

MEMORIES
of
LANGCLIFFE
and
LANGCLIFFE SCHOOL

(mainly in 1930s)

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I have compiled this partly from my own recollections of my time at Langcliffe School and, more particularly, from the many photographs, newspaper cuttings, and diaries kept by my father, H. H. Bland (Bert) who was Headmaster at Langcliffe School from April 1934 until May 1947.

My own attendance at the school was only from 1934 until July 1939, but I have retained the happiest of memories of my schooldays there, of my teachers and fellow pupils, of Field Days, Old Folks' Treats, Socials and School entertainments.

Most valued of all is my remembrance of a village community; of friendly faces and kindly people, and of people in the village who gave their time to village activities, which, centred on the Green, the Institute and the School, so greatly enriched the lives of the whole village, and gave so much pleasure to young and old.

Thank you Langcliffe for my happy introduction to society, and for all my memories!

Mary Atkin

Contents

Changes at Langcliffe School.....	1, 2.
Billy Blot.....	3, 4.
The Gate-Shutting "Racket".....	5.
Floods, Drains and Lavatories.....	6, 7, 7a.
When Langcliffe School was Famous.....	8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
School Games and PE.....	13, 14.
Langcliffe's Jubilee Arches.....	14a, 14b.
Our Village Coronation Committee.....	15, 16, 17.
Report on Coronation Day Festivities.....	18, 19, 20.
Langcliffe School Entertainments.....	21, 22.
- puppets.....	22a.
- Robin Hood's Mill.....	23.
- concert programme & actors, 1946..	24, 25.
Yorkshire Gumption.....	26.
Miss Brennand Retires.....	27.
HMI report 1938.....	28.
"Field Day" 1936, and Cave-dwellers' rheumatism.....	29.
Some photographs of Old Scholars.....	30, 31.
Cuttings about Langcliffe School, 1946-7.....	33.

Changes at Langcliffe School.

When I first went to Langcliffe School in April 1934 it was a WRCC (West Riding County Council), All-age, Mixed and Infants, Elementary School with about 70 pupils. It took children from the ages of five (and even younger) up to fourteen years. (That was then the school-leaving age.) As I was five and a half years old, I was put into the Infants (Miss Brennand's) class. She was very much liked by her pupils and by the time she retired in 1945 she had been at the school for forty years and was teaching the grandchildren of her first pupils! Her classroom was the north half of the present big room, and was separated from "the Hall" by a partition which could be folded back to make one large room as it is now. It was folded back for the Christmas party and school concerts, and also when there was an evening dance or social for the village.

At the opposite end, next to the door into the infants lobby (where our coats were hung), there was a big fireplace with a large guard round it, but the fire was only lit in very cold weather as the school had big central heating pipes which were warmed from a boiler under the building. At that time the school had gas lighting - we only got electric lights at the beginning of 1939.

There was a small door in the partition which led through into the Hall where the piano stood (I think it is still the same piano and almost in the same position!) From the Hall there was a door into "the Back Lobby". This was a little dark room with a big gas cooker where a teacher could boil a kettle to pour on to the mixture of cocoa and sugar which we took to school in a screw of paper to make a drink at lunchtime. There were no school dinners then, so children who lived too far way to go home for dinner at twelve o'clock took sandwiches to eat. . (At playtime we had School Milk for a ha'penny a day. The milk was in one third of a pint bottles with a cardboard disk in the top, in which you could punch a small hole for a straw. If you weren't careful milk spirted out all over the place!) Just on the left of the door from the Hall was a shelf on which stood a bottle of cod-liver oil and next to it a jam jar with a greasy spoon in it. Children who were thought to need it had a spoonful of cod-liver oil poured into their mouths from this spoon. I used to watch with a shudder at the thought of the awful taste and was amazed that the children didn't seem to mind! Although it was rinsed in boiling water afterwards the spoon always stayed a bit greasy and smelly. The back door of the lobby led to a single set of steps (not two sets as now) which went straight on. I remember coming into school one morning and there was an inch of water all over the Hall floor and a waterfall down those steps! Of course, school was closed for the day! Pupils were delighted!

To the right of the door from the Hall to the lobby was the door to the Junior classroom, Miss Graham's. This is completely different today. Then it was one smallish room in the SE corner of the school with rather high windows because it was built into the hill-slope. Has this become the indoor toilets? The Senior pupils' room is much the same today as it was then, though it now has different furniture.

When I started at Langcliffe all the desks were for two persons. They were iron-framed with a tip-up wooden seat and a sloping desk-top with a small shelf under it for notebooks and a hole for a pot inkwell for each pupil. There were three sizes - Infants, Juniors and Seniors, and if you were a large Junior or a small Senior it was just too bad! You had to manage with the desk as it was. In sliding sideways to get in and out of their seats pupils sometimes tore their clothes on bits of metal and rough bits of wood. This helped Mr. Bland to argue for new table-top desks and separate chairs. It was some years before we got the new desks but they were much better - they were made in more sizes; they could be arranged together as small or large tables; the chairs could be moved into the Hall for concerts or film shows; and they could be put up on the desks each evening, making it much easier for the caretaker to sweep underneath. We also got six new paintings in bright colours instead of the old sepia etchings.

The Juniors and Seniors used to go into school through the "front lobby" which had wash-basins and coat pegs. Today there is a new door, and the lobby seems to be all storage cupboards!

Outside at the back, where there is still a small building, there were two sets of old-style privies (hole-in-the-seat type) over a deep, and very smelly pit (which was periodically cleared out in the holidays). Mercifully we got modern flush toilets and a proper sewage system fairly soon after I started at Langcliffe. Boys and girls played together on the front playground, but "The Girls' back" and "The Boys' Back" were separated at the back of the school by a very high stone wall between the two sets of privies.

The outside of the school doesn't seem to have changed very much. The road up Cow Close may have more traffic today, but I expect the farmer still comes down carrying a new-born lamb in each hand back to the safety of the farm with the mother following anxiously behind. Over the wall at the infants' end was a wet meadow full of colourful flowers in May - buttercups, dog daisies, meadowsweet, which were later scythed for hay. The front of the school is still as dusty, but it made our netball and stoolball ground. It needed some discussion to get permission for every child in the school, even if not actually resident in Langcliffe, to be allowed to use the Green, but eventually football and cricket were normally played there.

School was very much a part of the village life. May that long continue!

Mary A. Atkin, 1995

BILLY BLOT.

Until after the 1939-45 War schools provided pupils with "dip pens" which you dipped in an ink well to get enough ink to write a few words. They were also called "stick pens" because they were thin cylinders of wood with a metal sheath at one end into which a metal pen nib was inserted. They were uncomfortable to hold, and after a while your index finger and its neighbour became grooved - and usually inky as well!

The ink was dreadful stuff for spreading itself around. If the pen nib picked up too much ink when you dipped it in the ink well, you had to shake a little ink back into the well - and often you missed and spattered the desk or your book. Then there would be trouble from teachers! If the ink monitor had over-filled the ink-well blots were liable to get on shirt cuffs or dresses. Then your mother had things to say when you got home!

The ink writing took a little time to dry on the page and a careless move could smudge it, so each child got a piece of blotting paper (pink!) with which to blot the work - or to mop up spills or blots dripped accidentally from the pen. Oh, ink was messy stuff!

Older children could sometimes afford to buy fountain pens which had a lever to draw ink into a rubber tube inside the pen, so that a filling could last for a lot of writing. They were nicer to hold, but could also be problems if they leaked. I was an inky child who always seemed to be blessed with leaky pens!

Mr. Bland (HHB, also known as th'Gaffer) the headmaster at Langcliffe, made a drawing of Billy Blot and wrote a little song to go with it, as a reminder to pupils to try not to splash ink about. I've enclosed a copy of his drawing and you will recognise the tune I expect-

Are you making dirty blots,
All the day, all the day?
Are you making dirty blots,
My Billy Blot?
Yes I'm making dirty blots
And I'm going to make some more,
For my inkpot splashes mi paper
O! mi charming Billy Blot!

We're ashamed of making blots,
Mr. Bland, Mr. Bland.
We're ashamed of making blots
O! yes we are!
And we plead that you'll forgive
For we'll never make another (!)
And our inkpots never will empty
On our clean and tidy books!

But of course they probably did! The development of Biro's (ball point pens) after the War made writing much less messy!



BILLY BLOT.