

My name is Mary Swain. I was born in Brompton Regis on the 17th March 1920 and my maiden name was Evett. I lived with my parents in a cottage opposite the Methodist Chapel which later became a showroom for a Mr Steer but now is no longer there.

I started my school life in 1925 and on the first day I cried and asked to go home but after that I soon settled down and made friends. Catherine and Olive Land, Stanley and Alice Coleman, also Jane Hawker are names I recall. Four or five new pupils started on the same day. Jim Hayes was one.

About thirty children attended the school and they were split into two classes depending on your age. The five to six year olds were in one class and the seven to fourteen year old children were in another. In those days you would leave school at fourteen.

We were taught by the two Miss Parkins and they were affectionately known as "Little Miss Parkin" and "Big Miss Parkin". There was also a Caretaker and one of the tasks that she undertook, in the winter, was to light the big black cast iron fires which were fuelled by coke. The lighting in those days was by oil lamp.

The other staff member was a Miss Dolly Roar who was the Monitress. She was the daughter of a German. One night he was taken away, accused of being a spy during the First World War and was never seen again. They lived in a pretty cottage at Hartford.

Our lessons consisted of arithmetic, music (which was mainly singing and Miss Roar played the piano), spelling, reading and art. Games lessons consisted of skipping and rounders. The girls would also do needlework whilst the boys did simple woodwork. We wrote on slate boards with chalk. The girls wore dresses with a white pinafore over the top and black boots and the boys wore shirts, trousers and boots.

I used to go home for my lunch but if you lived on an outlying farm you would bring a packed lunch with you and in the Summer you would be given milk to drink and in the Winter hot cocoa. Also if you lived outside the village, such as Copphole or Holworthy, it was quite usual to travel in by pony and trap.

Our school day started at 9.00am and finished at 3.30pm. If you misbehaved you could expect either a ruler across your hand or you would have to stand in the corner with your hands behind your back.

We used to have a yearly visit by the Nurse who would inspect our hair and a Doctor who would examine your chest, back, hands and feet. If you had a medical problem you would then be referred to your own Doctor.

We did not go on school trips but we celebrated Christmas with a party where the refreshments included mince pies and orange squash. We made paper chains beforehand and carols were sung. We were allowed to go home to change for this special occasion where you were allowed to wear a party dress and lace up shoes.

On Guy Fawkes night there would be a bonfire and fireworks and you were given sparklers.

When it was May Day we all went to the playground with Miss Parkin and danced around the maypole with different coloured ribbons and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Also there was a fair held every October in the field where the Council bungalows now stand. We were given the day off for this event.

Village life was rich and varied. There was a bakery by the Village Hall which was run by a Mrs Chidgey who did all her own baking and would deliver the bread all around the Brendon Hills travelling by pony and trap. I can remember being as young as four years old and my mother taking me with Mrs Chidgey in order that she could attend to the horse and the food in the trap while the bread was being delivered. Sometimes we did not get home until 8.00pm. Mrs Chidgey would then have to be up early to make the bread for the next day. The buns and Easter hot cross buns that she made were delicious.

By the George Inn was a butcher's shop run by a Mark Goodland. Also Mr Perry ran a shop which was later taken over by Mr and Mrs Steer senior. Then run by Mr and Mrs Roger Steer.

Near the Old Police House was a Post Office and shop run by a Mrs Rudd who had two daughters. When one of her daughters married a Mr Sid Hayes they took over the running of the Post Office.

The Normans of Gupworthy Farm were the first people in the area to have a motor car in 1925/1926.

My family left the village when I was nine when we moved to Withiel Florey but I have wonderful childhood memories of Brompton Regis where I returned to be married in the chapel opposite my old childhood home.

Letter sent for the Kings Brompton School Reunion - 20th October 2002