

## Mr. Norman Hyde – Head teacher of Meerbrook Village School



On 14/5/2010 Mr. Norman Hyde recalled his time as head teacher at Meerbrook village school. He lived with his wife in the schoolhouse from 1956.

Norman was born in a small village in Bedfordshire, in a schoolhouse, so it wasn't too different for him when he moved to Meerbrook.

He was appointed as head teacher when his brother John left the post. On gaining the post he bought a car, as his wife knew how difficult village life would be without one. In those days, of course, not everyone had cars.

He went on to say: -

"The school house had electricity when we moved in but there was no mains water in the house at all. However there was pumped water. Outside the back door of the house was a well but the house was joined to the school so we had to step outside and into the school cloakroom where there was a pump. It was a round disk with a big handle. This water was used for washing and we had a long bath in front of the fire, but drinking water was brought in from my parents' house in Leek. We would fetch it up in our Dormobile, which was bought soon after moving to Meerbrook.

Mr. Ward, the postmaster, fetched water from the parish-pump, which was at the present well, near the chapel, as they had no water either, in the house opposite us. He would fetch it in a contraption built from a three-wheeler cycle with a large cage on top and large water carriers. This was for his wife and his neighbours. It was supposed to be drinking water for the village but sometimes the pump had a notice on it saying it couldn't be used for drinking. Mr. Ward was also the school caretaker. His wife Margaret was the postmistress and he was the postman, delivering post on foot, all around to Roche Grange and Upper Haddon. Margaret Ward also cleaned the school and served the dinners, which came from Leek in a van, from one of the secondary schools. They were a very interesting couple. The letters would come into the post office and then he took them out. He took a long time to deliver the letters, sometimes all day, and when he returned she would shout "Fred, Fred, Fred where have you been?"

The schoolhouse was on the right of the building, looking from the front and the brick part was used for the Infants at that time, but it had been added a long time before we were there. The stone part, the older part, was for the junior children. There were two teachers. When I started, Freda Warrington ( Fernyhough) was working there. She lived near Eleven Lanes End, and I think she left to get married. Then we had a young lady from Leek, Marie Povey, possibly straight from college and she was with us for about 3 years. She left us to get married. In the last 12 months or so we had a lady from Wetley Rocks and she had a car.

The children were 5 or nearly 5, when they started, until 7 in the Infants and then 7 till 11 in the juniors. It was grand to teach country children because they were so interested in everything. We catered with the Maths of the day. They sat the 11+ and we usually had about 4 leaving in any year, but once there were 8 or 9. There were about 30 or 40 pupils in the school most of the time. The furthest they usually came from was probably Roche Grange. There were not many in the heart of the village but many were on the roads out of the village. A lot of the children lived on the road to Roach Grange. We had one or two from the road to The Three Horseshoes, but no further, as they would have gone to Thorncliffe School. We had a family from the Fould Farm and also Gunside. Most children were

brought by their parents, but there was a daily bus from Leek to Roche Grange in those days.

*I've got a story about the bus. It was a bad winter's day. School had finished, as the children had gone early and the bus came in. There was a commotion outside. The driver said, "I'm not going any further. I'm not going up to Roche Grange." On the bus there were two ladies, mother and daughter. The mother was 60-ish. I wondered how they would get home as they lived at the end of Roach Road, which goes round the Roaches. There was a little cottage there down by the river Dane, and they would have had to walk there from Meerbrook. So I thought I should try to take them by car, my little Morris Minor. I told my wife what I was going to do. We got stuck at the corkscrew near the Grange and I dug my way down to the stone surface. Then we went on but I could see in the headlights that the snow was filling in. I explained that I wouldn't be able to take them any further but they said they were all right and thanked me and plodded on. I managed to turn round in the gate-hole by gingerly reversing and drawing forward etc. for about 5 minutes and got home. How those poor folks lived there I do not know. That was how things were then. They would have had water from the Dane but no electricity. They had been to market, of course, with the eggs they had collected.*

The area immediately behind the schoolhouse and leading to the toilets was concreted and the children could play there. When the weather was nice we would go pond dipping in the stream for water boatmen and tadpoles and frogspawn. Those were interesting times, looking at life cycles etc. It was very relaxed there but it was in the school as well, mainly because of the numbers, I suppose. With living in the schoolhouse we knew everyone well. It was a school family, they knew us and we knew them and we knew the parents and the grandparents. We never really had to worry about discipline, as the children were happy to behave. They had to do as they were told though. They didn't have to wear uniform just their normal clothes. Inspectors rarely came to school, perhaps they didn't want to come out, but occasionally they did come to talk to me and sometimes the children. I can't remember any written reports from them.

The children who really stood out were probably the older ones when I started there. I especially remember, in particular, two girls, Mary Clulow and Gill Torr. They were at the top end of the school and almost ready to leave. Both went on to Westwood High school and a lot of the work that they did, they did by themselves. I would give them the work and supervise them, but the difficulties of the different age groups, meant that they had to be very good and work by themselves. Mary was Vinnie Clulow's daughter and her son John also came to the school. He was about 2 years younger. They tended to do guided work on their own. All the children were interested in books. They didn't have television to divert them. They were keen on getting into books. The boys would have a small ball to play football but the age range made it difficult to form teams, of course.

There was a youth club based up at the village hall and they could play in the field opposite (Billy Goodwin's in those days) We used to have a football team and a cricket team but it wasn't a cricket pitch just a piece that was reasonably flat. We had a very thriving youth club. I had taught lots of the children but they came from far and wide to the youth club. We used to have dances and so forth. We took them to Manchester one day.

In Sheila Hine's book "Around Meerbrook" there is a photograph of a schooltrip to the seaside on page 124. It was with my brother John, just before I came to Meerbrook. The boys at the front were Frank and John Taylor, then Mary Clulow, John Clulow. Freda Warrington was there as well.

In the school sports photo, on page 125, my daughter is there with Mrs. Bennison, in the white hat, Derek, Stuart and the Woolliscroft children.

When we were first there the vicar was Rev Grove and later it was Rev. Walmsley. Tom Hine was a churchwarden and was also on the parish council. The parish clerk lived at Rock Cottage. Bill Allen ran the pub. Les Holland was an important person as he had the garage. They were all such friendly people and 'on the ball'. They all wanted things done properly. I can't remember any occasion when there was any pulling in opposite directions. They were very, very supportive of the school and the village. There was no difference

between church and chapel. They all pulled together for the common good.

It was difficult when the reservoir was extended. Various things had happened before, which I didn't know about. It was very unfortunate because suddenly something came into the village to cause them to change their ways. Nobody knew quite what was going to happen. The parish council was told that this or that would happen but it didn't materialise. Things had to change because of the compulsory purchases on cottages. The tenants often remained, only, with very different landlords. There were restrictions on the use of the land because of what the water board wanted to do. When they talked about the new road they said they were going to build some cottages there and we would have liked to move to live there. There were not many houses in the heart of the village but some were on the roads out of the village. A lot of the children lived on the road to Roach Grange.

We used to have sports days for the children. It was difficult with a school of that size to run many events, of course, because of the mixed ages but we did skipping, sack race and egg and spoon. There were no Marathons! We always had a good turn out. We took the forms out from the school into the field next to the burial ground, opposite Rock Cottage. The parents and the rest of the village all turned out for sports days.

Christmas and the church fete were important as well. Freda and Marie taught the children to do the old dances for the fete on the church field. They did maypole dancing and the children dressed up in summer dresses with flowers in their hair etc. I don't know who looked after the pole during the year. It wasn't a school thing. It was part of the church fete celebrations. The fete would have been where it is now.

As well as being the clerk to the parish council, I was also asked to see to the register of electors.

I was asked to make sure that all the forms came back from everyone in the parish so I found it was easier to take them out, across the parish and make sure that people completed them. That was from the A53 and across to Swythamley. It just happened to be a nice

autumn. Apart from maybe a dozen, we visited every farm and house within the parish in our Dormobile. We piled in with our children, taking a picnic. Neild's Farm was the outpost. We went up to Thorneyleigh and round the back of the Roaches. There was one on the left hand side where they used to take coal. We also went up to Swinson's at Old Hay Top. It was great fun but although the roads had tarmac, the farm tracks were often quite rough but it was a good summer and they were dry. It was such good fun that a couple of years later we did Tittesworth parish as well. It was interesting. It was a means of getting to know people. It wasn't schoolwork but it was part of the community.

We enjoyed our time at Meerbrook. We were really involved in everything. There was always something going on. Everyone was very friendly and we were all pulling together. There was a real community spirit and if anything needed doing people would turn out. They were probably the best years of our lives, in the fifties. We left in 1967. The children were pleasant children to teach. The atmosphere was good and there was plenty of support.