

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - September 2004

### The Piggott Infant School

The Hannen Room was packed for the Wargrave Local History Society's September meeting when Ann Bushnell gave a most enjoyable and interesting talk about the Piggott Infant School.

Ann had been Headmistress at the previous infant school, in Victoria Road, (as well as the present site). The old buildings were 'an awful old school, but so happy'. The building was 'awesome' - a very dark entrance and cloakroom, only cold water in the sinks, whilst the high up windows meant the classrooms were dark too. There was no electricity - the classrooms being lit by paraffin lamp hanging from the ceiling of each classroom. The 'heat' was provided by a small coal fire in each classroom - which therefore were cold in the mornings, but quite hot by the afternoon. There were 'outside toilets' (the boys 'stood in all weathers' as it had no roof!) - and beyond the playground were the old Guide hut and the fire station - when the siren wailed, the school would go out to see the fire-fighters arrive on their bikes -- and watch them all return afterwards.

Reading was at first taught by the 'Radiant' method (with 'rhyming' words like cat, rat and mat) later the 'Janet and John' books, and then the 'Ladybird' books when they were introduced. The children would copy from the blackboard, and learnt mathematics by rote, with communal chanting of the 'times tables'. Visits to the recreation ground would bring leaves and conkers to add to the 'nature table', and the Wendy House was popular. The Victorian style desks could be moved for 'music and movement' accompanied by old records played on a wind-up gramophone! Daily at 11.50, the pupils would march up to the Junior School for lunch.

Other activities included visits to the Child Beale wildlife park, and Nativity plays in the Woodclyffe Hall - the children would enjoy the rehearsals, as the Hall was warm and had proper lights! However, the school had a leaking roof, and was literally 'falling down', and so the Oxford Diocese approached Berkshire County Council about having a new school built. That was eventually agreed, and so on 23rd October 1963 the infants moved to their bright, airy, clean, warm new school buildings in Beverley Gardens. Originally there were 3 classrooms and a hall - arranged on an 'open plan' pattern - to cater for the 60 pupils. There was a small staff room, and a lovely kitchen. Rene Goodchild joined Ann and Pat Dummer as the extra member of staff. Rene Hyatt came to help the children with 'craft' work - making aprons and knitting dishcloths, and - with a Baby Belling - doing some cooking. The school kitchens - with Doreen Harbour 'in charge' provided the lunchtime meals - with 'not to be forgotten' puddings like crumble and chocolate crunch, whilst Mr and Mrs Ridge, and later their daughter Jackie, took on the role of caretaker. The Chairman of Governors (John Ratings and then Rosemary Gray, would help in school every week, as did Marion Pope (who also became a Chairman of Governors). When Adrian Downton became the Head at the Junior School, the 'links' between the 2 schools were strengthened by forming a joint PTA to provide extra facilities for the children. One of the first projects was a 'learner' swimming pool - used every summer term for over 25 years.

Other activities still played a part - visits to the church for 'special' services, the 'end of term play, or visits to a wide variety of places of interest. Visitors into school included theatre groups and Terry Mills, who would bring animals from Bristol Zoo for the children to see - especially remembered was a large snake! The school also kept its own animals - Mrs Dummer having guinea pigs, Mrs Goodchild hamsters, fish and stick insects, whilst Ann had a budgie that would answer when the register was called!

When the changes in education meant that the task of a Head became more 'administration' than 'teaching', Ann decided to retire - having been Head for 32½ years.

The pictures ranged from the 'old' school to the 'new', with many former pupils being identified by the audience!



*An early 1960s photograph (left) of the Infant School pupils in the grounds of the Victoria Road site. Ann Bushnell is stood in the middle of the back row of pupils.*

*Once the school moved to its new site in Beverley Gardens, a learner swimming pool was created in the grounds (right).*

