

Levens school in the First World War - 1914-1918

The Headmaster was Mr Newall.

During the war years the school was troubled by outbreaks of sickness, serious staffing problems, extra demand for farmers' children to work at home, and two very cold winters. When the war started in August 1914 there were 117 children on the registers.

In October 1914 the school had to be closed for six weeks due to an outbreak of measles. This was followed by bad colds and the threat of scarlet fever coming as close as Hincaster. Several Levens pupils lived in Hincaster and were excluded.

In 1916 and 1917 the winters were very cold with a great deal of snow. This led to many bad colds and poor attendance, the roads being too bad for the more distant pupils to walk to school.

In 1918 there was another outbreak of measles, but luckily not quite bad enough to close the school. However, in October 1918 a serious 'flu epidemic began; school was closed for 3 weeks, the teachers were also suffering, and it lasted until the end of the year.

The staffing problems were at their worst in 1917 and 1918, when the school functioned for most of the time with only 2 out of 4 teachers present. This was partly due to the teachers coming by bicycle or on foot some considerable distance; one lived in Coniston and one near Shap, staying in Levens some of the time. One walked each day from Whitbarrow. When one teacher left in 1916 to go to college there were no supply teachers available, and Miss Just was very ill and in hospital in 1917, being absent for five months. This meant that several girls from the top class had to be used as monitresses and the Headteacher took responsibility for the Infants as well as the 9 - 15 age group.

The extra demand for farmers' sons to work at home came about because of some farm workers being enlisted for service. There was also extra demand for food production due to the war. Because of this, special efforts had to be made to take school holidays to suit the farming year. In 1916 an extra 2 weeks were added to the summer holidays because of the harvest. As the war continued more boys, some as young as 12, were granted total exemption from school to work full-time on the farm. The blacksmith's son had to leave school early, aged 13, because his father's apprentice was called up.

From early in the war, efforts were made by the schoolteachers and scholars to do what they could of the cause.

In September 1915 twelve of the girls attended a cookery class in the old Infants' school where they took a short course in 'Economical cookery for wartime'. Lady Theodosia Bagot showed the children a Magic Lantern Show about her 'Hospital of Friendship' in Belgium. Three sacks of chestnuts were collected and taken to Milnthorpe station to be used to make propellant munitions, taking the place of grain. Fifty scholars picked 1cwt 13lbs of blackberries on Whitbarrow for the Ministry of Food in September 1918.

On November 11th 1918 when the Armistice was declared, the flag was hoisted in the playground and the National Anthem was sung.