



## 9 THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

*... once again I am able to give an excellent report ...*

### **The old school**

There are known to have been a succession of schoolmasters at Stainforth from 1710 onwards, but as yet it is not known when the school was started or by whom. A small building is shown as entry 382 on the Tithe Map of 1844 opposite what is now Townhead Cottage on the spot where the STAINFORTH highways sign now stands at the Arncliffe Road entrance to the village. It is described as *School* and belonging to *Stainforth Proprietors*. We can guess that this was the 18th century school and that it was probably in a state of disrepair in 1842 when a Town meeting was called ‘to decide how best to employ the poor during winter...’ and one of the proposals was that a new school should be built on land belonging to Thomas Brown adjoining Goatscar Lane above Kern Knotts. Nothing came of this suggestion, and in 1855 Thomas Stackhouse offered a new site on the opposite side of the village.

### **The new school**

Stainforth School was built in 1857, ‘by subscription’. The land had been conveyed for ‘a nominal consideration’ by Thomas Stackhouse to:

*the incumbent and chapel wardens of Stainforth the site and building, described as, ‘All that plot, piece, or parcel of land situate in the township of Stainforth aforesaid on the west side of the road leading from Stainforth to Horton in Ribblesdale, being part of a certain croft or close called Borrans, whereon a new school has recently been erected and a playground set cut containing altogether, including the site of the buildings, 611 superficial square yards or thereabouts.*

In 1858, the school opened for the first time taking over from a building no longer standing (sited on Goat Lane above Town Head Farm), to teach local children of all ages, i.e. 5-14 years. It was not until the 1950s that the school became primary only, after which point pupils moved to either Ingleton or Settle schools. There is very little information about the early years, although one item that was printed in the *Craven Herald* of 28 August 1896 relates to the resignation of the schoolmistress at Stainforth, the third in 12 months! When one considers that schoolteachers in those days almost had a job for life—and certainly it was very common for teachers to have one job for many, many years—for there to be three teachers resigning in 12 months was

very unusual. Unfortunately, we do not know the circumstances surrounding these resignations over 100 years ago. It is perhaps significant that the replacement for the last of these three schoolmistresses was a Mr Henry Smith, in January 1897.

### Class sizes

The number of pupils attending the school varied quite considerably over the years, ranging from the mid- to high 20s in the 1920s, increasing very rapidly, in the early 1930s to an all-time high of 51 in 1934. Quite how 51 children could be fitted into two classrooms, one 20 feet by 18 feet and the other 15 feet by 18 feet, is an interesting point. At the end of the 1930s the numbers were in the high 30s, but in 1939 there was an increase of seven, the result of children from Bradford being evacuated to the village. In November 1942, there was an even bigger increase following the introduction of nine children evacuated from London's East End. At the end of the 1950s, the role had reduced to nine and ten in consecutive years and



*Pupils and Staff of Stainforth School about 1927. From left to right, back row: Miss Percival, Hilda Dawson, George Farrow, Noel Dinsdale, Arthur Greenbank, Norman Greenbank, Freddy Lund, John Haworth, John Forster, Margaret Metcalfe, Eva Taylor, Miss Newhouse. Second row: Clarris Greenbank, Madge Dinsdale, Dorothy Dinsdale, Ida Taylor, Mary Hoyle, Grace Lund, Lena Greenbank, Violet Dinsdale, Agnes Dawson, Jane Birtle, Agnes Farrow. Third row: Tom Dinsdale, Annie (?), Laura Taylor, Enid Birtle, Jose Greenbank, Dorothy Hoyle, Jean Singleton, Joan Greenbank, Renee Greenbank, Harold Howarth. Front row: John Dinsdale, Gladys Dinsdale, John Chalk, Lizzie Dawson, Betty Alston, Kathleen Forster, Amy Greenwood, Alf Farrow  
- photo courtesy Mary Rayner*

throughout the 1960s to the mid-1970s the numbers were in the mid-teens. From then until closure in 1984, the numbers remained around this level.

The introduction, in 1942, to the village of the two evacuated families totalling 18 people with such a different background, i.e. living in a large city, must have been quite an eye-opener for all concerned. One little story that has emerged from this period relates to the habit of punishment at school being a slap on a bare forearm. One of the London evacuees took exception to this punishment and on a certain occasion simultaneously slapped the teacher on the face, 'causing a notable red mark in sharp contrast to the whiteness of the rest of the face'. The mother of this evacuee returned after dinnertime with the child and proceeded to have strong words with the teacher, allowing many of the other children to learn a significant number of new words!

### **Inspectors**

On 4 May 1921, an inspection of the school took place by Miss E H Briggs, a County Council Inspector. It is interesting to contrast this with some of the comments one might read from today's inspectors:

*The work goes forward pleasantly in this country school and there is evidence that both the Headmaster and his Assistant put forth much zealous effort. ... More attention might be given by the younger children to both the writing and the figuring in the exercise books and the economical use of the paper.*

In 1937, R Garrard, a Diocesan Inspector, visited the school and part of his report reads as follows:

*This is one of the best schools which I visit, and once again I am able to give an excellent report. I found the Bible subjects, both New and Old Testament, well known by the children, care and thoroughness have evidently been used in their teaching. In addition I found a good knowledge of the Early Church History stories, which I think have been enjoyed, and a modern missionary subject has also been found interesting; hymns are nicely sung and the catechism is known ...*

How things have changed in 60 years! How many children now know more than a few hymns and are taught the catechism?

### **Friendly school**

There have been at least three examples of teachers who stayed for around 30 years each, which perhaps say something about the pleasures of teaching in a small local community as well as reflecting the general change in employment. Henry Smith became headmaster in January 1897 (after the three headmistresses in 12 months) and left in July 1925, presumably to retire. At around that time, Miss Percival arrived as the assistant teacher and

remained at the school until 1957, when falling numbers brought about a change in staffing needs. Miss Percival left to teach at Settle School. In 1926, Miss Newhouse came to the school as headmistress and remained there until her retirement in December 1958.

All of those interviewed who attended the school remember it as being a friendly and happy environment, but with a strict regime and with strong



*Stainforth School 1965 From left to right: Ryblma Cardus, Elaine Kitchener, Sarah Snape, Caroline Bullock, Joanna Nowell, Valerie Lister, Jacqueline Dunn  
- photo courtesy of Mary Rayner*

disciplinary standards. A typical day would start with a brief assembly during which there would be a hymn sung and probably a reading from the scripture, along with perhaps saying the Ten Commandments and a psalm. The vicar would visit at least once a week, would take the morning service and then listen to, or test, children on the scriptures. There would also be frequent and regular visits by others, including the Attendance Officer, the specialist 'Drill' Teacher (now physical education), the Diocesan Inspector, etc.

#### **Closure**

Along with thousands of other small

village schools across the country, the threat of closure hung over Stainforth School from the late 1950s as respective Governments looked to save money. Therefore, it was a brave decision in 1983 to try to raise funds to buy a computer for the school. This was achieved by a sponsored triathlon, involving the children in relays swimming across Malham Tarn, cycling from there to Horton (about 10 miles) and finally a Three Peaks Walk, all completed with-

in 24 hours and raising £400 in the process.

Unfortunately, all these efforts did not achieve the desired result and, to the consternation of the village, later that year a decision was taken by the Education Department to close the school in the following year. From that point, a concerted and valiant rearguard action was fought by the School Governors and others, sadly to no avail and, in July 1984, Stainforth C of E Primary School closed for the last time, having provided education for many hundreds of village children over 126 years.