



Sevington School

News

September 2014

What a glorious summer we have had, dear friends.

Activities are burgeoning everywhere at Sevington School.

Miss Squire has been delighted to welcome so many people to her parlour for afternoon tea on our Summer Sundays, especially as Nick has organised the repainting of the kitchen. He has named the colour Sevington blue, as it is mixed to match samples and pictures of the time. Blue is a cool and cleansing colour and helps to keep the flies away. All the woodwork is in period colours, the ceiling stripped and emulsioned - distemper not being readily available - and minor repairs attended to.

We have visited a Victorian village. We have been learning how to make our costumes and how to behave in them. Knowledge of the school is spreading while our knowledge of life around the school is growing. We have met people who remember people who were there. One lady actually remembers being taught by Miss Squire as you will see in Meg's article 'Connections'.

Please do check our website and twitter for up-to-the-minute information and any comments you may wish to make. If you would like to contact me I have a new email address; zimmoliver@gmail.com

I hope you enjoy catching up with our news, preferably with a soothing beverage, in an Indian summer.

Kay Oliver

Connections

I was driving to Sevington one morning in late July very much looking forward to meeting John Holbrow whose father, Fred Holbrow, had been a pupil at Sevington around the turn of the Nineteenth century. The Holbrow family have many long links with Sevington and Doris Holbrow was one of the last 3 pupils at the school when it ceased to take day pupils in 1913. Doris also looked after Miss Squire in her later years and some of her descendants have been members of the project and at least one, Jenny Jones, still is.

Not only did I have the pleasure of meeting John and his wife I also met John's aunt Lily, aged 98, who had attended Sunday School in the school room aged 5 or 6. She remembered the counting frames and the portrait of Queen Victoria and when asked the name of her teacher, she thought long and hard. 'It was Miss' – long pause – 'Miss Sss' – pause – and then, triumphantly – 'it was Miss Squire!'. This released the memory of Miss Squire asking the small group of little girls to spell 'rhubarb' and of them spelling out 'rubarb'. She proudly said that she has been able to spell it correctly ever since. It is said that you never forget a good teacher but to remember a lesson that took place over ninety years ago is quite something.

As Jenny Jones said when I told her about Aunt Lily, she is 'a living link' with Miss Squire. Her branch of the family had lost touch with her late father's cousin John and all were very pleased to re-establish the family connection.

We learned much from this visit. Firstly, we had not realised that Miss Squire had continued teaching well after 1913 until around 1921/2 when she would have been around eighty. Secondly, notwithstanding the social purpose of schooling the children of estate workers to accept their God-given place in the social order, John told me that his father Fred had been a Company Sergeant Major with the Coldstream Guards and had been asked to apply for officer training. John's mother was very against this as she felt she would not be accepted by other officers' wives. This was probably true, given the rigid class structure of the time, but, sadly, Fred died when he was only 42 so was never able to pursue this opportunity.

My mother always told me that the Second World War opened up wider horizons for people from the working classes and this seems to have been the case for Fred as, indeed, it was for my mother who escaped from the domestic service that was the destiny of the majority of rural girls. This may well have been the case for other Sevington scholars.

This will be an on-going investigation as my vague ambition to research the lives of former Sevington pupils has been set alight by my meeting with Lily and John. I know something of Doris Holbrow's life and Edward King has told me something of Bennett Isaacs, another of the last 3 day pupils and if you have memories of people who attended Sevington please let us know!

Meg Gommersill

Corsets and Crinolins

Do you know the correct way to hold up your skirts? Or how a Victorian lady achieved that handspan waist? The people who attended our day course, Corsets and Crinolines, certainly do.

It was all part of a project to improve our visitors' experience. We get quite a lot of adult visitors these days and we wanted them to enjoy the same authentic experience as the children. When the schools arrive, they feel as if they are stepping back in time and we wanted the adults to have a taste of that.

And that meant that we - the volunteers - needed better costumes and more knowledge about the parts we play. A generous grant from the Chippenham Area Board sorted out the costumes. We used some of it to commission costume expert Virginia Crawford to design the kind of outfit that Miss Squire might have worn in the 1890s. She pored over photographs of Miss Squire herself and other school teachers of the period and came up with a severely simple suit which is wonderfully in keeping with the period and with Sevington itself.

Meanwhile our team of volunteer seamstresses got to work to provide 1890s style aprons for the tea ladies, and are standing by to create some more complex garments from patterns which Virginia is providing.

Once we had the costumes we needed to learn how to wear them and behave in them and our one day workshop gave us the background we needed. Ex trustee David Sherratt talked to us about the real Miss Squire and her relationships with villagers and the Big House and the costume workshop 'Crinoline' gave a fascinating

presentation, dressing a Victorian lady from corsets to crinoline. By the way, it's all in the lacing.



Mary Waite as Miss Squire in her new outfit

Virginia's replica costume was on show and she talked to us about her work and how she arrived at the final design, and the day finished with an inspiring demonstration from Denise Lea showing how to make your own Victorian costume, using bits and pieces from charity shops. You'd be amazed what you can do with a pair of lacy knickers and a plastic alic band.

Everyone enjoyed themselves and came away knowing a lot more about Miss Squire and her life and times. So it's a big thank you to everyone involved, and let's all remember to conduct ourselves in a genteel manner when we're entertaining at Sevington.



Dinah Starkey

Donation of Victorian Baby Clothes



Those of you who attended the “Corsets and Crinolines” day may recall a display of beautiful late Victorian baby clothes and Christening gowns. These garments were kindly given to Sevington by a lady whose children had enjoyed a day at the school some years previously. The garments had belonged to her grandmother who led a very interesting life, becoming a Suffragette, for which she was imprisoned, and running a magazine called

Votes for Women. It is thought that she was born in 1890 and that the garments were first used by her as a baby.

We are indebted to Jane Haines, who worked with historical costumes for many years at the Museum of London, for the information she has given us on the making and uses of the garments and for her advice on preservation and storage. We shall now be looking at ways of displaying these garments, both at Sevington and elsewhere. Should anyone know the whereabouts of a late Victorian doll, large enough to model baby clothes, we would be very pleased to hear from them!

Isobel Moore

Summer evenings has shown some newcomers to Sevington. We have had Lacock and Devizes cub groups come and join us for activities. They spent the evening engaged in various challenges trying to write with a dipping pen and ink or taking pictures of things around the school. They also had to identify Victorian artefacts and try their skill at quoits and skittles. They finished the evening with squash and biscuits. This is a new venture and Dinah and I have been setting up a range of activities for various youth groups like cubs and brownies. We used Lacock and Devizes cubs as guinea pigs to see if it worked and it seemed to go really well. There was lots of positive feedback.

So now we have a great evening planned for these groups during the Summer months and are just waiting for some more to come and have an enjoyable evening.

One little extra visitor that called in for a lesson was a newly fledged swallow that I managed to capture on the

schoolroom desk. We have had lots of fledglings this year and I think clearing up after them is worth the extra work it involves and the children love watching flitting in and out of their nests.



Sue Sunderland

Blist Hill Victorian Village 'To experience is to understand'

Leaving the coach was leaving our time zone. We stepped into a Victorian iron foundry, surrounded on film by the thumping noise of machines and the sweat of the men who shovelled coal to fire the white hot furnace. The half a dozen pints in the pub afterwards was clearly a necessity.

On entering the village some of us changed our money to Lsd. it sounds like a drug, but it made everything seem quite cheap. It was a simple few steps to walk back in time and, aside from the horse drawn carts, - oh those lovely horses with elegant feet, - and the occasional steam engine, you could walk in the road - no cars.

There was a bakery, haberdashery, fish and chips and of course, the pub, where we had a pint (only one) and sang our troubles away. I bought a currant loaf from the bakery which was deliciously infused with cinnamon. My husband bought a cloth cap, which suited him.

We also watched the locksmith at work, and the blacksmith and carpenter.

This school had more pupils than Sevington



. The school had two rooms. We could look through the windows but no classes were in action. It was plain, compared with Sevington.



We went to a house built by workers who paid for the land to the landowner over a period of years, much like a mortgage. It was two small rooms and a pantry. They slept several to a bed and then swapped to the night shift. But the cottage was in the end theirs, unlike others who were still paying rent. We felt for their lack of privacy.

The pantry in the self build cottage



There was another cosier house - a little more like Miss Squires home, and the doctor's house was most comfortable.

The coach driver kindly made a detour so that we could see Ironbridge before heading back from a great day.

Many thanks to Sue Sunderland for this.
Kay Oliver

Adult visits and summer Sundays.

When we first applied for a lottery grant we said we would open the school to the local community and we've kept our promise. Group bookings are up this year and we have had twenty visits this year, compared with fourteen last year.

Visitors come in all shapes and sizes. We've had cub scouts, who spent a happy couple of hours chasing round the grounds on a treasure trail and playing with our Victorian games. We had a birthday party for a five year old organised by a heroic grandmother who had no less than six of her small grandchildren staying with her. Everyone dressed up and practiced passing the cucumber sandwiches and grandma, who had thought of everything, brought a cake and candles.

There was a group of Russian teenagers who were entranced by writing with a dip pen and demanded the recipe for our chocolate fudge cake –can you get evaporated milk in St Petersburg ?– and, at the other end of the scale, a large delegation from the National Trust and an even larger contingent from the Kington St Michael Autumn Club, who sat out on the grass on a very hot afternoon and had such a good time they didn't want to go home.

The last visit of the season was the Riley's Register, a group of vintage car enthusiasts who parked their beautiful vehicles on the grass outside the schoolroom. Standing at the window we could see passing traffic slow to a halt and pause to have a good look, before moving on.

Every visit has been different and every one has been enjoyable. It's a real pleasure to share our beautiful building with fellow enthusiasts, and to see them return on our Summer Sundays to show their friends this recently discovered treasure. We could never have done it without the unstinting support of the team of volunteers and we're all hoping they'll be available again next year because we're taking bookings already.

Roll on next summer!

Dinah Starkey

NOTES FROM THE GARDEN

Some of you may know that the garden refurbishment is making steady progress. The fruit bed has been cleared and partially restocked with raspberries, strawberries and a loganberry and we have two gooseberry bushes and various currant bushes ready to be planted. We saved the original rhubarb plant which would please Lily! Unfortunately, the weeds are also flourishing but will soon be dealt with.

Volunteers have cleared part of the large herbaceous border and have put down heavy duty weed suppressant materials – a plastic membrane and a thick layer of wood chippings, the latter supplied as a donation from a Grittleton firm. To keep the border looking attractive two large planters were made from decking squares and the first was planted with runner beans and ‘Tumbling Tom’ tomatoes and the second with sweet peas. As Autumn looks like being early this year we are thinking about what should be planted next and I am busily going through my gardening books and magazines to decide what would be most effective.

I have also asked my step son and his wife to try to track down additional smaller planters in the shape of Victorian dolly tubs. These are available locally but are fashionable and so very expensive but may be cheaper in West Yorkshire where they live so my fingers are crossed.

Fingers are also firmly crossed that we will be successful in banishing the couch grass, bindweed and other perennial weeds. Then we will restock the cleared ground with suitable plants and repeat the clearance process with the rest of the border. It is a long-term project but will be well worth it if we can keep this glorious bed looking beautiful.

If you have any spare pots (not plastic or multi-coloured!) or an old stone sink that could be used for planting all donations would be very gratefully received. Also now that the major building work that has kept me tied to home is very nearly completed I am planning to be working on the garden every Tuesday morning as last year – weather permitting, of course!

Meg Gommersill

A Unique Day Out

Sevington was asked some time ago if it was possible for a group of foster parents and children from the Bath and North East Somerset area to visit the school. It would be part of an afternoon out that was being organised for them by local business man, Richard Tanner.

The Trustees agreed in principal and three volunteers came forward, Mary [Miss Squire], Sylvia [Miss Hannah] and Edward [Cousin George].

As details emerged we found out that the afternoon consisted of a ‘fete’ at Park Farm, Yatton Keynell and that the pupils would be transported across the fields to us by tractor and trailer.

The first group arrived at 2.15 and were lined up on the path, much to

the amusement of the adults and children alike. The girls went into the schoolroom with Miss Squire and the boys to the parlour with Miss Hannah where they learnt how Victorians spent their evenings. This group then split into two with some following Miss Hannah down to the kitchen and the rest going out into the garden with Cousin George. They then swapped around, garden and kitchen. After too short a time the boys and girls changed over and the story and learning were retold.

There was a very short time to play with the toys before the tractor returned with the next group. Three groups, totalling well over 60 foster parents and children came and went and our part of the afternoon ended

about 4.15. After tidying up, the three of us went back to Park Farm, where we had been invited for tea.

At Park Farm we found that they had all enjoyed the 'fun of the fair'. The afternoon had started with a hog roast and there was a fairground organ playing away. Guess the number of balloons in the back of a Landrover, apple bobbing, make a scarecrow, skittles and so much more was there to do and, best of all for some, just being able to run around. All followed by a sumptuous tea. The trailer ride was talked about by many and I believe the visit to Sevington went down well, even with the children.

Over 110 foster parents and children came to the fete as well as around 25 helpers who were Richard's family and friends. It was glorious weather until a few spots of rain at 5pm which was the time for the busses to take everyone home.

I learnt a number of things. The absolute fascination the earth closet has for children, that we should be pruning our quince tree which will help its growth [according to one foster parent] and the dedication that foster parents have for their charges who were of all ages, with some having special needs, who were a mixture of long term placements and short term, giving biological parents a much needed respite.

Sevington has hosted many groups during the summer, all of which will have been different, but these children and their very caring foster parents have to be unique. They hope to return. I would like to think that we can welcome them.

Edward King

The Hundred Club Winners;
May *Timothy George*
June *Jenny Williams*
July *Harriet Tupper*
August *James Anderson*

*Dear Friends,
I think you will agree life is busy at Sevington School.
We thank you for all the help you have given.
Miss Squire has a new lease of life that she would not have believed.*



