

Sevington School Newsletter



Spring 2025

Dear Friends,

Spring has finally arrived at Sevington and I hope you have been enjoying the recent spell of good weather and the feeling of wellbeing it brings. We will soon be starting our Summer Sunday openings, in May, June and September, and we would be delighted to welcome you back to the school at one of them. There are further details on the poster in this issue.

As you know, one of the main purposes of our charity is to offer an authentic experience of Victorian education to primary school pupils, and last year 89 days of Victorian schooling were booked. Integral to the success of this operation is our Bookings Secretary, Sue Dann, who for over 15 years has built excellent relationships with visiting schools and efficiently arranged two members of our team of teachers to be ready and prepared for each school day. Sue has now decided to retire from this role, and we owe her a huge debt of gratitude for ensuring that everything has run so seamlessly over so many years. We thank her and wish her well.

I have recently discovered another interesting fact about Elisabeth Squire, Sevington's schoolmistress, from an article in the Wiltshire Gazette and Herald in 1960: "She is still vividly remembered by many villagers. She was for example a fine winemaker, and the gooseberry variety, brewed in a shed at the foot of the school garden, is still remembered." It is possible she used the following recipe from Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management, first published in 1861:

Ingredients.—20 lbs. of firm green gooseberries, 3 gallons of hot water, 15 lbs. of loaf sugar, 1½ ozs. of cream of tartar.

Method.—Top and tail the gooseberries, put them into an earthenware bowl or wooden tub, and pour over them the hot water. Let them soak for 24 hours, then bruise them well with a heavy wooden mallet or potato masher, and drain the juice through a fine hair sieve or jelly-bag. Replace the skins in the vessel in which they were soaked, cover them with boiling water, stir and bruise well so as to completely extract the juice, then strain through the sieve or bag. Mix this preparation with the juice, add the sugar, and boiling water to increase the liquid to 5 gallons. Replace in the bowl or tub, stir in the cream of tartar, cover with a heavy woollen cloth, and allow the vessel to stand in a moderately warm place for 2 days. Now strain the liquid into a small cask, cover the bung-hole with a folded cloth until fermentation ceases—which may be known by the cessation of the hissing noise—then bung closely, but provide the top of the cask with a vent-peg. Make this wine in the beginning of June, before the berries ripen; let it remain undisturbed until December, then drain it off carefully into a clean cask. In March or April, or when the gooseberry bushes begin to blossom, the wine must be bottled and tightly corked. To ensure its being clear and effervescing, the wine must be bottled at the right time and on a clear day.

Quite a job! Would anybody like to try this? Purely in the interests of historical research, of course.

With best wishes from us all at Sevington,

Isobel

Isobel Moore

In Conversation with Sue Dann



Sue has been a member of the teaching team for many years. She has also been our Bookings Secretary for school visits until April. She now lives in Cheshire.

Where did you start teaching?

I started teaching in 1974 in Guildford, teaching history from Y7 to A Level. I moved to Lund University in Sweden to teach English and then based myself in Somerset, teaching Humanities in Shepton Mallet and Frome. I took a break from teaching when my daughters were born but have taught locally at Hardenhuish and Abbeyfield Schools where it was noted that I might be a good fit for teaching at Sevington as I taught like a Victorian anyway!

What do you think children gain from a visit to Sevington Victorian School?

A visit to the school is a door into the past where children are fully immersed in another age. It's an experience like no other because it's entirely real and believable. The premises and artefacts are authentic and Miss Squire and her sister are living the roles. Lessons in the schoolroom are so different to those that the children are accustomed to, but they become quickly absorbed and respond well to expectations. They are given a terrific insight into the ways in which children lived in the past. The gender-specific activities are a fantastic way for them to see how much life has changed for boys and girls. It's a day they will never forget, and of course, it can be enormous fun!

We don't expect Victorian teachers to laugh when teaching. Have you ever come close?

Children arrive wearing a variety of costumes they consider to be "Victorian." It was hard not to smile at the little girl wearing a Scarlett O'Hara costume in red chiffon, or the adult

teacher dressed as a chimney sweep covered in soot and carrying a full-sized brush! Most distracting of all was an adult who arrived in a Victorian bathing suit.

Tell us something that we might not know about you.

In the early 1980s I was at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp.

What do you like to do when you are not teaching?

I'm a lover of all things historical and enjoy conferences and talks whenever I have the opportunity. Since moving to Cheshire, I have become a Friend of the Weaver Vale Museum and Workhouse. I shall be revisiting student life in the summer, attending a History Summer School in Manchester.

Hiking has been a great passion and I have enjoyed walking holidays in many parts of Europe, most recently in Albania. I also enjoy travel and reading.

Nikki Wright

From Miss Squire's Log

April 2025

The garden is bursting into life. It's looking beautiful, plants are popping up everywhere, horse manure around the hydrangeas, seeds for the vegetables in neat rows labelled with wooden sticks so there is no guessing what lies beneath!

The school that came today was delightful, very helpful adults and well-behaved children, Year 5's. Outside lunch as the weather was sunny and dry, the coach arrived on time, all waved frantically as we waved them goodbye!

A good day was had by all.

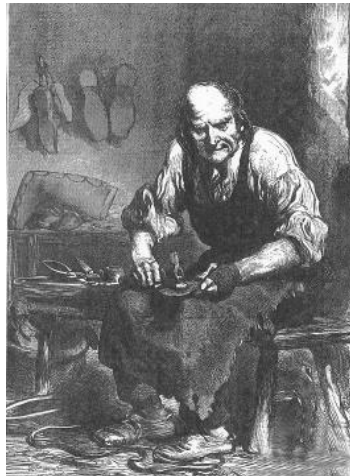
Miss Hannah Squire

Sylvia Townsend

The Shoemaker of Sevington

I have often wondered about the people who lived near Sevington School and were neighbours of Elisabeth Squire during her time there. So I turned to the burial records of the Church of St Margaret of Antioch in Leigh Delamere. Reverend John Jackson (later known as Canon Jackson) came to Leigh Delamere as Rector in 1845 and remained there until his death in 1891. He kept a record of burials, giving a brief but vivid pen portrait of each deceased person, and often not mincing his words.

Canon Jackson states that when he first came to Sevington, the Lock family lived “in a cottage which they had on lives over the way opposite the new school”. John Lock, born in 1790, was baptised in February 1791 in Grittleton. He was a shoemaker who, according to Canon Jackson, used to have a good deal of custom in the neighbourhood. In the 1851 Census he was described as a “Master Cobler” and in the 1861 Census as a “Master Cordwainer”, a craftsman who makes new shoes from leather rather than simply repairing footwear.



A nineteenth century shoemaker

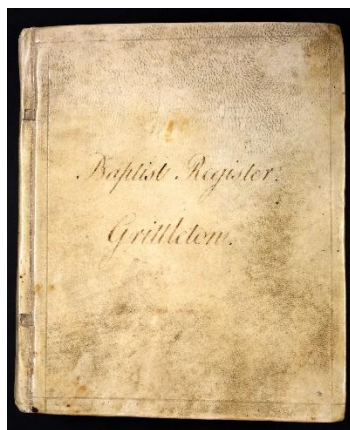
On 22nd April 1815 John married Elizabeth Smith. She was born in 1793 in Sevington and lived there all her life. Canon Jackson notes that she was a very kind woman, who supported her sick neighbour. In the years spanning 1816 to 1835, John and Elizabeth had eleven children, nine of them sons. One son, Joseph, worked as a clicker, cutting out the leather uppers for boots and shoes. Another son, Thomas, became a shoemaker in Kington St. Michael and yet another, James, a bootmaker in Devizes. Son Richard was, like his father, a cordwainer. There was also a grandson, Jacob, who at the age of 15 was living with the family as an apprentice.

In his notes Canon Jackson makes reference to the Locks' religious beliefs. John was described as “a so-called dissenter but harmless man” and Elizabeth as “a dissenter, very fond of talking and expounding”. The family were in fact Strict Baptists and would have worshipped at the Baptist Chapel in Grittleton, built in the early eighteenth century. All the Lock family members, with the exception of three of the youngest children, were recorded in the Baptist Register of Grittleton, a document started in 1775 by Richard Mosely, the then Pastor of the Baptist

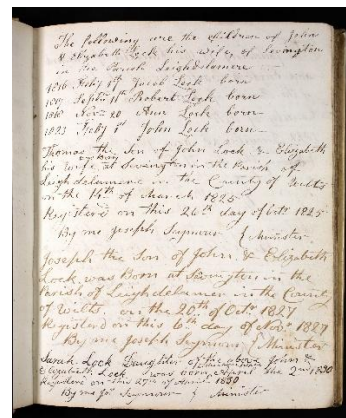
Church in Grittleton, and “designed for the advantage of dissenters’ children whose lives are not recorded elsewhere”.

In his old age John Lock had become very deaf, but it seems from the 1871 Census, when he was 80, that the shoemaker’s business continued, no doubt run mainly by his youngest son James. John died on 23rd December 1873, aged 83, and was buried on 27th December in St. Margaret’s Churchyard in Leigh Delamere. His wife Elizabeth died on the day following his burial, aged 80, and was buried by the side of her husband on 1st January 1874. Their deaths were recorded in the Baptist Register.

After their deaths, Canon Jackson records that the Locks’ cottage was pulled down in 1874 and replaced with a new building, so perhaps that was the end of shoemaking in Sevington for a while. What a shame we don’t have any written or photographic evidence of Elisabeth Squire’s footwear when she was still a young woman.



The Baptist Register: Grittleton



The entry on the Lock family



Grittleton Baptist Chapel, now in the care of the Historic Chapels Trust

Isobel Moore

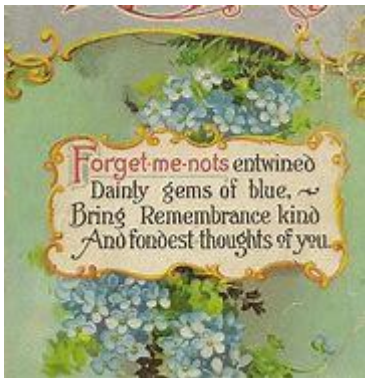
Spring Flowers at Sevington Victorian School

At this time of the year gardens are bursting into colour, heralding much promise for the season ahead. The Victorian Garden at Sevington is no exception. In spring there are daffodils, forget-me-nots, hellebores, irises, primroses, pulmonaria, tulips and wallflowers all in flower. The Victorians used floriography, the language of flowers, as a means of communication in an era when social conventions imposed severe restrictions on what could be expressed directly.



Daffodils

All daffodils belong to the genus *Narcissus* and are divided into 13 divisions determined by the size, shape, colour and length of their petals and coronas (trumpets). They are also known as Lent Lilies. The Victorians endowed them with a variety of meanings from chivalry to regard and unrequited love.



Forget-me-nots

Their botanical name, *Myosotis*, derives from the Greek meaning mouse ear which their leaves are said to resemble. In Victorian times, when bouquets of forget-me-nots were exchanged, they served as a promise of reunion for parted lovers.



Irises

The Victorians used different coloured irises to indicate quite specific meanings. A yellow iris was used to show joy and enthusiasm for a shared interest; blue irises symbolise faith and hope and are also a sign of deep trust.

Sevington School in Focus



Sue McDine who, together with her husband Roy, made such a special photographic record of our 175-year anniversary celebration at Sevington School, is currently displaying some of her photos of the event in an exhibition of her work, entitled *In Focus*, at Trowbridge Museum.

The opening of the exhibition on 1st February was very well attended and the photos of Sevington, together with a collection of artefacts from the school, aroused a lot of interest. There was even a partial re-creation of a group photo taken at the celebration, this time out of costume.



This really is an exhibition worth seeing, so if you haven't visited yet, it is still running until 26th April and entry is free of charge.

We are delighted that Sue has generously offered to present her photos to the school once the exhibition is over, and we very much appreciate the support that both Sue and Roy have given to Sevington School.

Isobel Moore

Photos of the exhibition by kind permission of K J Hartley

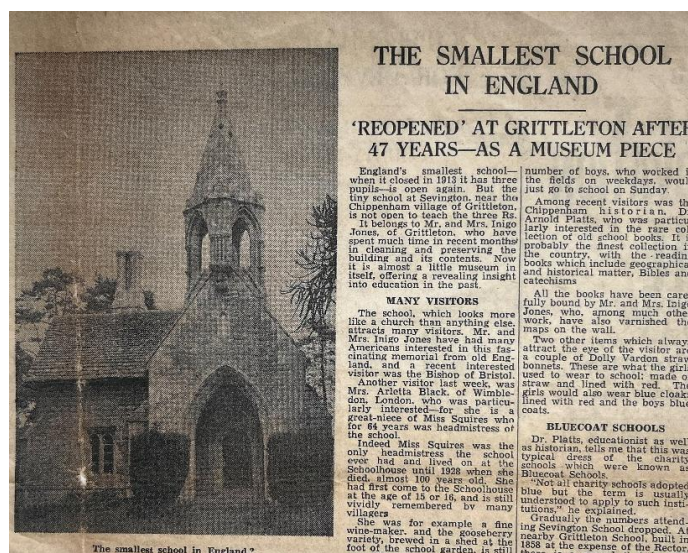
Sevington School in the Twentieth Century

What we already know

There is always something new to learn about the life of Sevington School and the history of the twentieth century in particular has up to now contained some gaps. We know that the school closed in 1913 with only three pupils remaining and that Miss Squire continued to live in the school house until her death in 1928. After that, so the story goes, the property was rented out by the Neeld family to various tenants, until in the late 1980s it was discovered by a group of teachers and educationists who saw its potential as a historical resource for schoolchildren and re-opened it as a charity in 1991. A twenty-year lease on the school was signed with the then owner, the divorced wife of Ralph Neeld, in 1992.

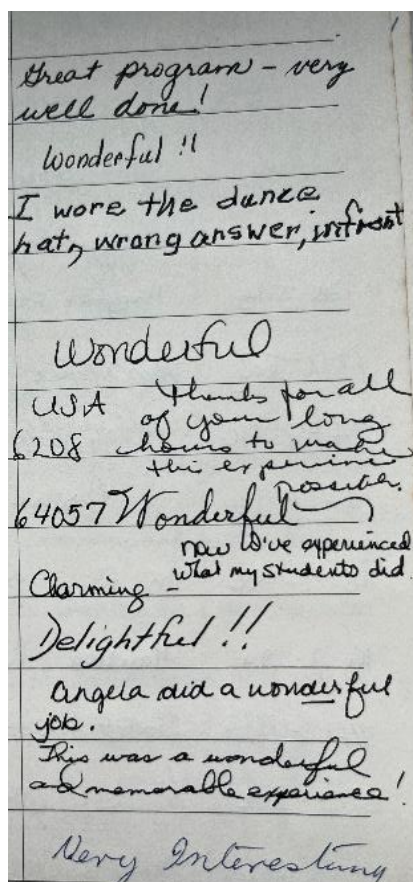
The 1960s

An article in the Wiltshire Gazette and Herald in August 1960 gives a fascinating insight into what was happening in that year. It tells us that “the smallest school in England” was reopened after 47 years as a museum piece. It belonged to Mr and Mrs Inigo Jones of Grittleton who “have spent much time in recent months in cleaning and preserving the building and its contents”. The school attracted much interest and among early visitors were the Bishop of Bristol and a Mrs Arletta Black of Wimbledon, a great-niece of Elisabeth Squire. The Chippenham historian, Dr Arnold Platts, was particularly interested in the rare collection of old school books which he declared to be “probably the finest collection in the country”. The school also attracted many American visitors “interested in this fascinating memorial from old England”.



We know that Nellie Holbrow was living in the school house in the 1960s. Her husband, Charlie, a Neeld estate worker, died in 1962 and she probably moved into the school house within a year, as her tied house was wanted for other estate workers. It seems that she looked after the school room, doubtless letting in some of the visitors, in return for a peppercorn rent. She moved out in the late 1980s.

The 1980s on



A Visitor's Book, recently unearthed from amongst Sevington's collection, throws further light on activity at the school from the mid-80s on. Early visitors came from as near as Leigh Delamere and as far afield as Germany, Norway, Australia, South Africa and the United States. In 1988 and 1989 there was a flurry of visits from school groups for a re-creation of a Victorian school day. One notable visitor in 1991 was Dietrich Hanff, the adopted son of the artist Robin Tanner and his wife Heather. In the mid-1990s there were many visits from camera clubs, museums, historical associations and U3A groups. The last visit recorded in the book was in 2001.

Some comments from the Visitor's Book

Isobel Moore

With thanks to Jenny Jones and Sylvia Townsend for the newspaper article and Visitor's Book.

Will you share your memories?

As Friends of Sevington, many of you have had a close association with the school going back decades.

This is your Newsletter too, and through it we would be delighted to share any facts, anecdotes, impressions, memories and photos of the school which you may have gathered over the years.

Please send in any contributions at any time to Isobel at:

friends@sevingtonvictorianschool.co.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope to be able to publish some of your memories in the Autumn Newsletter.

Summer Sunday Open Days at Sevington Victorian School

2.00 – 5.00pm

Sevington School is a beautifully preserved Victorian village school set in the heart of the Wiltshire countryside, 4 miles from J17 on the M4, close to Chippenham, Castle Combe and Malmesbury.

Experience and tour the authentic Victorian school room, school mistress's house and level access gardens. Enjoy our children's activities and home made teas.



May 18th

June 29th

Admission: adults £2, children £1, families £5

September 14th Heritage Weekend free entry

*All dates Penny-farthing and traditional lace
making demonstrations*

sevingtonvictorianschool.co.uk

enquiries@sevingtonvictorianschool.co.uk

Sevington Victorian School, Sevington, Wilts, SN14 7LD

Tel 01249 783070

Registered Charity No:1178337

