



Vale and Downland Museum – Local History Series

Miss Bayley's School

by Enid Denley

Alton House, at 31 Wallingford Street, had been built in the 18th century when Wantage was a flourishing place with tanneries and rope works in the town. In the next century the house had been divided into 2 smaller houses. Miss Bayley's school occupied one of the halves and the front door opened from the pavement straight into a pleasant hall with a mosaic tiled floor. When I visited there about 1990 the mosaic floor was still there and covered in carpet.

In the hall we did drill once a day, had playtime, had a few pegs for our coats and even parked a few bicycles belonging to boys, mostly from the villages.

Part of the roof over the hall had been glazed and made into a small conservatory leading to the garden which ran down the slope at the back of the house to Stirlings Lane. We used to play out there in fine weather and I always remember the lovely smell of a syringa (orange blossom bush) growing there.

Miss Caroline Bayley had helped her mother run a Dame school in Newbury Street for many years and realised Wantage needed another school in the town for children of the trades people and shopkeepers in the town and farmers' children.

There was a C of E school and a Wesleyan school in Church Street, also St Mary's boarding school as well as St Katharine's for boarders and day girls so there must have been quite a number of children in the town and district.

Miss Bayley always believed the older children helped the younger ones with learning especially reading so we all sat around her dining table with old and young together and seemed to know the alphabet in no time and were soon reading. We enjoyed learning to write as we used wooden rimmed slates and slate pencils which squeaked as we wrote and the more we wrote the more squeaks we made and enjoyed. We then tackled numbers and sums - still with slates.

We learned the multiplication tables which we all chanted day by day, ad infinitum. We learned simple poems and I only remember one about the poor robin in the barn when it snowed. I think we must have been pupils there for about two years before we tackled writing with pen and ink with steel pen-nibs, of course, so made lots of blots. Two or three of the girls were weekly boarders there and only went home at weekends as they lived in villages too far to cycle daily. As we lived just along the road from the school I spent lots of evenings with the boarders and loved it. It was a very happy place and Miss Bayley was a devoted teacher.

I cannot remember the actual number of pupils but can remember most of the children and their names. There is a photo of Miss Bayley and a few of her children in the ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHS SERIES compiled by Rene Hancock, page 43.

This article was donated by Mrs Enid Denley.

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Vale and Downland Museum Trust, 19 Church Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire, OX12 8BL
Telephone: 01235 771447 e-mail: museum@wantage.com