



7 • Schools



*Dame School in The Street Horton Kirby
Photograph courtesy of KAL Dartford Group*

For two such relatively small communities, South Darenth and Horton Kirby have been served by a surprisingly large number of schools over the years. The story of universal education in the Parish was begun by the Rev Henry Burvill Rashleigh during the mid-1850s. At this time there existed only the Dame School, which stood on the site of what is now Bexley Cottages in The Street. It catered for only a limited number of pupils and the Rev Rashleigh saw the need for a school which could meet the needs of a larger number of children. Together with local farmers and

landowners, he financed the building of a school on land granted by Queen's College, Oxford. Originally designed for 70 children, Horton Kirby National School and the schoolhouse in School Lane were opened in 1857 and served both communities. The new school took not only "The Master", Mr Dungate, from the Dame School down the road, but also the yew tree which still stands outside the 1857 building.

*South School, School Lane Horton Kirby designed by Edward Cressy
Photograph courtesy of Pete Flewin*



By 1894 some 204 children were on the school roll (the Education Act of 1870 having made school attendance compulsory with its obvious effect on numbers). At this time there were four class groupings. Firstly there were the infants, accommodated in The Infant Room (added in 1872), secondly Standard 1 who were in the New Room (1875), thirdly Standards 2 and 3 and lastly Standards 4, 5, 6 and 7. The latter two groups of children were taught in the Long Room, the original schoolroom.



*Percy Kemp, headmaster of the South School for 31 years with wife and children (L-R) Nellie, Winnie and Edgar
Photo courtesy of Pete Flewin*

“The Master”, as the headteacher liked to be called, at this time was Mr Kemp. It was he who taught the older children of Standards 4, 5, 6 and 7 and, together with his wife, who took Standard 1, ran the school for over 30 years. Maud Dartnall recalled that they “were very strict. I’ll never forget going into a field and picking some wild pansies, they were so pretty. I got the cane for that”.

The children of the area were summoned to school by the ringing of the school bell (until its removal in 1939, when the belfry became unsafe). One past headteacher, Mr Brown, recalled that the duty of ringing the bell was given to a group of boys, and went on to relate the not infrequent occasions when he had to get onto the roof, climb up to the belfry and release the bell when it had been pulled a little too zealously.



*School Group 1902 with Mrs Kemp (seated), Mr Kemp and Miss Cooper
Photograph courtesy of Dolly Wakely*

The children attending during the last years of the 19th Century had a hard time, both in and out of school. Records frequently allow glimpses of life at the time, with children falling asleep during lessons owing to their parents rising early for work, 4.30 am in the case of one family. Attendance rose and fell according to the farming calendar. Pea picking, hop picking, stone picking, the Farningham Fair and later the boot lace factory at Westminster Mill are all cited as reasons for low numbers of children in school. There even appears a reference to children being absent owing to the visit of a circus in the area. In October 1897 the Ploughing Match forced the closure of the school as “so many vehicles and people congregate on these occasions that it is not safe for little children to be on the roads”. Regular outbreaks of whooping cough, scarlet fever and diphtheria had similar effects, whilst in school, lessons were altered when children were unable to write because of the cold, or on another occasion when it was so dark that only oral work could be done. In August 1898, the temperature in the school building reached 80 degrees Fahrenheit, “in spite of sprinkling the floor with water and having all windows and doors open”. The water used was drawn from a well at the rear of the school which also served the schoolhouse and, during particularly dry periods, local houses. Mains water eventually reached the school in 1903, but prior to that the duty of

pumping up the week's supply of water fell to a selected group of girls every Friday afternoon. Nellie Kemp recalled that competition for this coveted task was usually very keen!

Another difficulty, gross overcrowding, led in 1897, to the opening of what was to become known as "The Little School", or Horton Kirby Primary School (North) in Horton Road. The building, clearly showing a date of 1894, was originally built as a hall (or parish room) and cottage.



*Little School, Horton Road, South Darent taken in 1993
Photograph courtesy of Ted Hughes*

Circumstances must have altered quite dramatically for a change of use so soon. This school initially housed infants, up to seven to eight years of age, whereupon they transferred to the "old" South building in School Lane. During the early years of the century extra holidays were given to the children in order to celebrate victories such as the declaration of peace in South Africa and the relief of Mafeking. In June 1900 a partial eclipse of the sun "afforded subject for an interesting lesson". For the most part, however, daily life for the children attending the schools consisted of learning the alphabet, object lessons, reading, writing, arithmetic and drawing. Drill was also a part of a child's "education", its purpose to instil discipline. Numerous references appear in school records, however, concerning incidents of bad behaviour and the punishments which were handed out as a consequence. Chalking on walls, truancy, stealing turnips, breaking crosses in the churchyard,

locking a child in the girls' lobby and teaching a two year old to swear, all resulted in blows from the cane. Such punishments were not always appreciated by the child's parents. One mother, whose daughter May had been caned, wrote "If she is not a favourite in the school she don't come to have her lessons knocked into her. She has plenty of time yet to learn all she requires so if you will oblige me by keeping your hands off".

Children whose attendance, behaviour or work merited it were rewarded. Crown coins were given out, medals or bars were awarded and prizes were presented. An Honours Board was set up and hung in school in order to celebrate and record pupils who had gained Kent County Council Scholarship awards.

In June 1911 it was recorded that "Mr Laurie called to ask that Tom Hall (aged 9) be thanked for having pluckily rescued Olive Laurie from drowning in the river just below the mill head on Tuesday last".

Between 1914 and 1918 both North and South Schools were affected by the War. Children were prepared for air raids and some boys were absent helping the police watch telegraph wires on the London Road. The land opposite the South School was secured in order to produce more food, in accordance with government instructions, and the "upper children" cleared and worked the land with help from local gardeners. During October 1917 "an air raid on Tuesday lowered the attendance"



*Honours Boards from South School
Photograph courtesy of Ken Allart*



One of Ivan Dunmall's seven certificates for perfect attendance

and “a number of balloons came down in the close neighbourhood”. The following year saw damage to the school from night raids, with shell fragments “making a hole in the paving and another breaking slates on the roof”. In March of 1918 it was reported that “Some children missed attendance on Monday owing to descent of aeroplane near the river” and another record stated that “Horse chestnuts have been collected by the children as desired by the Minister of Munitions”. Wally Millen recalled each child being given a pair of scissors and some rags which had to be cut up into tiny pieces to stuff pillows for wounded soldiers.

In 1924 a holiday was given to the children in order that they could attend the opening of the Dartford By-Pass Road and the



Arthur Brown, headmaster of the South School with his wife Nellie, daughter of the previous headmaster

Photograph courtesy of Pete Flewin

accompanying visit of the Prince of Wales. A year later the school reported that, having taken eight wickets for only nine runs during a match between the school and Erith St John's Bible Class, Norman Robertson had been awarded first prize by *The Star* newspaper's cricket editor.

1924 also saw the introduction of *The Hortonian*, the school magazine started to raise money for the school. Early volumes contain fascinating articles and snippets of information including the names of the school houses (Clive, Drake, Nelson and Wellington). Competition was strong to be top house and points were awarded not only for academic achievement but also for punctuality and conduct.

Volume 2, Number 3 of *The Hortonian* tells us that in 1925 “Molly Day met with an accident resulting in a broken arm. First aid followed by medical attention is leading to a good recovery but her great aim was to avoid missing an attendance and she continued to attend so as not to spoil her six-year record of perfect attendance”.

In 1931, Volume 7, Number 1 informs us that Horton Kirby School had volunteered to take part in the Land Utilisation Survey of Britain, a national scheme to monitor and mark on maps each field with its crops, trees and buildings.

A page from the first edition of The Hortonian Courtesy of Peggy Rolph



*Dressed for the Little School May Day pageant c 1938
Photograph courtesy of June Smith*

In 1939, because of the War, both schools taught all children up to school leaving age.

In September that year the headteacher in a letter home to parents concluded with the following words: "May we hope that you will help us in these times, to guide the children's minds and activities into channels which have little or nothing to do with war". In October 1940 the school was 50 yards from an exploding bomb which still managed to blow in more than half the windows, together with two doors. In 1942 the school sent a cheque in order to cover the cost of buying and sending 500 cigarettes to four Old Boys who were prisoners of war.

After the War life returned to normal and then in 1946 came changes as a result of the 1944 Education Act. These meant that our main village schools "lost" their secondary school children and became primary schools only.



Horton Kirby School Cricket Team 1926

(L-R) standing: Harold Kitchener, Bernard Townsend, Fred Herbert, Ted Dimond, Ray Booth, (unknown)

(L-R) seated: Ron Barber, Jack Austin, Tom Burberry, Wilfred Giles, Fred Day, Ron Elcombe, (with scoring book) Charlie Clark

Photograph courtesy of Horton Kirby School collection

School life was then interrupted only by the death of George VI and in 1953 the Coronation of Elizabeth II, when “the children were given a hearty tea, after patriotic songs and poems had been performed”. At about this time overcrowding again became a problem resulting in the Village Hall being used as an overspill classroom.

1957 marked the Centenary of the South School. Elsie Costley, school secretary at the time, noticed the date on the building and so set in motion a celebration which involved former scholars returning from far and near. The Bishop of Rochester planted a gingko tree in the grounds and this tree, following the tradition set by the removal of the yew tree from the Dame School, was replanted in the grounds of the new school in 1965. It can still be seen to the right of the main entrance. Also as part of the school’s Centenary, Sir Steven Tallent’s son, Martin, made a lectern as a gift for the school out of wood from his St John’s Jerusalem estate. A new school badge was designed by Mrs Beresford (then deputy head), to mark the Centenary.

*South School pupils in 1957
Photograph courtesy of Yvette Peeling*



*South School badge
designed by Mrs Beresford,
deputy head, for the
Centenary in 1957
Drawn by Yvette Peeling*

1965 saw a major change in the Parish’s schools when the new school was built on the Vineyard Field, Horton Road. Initially this was a Junior school only with four classrooms, the Little School continuing to house the Infants. However it soon became clear that extra capacity was needed as the Infants were having to spill over into the Village Hall. Four more classrooms were therefore added to the new school and by 1970 all primary pupils were taught in the new school.

The old schools were left empty until the South School was opened as a Field Centre for Kent schools in 1972, the North School having been developed along similar lines by the Inner London Education Authority. As warden of the School Lane Field Centre until 1993, Audrey Gee transformed the old school into a vibrant facility for both children and teachers alike, where they learned at first hand about a variety of topics. At present the old schools are in use on almost every day of the school year, with parties of children from north and west Kent and south London visiting in order to take advantage of the local natural features.

Children's weather station

FIVE primary schools have combined to take an interesting part in a practical course and we are particularly in luck for the year as the children have made a complete weather station with great success.

Judging of the weather on Thursday last week, when a forecast of rain, with a possibility of snow, was made, the children who had the station set up were surprised to find it was wrong.

On this occasion there was an average of rain, and had a weather station of this type the children would have been able to tell the weather.

The weather station has been installed at Horton Kirby School, and it is hoped that it will be used by the children to help them to learn about the weather and its effects.

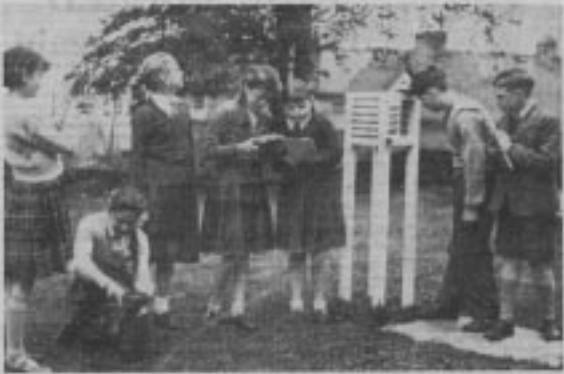
Parents help

Equipment for the weather station, including a barometer, thermometer, and a rain gauge, was all provided by the Horton Kirby Parents' Teachers Association.

A regular and useful time was spent from 10.15 to 11.15 on the school's premises.

The headmaster, Mr. H. C. Jones, said that the children were taking a great interest in the work, and that the weather station would be a valuable asset to the school.

On the weather station is a forecast of a greater range of weather than the children could have made on their own. The children who had the station set up were surprised to find it was wrong.



WEATHER EXPERTS—These girls and boys of Horton Kirby South School are busy engaged on their daily work of taking readings and keeping records of the weather. In the picture are (left to right) Lynn, Emma, Jane, and Margaret. They are working with the rain gauge, Margaret Wilson, age 11, looking up at the weather vane. Jane Hill, age 11, and Pamela Ward, age 10, taking a look at the barometer. Other children are working on the weather station, and Maria Pugh, age 10, writing the results.—H.K. Photo No. 20, 1959.

Right: Staff on the last day of Summer Term in 1990

(l-r) Mr Fenner, Mrs Ovenden, Mrs Carpenter, Mrs Whitting, Mrs Coombes and Mr Say



In recent years vast leaps forward have been made in the education of our children and the school has always more than kept up with progress. The 1959 photograph above shows pupils with a very simple weather station, but today our children monitor the weather by computer via equipment installed on the roof of the school. Schools programmes on the radio have largely now been taken over by television programmes which are regularly videoed to fit in with school timetables. In the past, children were exercised in "drill" and PE but now Year 6 (11 year olds) are able to enjoy a week at an outdoor activity centre joining in with such activities as rock-climbing, dry slope skiing and canoeing. Sports Days are still held along similar lines as in the past and inter-schools sports days are still competitive.

*Horton Kirby taking part in the District Sports Day in 1984
Photograph courtesy of Sylvia Ayris*



Attending school in Horton Kirby today is demanding and hard work but also a lot of fun. This is illustrated by the recent tradition that on the last day of the school year all leavers and staff come to school in fancy dress.

Not only has school changed for our children during the past 100 years but so has getting to school. All children used to walk to school on

their own. Now a days that would be considered much too dangerous and children are being driven to school, even very short distances.

The school roll in 1994 is 240 which is not so very different from that of 100 years ago. On 24th December 1993 the school heard that its application to become grant-maintained from 1st April 1994 had been approved thus ending control by the local authority.

Today, children of primary school age are taught the National Curriculum in the relative warmth and comfort of the modern building in Horton Road. However, the South and North Schools served generations of our children and those past childhoods are very much alive in both buildings. Long may they remain as a historic reminder of schooldays long since gone in our villages.

Headteachers South School

Mr Dungate	1857 - 1877
Mr Keddell	1877 - 1893
Mr Kemp	1893 - 1924
Mr Brown	1924 - 1937
Mr Tanner	1937 - 1940
Mr Bayliss	1940 - 1949
Miss Williams	1949 - 1954
Mr Linsley	1955 - 1958
Mr Rolph M.B.E.	1958 - 1965
Mr Harris	1966 - 1974
Mr Keys	1975 - 1979
Miss Knowles	1979 - 1981
Mr Davis	1981 - 1986
Mr Say	1986 -

Little School

Miss Smith	1897 - 1904
Miss Chandler	1904 - 1917
Mrs Hayward	1917 - 1931
Mrs Overton	1931 - 1945
Mrs Matthews	1945 - 1955
Mrs Tyrie	1955 - 1961
Mr Rolph M.B.E.	1961 - 1965



*The Gorringe School photograph in the 1950s
Photograph courtesy of Ray Knowler*



Other Schools

Other schools in the parish were those attached to the Homes for Little Boys. In 1911 the Gorringe Memorial School was opened for children of all ages who lived in the Homes. Originally it was a “non-provided school” offering accommodation for some boys not inmates of the Homes. However, few “outside” children are thought to have been pupils there. Prior to this the Homes’ boys had used the Bradford School, opened in 1872 and so-called because the finances for its building had been provided by friends of the Homes from Bradford in Yorkshire. In 1949 the Gorringe became a

Secondary Modern School and a small number of children from the villages went there for their secondary education. In 1961 Kent County Council proposed to stop maintaining the Gorringe School and later that year Farningham Homes for Little Boys was converted to an approved school. Bob Rolph, Head of Horton Kirby School, had also taught at the Gorringe and became its Headmaster for two years from 1956 to 1957.

Riverside Kindergarten



*Learning road safety at Riverside Kindergarten with Lynn Hill and Jackie Johnson in 1993
Photograph courtesy of Cecilia Reynolds*

Mention must also be made of the Riverside Kindergarten, a playgroup set up and run for over 25 years by Cecilia Reynolds. It started in 1967 at the Legion Hall in Devon Road with only eight children. Five years later it moved to the Village Hall where it has stayed ever since, with over a thousand pre-school age children passing through its doors. It may come as a surprise to many that today these three and four year olds even have the use of a computer on which to learn. Those who have had children pass through this establishment would agree that Mrs Reynolds is totally dedicated to the wellbeing of all “her” children.

From the Album

Mrs B Cushing with the class of '59 - new entrants whose classroom was a room in the Village Hall. Use of the Hall continued as usual and Mrs Cushing remembered the children, who had to cross the hall to get to the lavatories, chatting happily with the members of the Darby and Joan Club

