my ground and insisted the details were correct. He looked again and said Yes, that was ok and directed me towards another area. That gentleman too refused me access and said they could not be released due to time limits-they were not available to the public. Again I stood my ground and insisted that these records had already been made available and I knew my references were correct. He double-checked. Yes, I could have



From 1908/9. Teacher left-Miss Martin from Chelwood Gate. Schoolmistress on right-Miss Sealey. No. 18 is an infant teacher, Nos. 19 and 20 Lizzie and Rose Bennett. Nos. 10 access to the set of records, but not the 27. Dorothy Stead. He then said "Who had sight of these records?" Oops-officialdom was creeping in and I was on a losing wicket. The person who had previously had the records was Hylda Rawlings, and as she was over 100 years of age, I didn't think I could drop her in it. I backtracked and said it was many years ago from either the 1960's or 70's. He then softened his stance and said "Yes, that would be about right. At first access was available after 25 years, then 50 years, then 75 years, now it's 100 years-so yes your friend could have seen them-**but you can't.**" What he didn't know, and which I didn't let on, was that Hylda had spent many hours laboriously writing them out in longhand, so I knew what the records contained anyway. It was just that as a researcher I had a responsibility to double-check for myself. I got the first set of records and as I can do shorthand I was able to double-check a significant amount for myself relatively quickly.

My thanks to Hylda Rawlings who originally did all the donkey work and to Sally Alexander and the gentleman who lent me the photo of the two Turner children.

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