

On 2nd August 2011 there was an informal reunion of about 35 former pupils, their spouses, partners and parents in the Village Hall. The reunion was organised by John House and his sister, Jean Card, as it was almost 35 years since the school closed on 20th October 1976.



Photograph courtesy of Judy Nash

Those attending, in order of seniority: Mary Cull (nee Burbidge) (1929-1936), Muriel Williams (nee Burbidge) (1933-1939), Connie Read (nee Pardy) (1935-1944), Christine Ellis (nee Portch) (1935-1945), Bob Stenhouse (1930's), Barbara Emm (nee Portch) (1938-1951), Tony Stenhouse (1938-1945), Allen Wood (1940-1944, 1945-1948), Frank Herring (1940-?1946), Gladys Gurl (nee Paulley) (1940-1951), Joy Dodge (nee Stenhouse) (1942-1949), John House (1942-1949), Jacky Stenhouse (nee Bennett) (1943-1946), Glenda Cheleda (nee Burbidge) (1943-1952), Mavis Gray (nee Burbidge) (1943-1949), John Harvey (1943-1949), Gerald Curtis (1945-1951), Rosemary Saunders (nee Bennett) (1946-1952), Audrey Torpy (nee Burbidge) (1947-1951), Rae Burbidge (1949-1955), Veronica (Marjorie) English (?-1954), Terry Portch (1950-1956), Jean Paulley (1952-1958), Rodney Yeatman (1952-1959), Jean Card (nee House) (1953-1959), John Burbidge (1954-1959), Sheila Davis (nee Bowditch) 1956-1963, Pauline Davis (nee Bowditch) 1958-1964, Steve Bowditch (1959-1965), Janice North (nee Collins) (1960-1966), Jo Williams (1961-1963), David Bowditch (1961-1967), Wendy Wheeler (nee Eastment) (1961-1967), Steven Wood (1964-1967), Mark Ebsworth (1967-1972).

Many brought photographs, book prizes, old exercise books and other memorabilia. Our senior pupil was Mary Cull (nee Burbidge) who came to the school in 1929. Her and her sisters' father is in the school photograph of c1906. What follows are some of the photographs brought to the reunion and also some of the memories of former pupils. Apologies for any errors or omissions, for example, not all persons in photographs have been identified or there may be the wrong attribution of a name to a face.

Please inform John Danks jandjanks@tiscali.co.uk of any errors or omissions and also send him any further photographs and memories, if you wish.

Please contact Jean Card card2123@btinternet.com or 01935-425724 if you are interested in attending a future reunion in a couple of years.



School Photograph circa 1906

Is one of the ladies the headmistress, Miss Helen Rintoul (headmistress 1904-1940)? Kate Gough (later Paulley) is 6th from the left, middle row and Arthur Burbidge (father of Mary Cull, Muriel Williams and Nancy Burden) is tenth from left, front row.

Mary Cull (nee Burbridge) remembers: My school days began in September 1929. The first six years were spent at Melbury Osmond village school, still then known as "Lord Ilchester's School." There were three classes, Infants, Juniors and Seniors, with three female members of staff, taking boys and girls from 5+ to 13+. My first teacher, a Miss Berry, came on a motor bike from some distant place! Miss Esme Flatman joined the staff in 1930 and stayed until the school closed. My headmistress was Miss Helen Rintoul.

Prior to the village school opening there were two schools here, one for boys at the Old Post House and one for girls ("the Dame's School") at Glebe Cottage.

I remember the Infants' Room seeming very large and bright with a big South facing window, allowing us to see and hear the elements but nothing else. The East facing window allowed "teacher" at her high desk to look out and view the school yard, the road and approaching visitors. The little wooden desks and chairs were size graded to fit us as we grew and always stacked neatly at the end of each school day ready for the school cleaner.

We learnt our figures and letters in sand trays, later with plasticine and then with slates and chalks (messy!) until promotion to precious exercise books using very fat pencils. Pen and ink were only used when you were at least 8. I loved the tactile cowrie shells that we used for counting and the little tin boxes of cardboard coins identical to real money – farthings, pennies, sixpenny pieces, florins etc

I vividly remember in the freezing winter sitting in a semi-circle sitting round the big red-hot Yorkist coke stove which was surrounded by a very high fixed guard, reciting our tables and gaining coloured stars which were stuck on a chart pinned to the wall for all to see. Success was imperative.

School and church were almost as one. The day began with prayers and hymns. Our resident rector came in once a week

to take prayers and give a scripture lesson. We went to church from school in crocodile formation on Christian festivals. Grace was said or sung before and after every midday meal, which consisted of sandwiches (marmite, for instance) and a hot drink if we were lucky enough to get to school with a thermos flask intact, having travelled the 2 ½ miles from Stockwood in Dad's lorry or uncle's car. We walked home, usually.

Hand washing was a ritual, at the one cold water basin. Hands were inspected daily. The headmistress blew her whistle at the end of playtime when all shouts and laughter ceased and we had to line up in our houses (I remember Ilchester and Stavordale houses) and the command "Show Hands" was given. Both sides of your hands were inspected. Imperfect nails meant losing marks for your house – a disgrace almost impossible to contemplate.

I loved country dancing to gramophone accompaniment in winter and rounders on Fridays on the Recreation Field in summer. The tarmacked part of the playground was marked out for deck tennis: that was great fun. I loved the feel of the quoits.

My days at Melbury School were very happy. We had a prize giving every Christmas when the Countess of Ilchester gave and presented the prizes, beautiful books for the best pupil in each subject in each class: a lot of books! I remember my last prize giving before leaving for Sherborne, aged 11, standing alone on the stage, reciting to a full W.I. Hall, Thomas Hardy's poem "The Oxen", still firmly fixed in my head.

I was happy to see three of my children pass through Melbury School, by then only for juniors, and honoured and pleased to serve as a School Manager and Correspondent from 1955 until the school sadly closed in 1976 when numbers had dropped to a dozen or so from 60 when I first attended all those years before.



School Photograph 1936

Back row (l to r): Victor Hall, Marie Hall, Grace White, Winnie Hall, Kath Paulley, Gwen Neal, Mary Burbidge, Marjorie Curtis, Jim Neal.

Middle row (l to r): Nancy Burbidge, Marjorie Neal, Barbara & Doreen Osmond, Johnny Green, Peggy Portch, Chris Portch, Marjorie Gosney, Muriel Burbidge, Connie Pardy, Bill Peach.

Front row (l to r): Bill Faulkner, Leslie Hall, Gerald Childs, Freddy Green, George Everett, Bob Stenhouse, Peter Curtis, Ron Paulley.



School Photograph 1937

Back row (l to r): Leslie Hall, Bill Faulkner, Victor Hall, Frank Warr, Kath Paulley, Gwen Neal, Grace White, Bill Peach.
 Middle row (l to r): Ron Paulley, Phyllis Warr, Muriel Burbidge, Connie Pardy, Nancy Burbidge, Sheila Brown, Marie Hall,
 Marjorie Neal, Bob Stenhouse, George Everett.
 Front row (l to r):?, Geoff Stenhouse, Edwin Warr, Chrissie Portch, Doreen Osmund, Peggy Portch, Marjorie Gosney,
 Barbara Osmund, Leslie Neal, Johnny Green.



1940's

Back row (l to r): Pat Lee, Wendy Portch, Shirley English, Valerie Kellaway, Glenda Burbidge, Miss Esme Flatman.
 Middle row (l to r): John Harvey, John House, Joy Stenhouse, Mavis Burbidge, ? Cheney, Valerie Portch, Diana
 Broomhall, Trevor English, Janet Peach, Roy Portch.

Front row (l to r): Eric Wood/Cheney?, Michael Kellaway, Bob Peach, Maureen Mitchell, Rosemary Bennett, Nancy Wood, Gerald Curtis.

Joy Dodge (1942-1949) remembers: I went to Melbury Osmond School in 1942. I had three older brothers and we lived at Drive End Farm. People came to the farm for milk and my brothers used to take the milk for the pupils in one third pint bottles to the school each day. My earliest memory is of practising writing letters in sand trays which were checked by Esme Flatman and if she was happy with your work you shook your tray, (instant deletion), and then started the next exercise. We went on nature walks with Esme, who was always keen to find the first primrose or celandine. In 1944 we moved to North End Farm and I walked to school across the fields, never by the road. I think the school day was 9-3.30 starting with assembly. Lunch was, I think, delivered from Sherborne to the school but later on to the Reading Room. There were big coke stoves, electricity arrived in the village in 1947. There was corporal punishment. I remember country dancing in the play ground, if fine, if not, in the Village Hall. Once a year we went to Bovington Camp and danced with other Dorset schools. The school performed a nativity play in the church at Christmas and we went to church on Ascension Day and then had the rest of the day off. I went to Evershot school aged 11.

Diana Mitchell (nee Broomhall) remembers: I can plainly remember my first day at school sat in the front row with a slate and chalk learning numbers with Miss Flatman. I loved going to school especially when we went outside to do exercises in the field and when Miss Flatman said it was nature walk day and she took us to so many places explaining about the wonder of nature and its creatures. We would go to the pond near the tennis courts, which then were at the top of the field and collect frogspawn to watch turn into frogs. As we were war children often mum had to gather the children in on their way home and we would go under the stairs in the pantry as the planes tried to get Westlands. Nearly all the children from Melbury Samford and Yeovil Road would call for each on the way to school, pick me up at Drive Villa and sometimes we helped with the milk cart from Mr Portch's farm to take to school. In those days you had free milk each day. I hated it as they always put it near the round stove and it got warm and made me feel sick. I am now 73 and never drink milk on its own. As it was wartime we were encouraged to do gardening and grow our own veg etc. and we had a little piece of land opposite the school and with Miss Flatman's help we grew lots of things. Great excitement when one day a climbing frame was delivered to the playground I spent many hours swinging like a monkey.



PE circa 1944

Sports Day was a good day, loved the races and loved the three legged races with Joy Stenhouse we always won. In the Reading Room we had school dinners delivered and in the last couple of years about 1947 my mother worked there teaching children table manners and helping in the playground in the lunch hour, Mrs Peach was the lady that dished out our meals. I have always felt that with Miss Flatman and Mr Chacksfield (1949-1951) as my teachers I managed to pass my 11+ exam and that year, five of us from this little village school went to Grammar school in Sherborne, a great result.

The day when Miss Flatman planted a tree outside the church door for the closure of the school , there were not many dry eyes at the church service in 1976.



Flower Show mid to late 1940's



School Photograph 1949

Back row (l to r): Mavis Burbidge, Diana Broomhall, Joy Stenhouse, Janet Peach, Valerie Portch, John Harvey, Angela Neal.

Third row (l to r): Trevor English, Rosemary English, Shirley English, Mr Chacksfield (1949-1951), Miss Flatman (1930-1976), Valerie Kellaway, Maureen Mitchel, John House.

Second row (l to r): Glenda Burbidge, Gerald Curtis, Donald Portch, Michael Kellaway, Ray Peach, Michael Portch, Roy Portch, Peter Tyndale.

Front row (l to r): Jeanette Dodge, Rae Burbidge, Ivor Wood, Sylvia Lawrence, Audrey Burbidge, Shirley Herring, Sally Tyndale, Nancy Wood, Rosemary Bennett.

In the 1949 picture of the school there is a picture of Nancy Wood, even then she wore thick glasses. She has now won the National Gold award for Visually Impaired Players. Her married name is Nancy Cheeseman and now lives in the Sparkford area. More information can be obtained from www.yeovilvibowls.co.uk

John House (1942 to 1949) remembers: When I started school we had the original 'walking bus'. It started with Elizabeth and John Harvey from Church Farm Stockwood who walked and were joined by Les, Arthur and Angela Neal from the Stavordale cottages at the entrance to Melbury Park and then Janet Dodge and Joy Manners from the cottages above the Rest and Welcome where my older brother Roy and myself joined up and as we progressed more pupils joined in. Remember it was war time and very few cars were about and petrol was rationed. When we got to Drive End Farm we collected the trolley with the crates of milk for the pupils which Ernie Portch supplied and pulled the trolley to school with us, yes up the hill. Sometimes we would get a lift home with Ken Andrews who used to deliver the Evening Post papers to Mr Bennets shop in the village with a war time Jeep. Years later my father Charlie House had the school contract to pick up children from Stockwood and taxi them to Melbury School. My first head teacher at school was Mrs England (1941-1947) and the junior class teacher was Esme Flatman. Mrs England lived in Melbury with her husband Garth who worked in Yeovil. Garth had an early 1930's Morris Minor and when the river was flooded he could drive along the path and over the foot bridge. Mrs England moved to Osborne School and retired to Poyntington where I used to look after her car in the 1970's / 1980's. Mrs England died in 2010. To think that when I was 72 my first Primary School head teacher was still alive. Esme Flatman is another remarkable story. If my information is correct, somebody else told me this. Esme went to Melbury Osmond School as a 5 year old from her home up in Melbury Park, where her father was the gamekeeper. When she was 15 years old Esme left school but became the junior teachers' assistant and eventually the junior class teacher. Except for one term at Evershot School she remained at Melbury Osmond School from a 5 year old to when she retired. Esme was also the church organist and one of my early jobs was to pump the organ whilst Esme played. She also courted my uncle Richard House (Captain of the church bell ringers) for 40 years and all the rumours were that they were going to get married when Esme retired but unfortunately my uncle died as the result of a motor accident on that day. Memories of life at school are not that good. Heating in the winter was provided by large coke fires in the centre of each room with a protection rail around them. Toilets were outside on the left of the entrance gate. In the playground we had a large (12 ft sq.?) metal climbing frame which we could climb up and over etc. Unfortunately I became one of the statistics that led to the removal of these frames as on one occasion I ended up going to Yeovil Hospital with a broken leg. Opposite the Village Hall was a gate leading into the paddock between the hall and church. Just inside the gate on the right was the school garden where the more senior pupils would practice their gardening skills. Later on in the summer we used to go picking hips from the hedge rows in the recreation field, for the war time effort I suppose. I was one of the lucky ones who passed the 11 plus exam and went to Fosters Grammar School at Sherborne. The other Melbury pupils over 11 then went on to Evershot School but no transport provided. I believe, in our year 5 pupils passed the exam which must have been a good percentage for the size of the school. At Fosters I joined Tony Stenhouse (Geoff had already left Fosters School), John Petrie (An evacuee who lived in Melbury) my older brother Roy and John Harvey all from Melbury Osmond School.



School Fete 1940's



Photograph 1953

Back row (l to r): ?, ?, ?, Valerie Wood?, Don Portch, ?, ?, Malcolm Wood, Penny Bennett, Glenda Burbidge, Jennifer English, Diana Broomhall, Janet Peach, Marjorie (Veronica) English, ?, John House?, Maureen Mitchell.
 Third row (l to r): ?, ?, Jane Bennett, Sally Tindale, Ray Burbidge, Steve House, Barbara Diment?, Audrey Burbidge, Rodney Gough, Terry Portch, Bob Peach, Nancy Wood, Brenda Portch, ?.
 Second row (l to r): David Mitchell, ?, ?, Trudy Burbidge?, Pauline Burbidge?, Tessa Yeatman, Christopher Wood, Pat Portch, Jean House, Keith Dodge.
 Front row (l to r): Rodney Yeatman?, Wendy Puckett, Trevor English, ?, ?, Jimmy White?, Betty Wood, Jean Paulley, ?, ?, Sheila Puckett, Hazel Puckett.



School Photograph 1961

Teachers: Mr Dewey (1960-1976) Esme Flatman (1930-1976)

Back row (l to r): ?, ? Praille, Pauline Bowditch, Sheila Bowditch, Gary Mitchell, Jonathan Munn, ?, Jimmy Robinson, Nicholas Cull, Michael Humphreys, Paul Wilson, Nicholas Glazier, Martin Eastment, Matthew Williams.
Middle row (l to r): Dinah Glazier, Pamela Munn, Haydon Wood, Andrea Mitchell, Linda Gough, Judy Eastment, Andrew Smith, Janice Collins, Susan Wilson, Peter Ebsworth, Carol Robinson, Sarah Stenhouse, ?
Front row (l to r): John House, Peter Praille, Susan Praille, Martin Smith, Caroline Cull, Jane Hallett, ? Wilson, David Bowditch, Joanne Williams, ?, Hilary Anderson.



Football Team circa 1967



School Sports 1970 with Rev'd Watling awarding the prizes



School Sports 1971 or 1972

Memories from Attendees at Melbury Osmond School Reunion 2nd August 2011

Miss Rintoul sitting on a high stool/seat to teach us. We called her "Governess". **Muriel Williams (nee Burbidge) (1933-1939).**

Learning to write on a sand tray. Miss Flatman warming our bottles of milk on the little coke stove (the only heat in the room) and taking us outside for lessons and nature walks in the summer. Daily chanting of our "Times Tables" and Mrs England's spelling and mental arithmetic tests. Miss Bowering (1944). Discipline and respect. **Gladys Paulley (nee Gurl) (1940-1951).**

Growing candytuft in the school garden which was part of the allotments opposite the school and the Recreation Ground. **Jacky Stenhouse (nee Bennett) (1943-1946).**

Sitting under the hedge in the Rec doing cross stitch in the summer. Falling off the climbing frame and knocking myself out. **Rosemary Saunders (nee Bennett) (1946-1952).**

Most of my memories are based around playtime which must say something! I remember Mr Bennett (1952-1959) as the "Big Room" teacher and headmaster who seemed quite strict and stern. My main memory of the "Big Room" was having to learn our maths tables by rote and having a huge chart displayed on the wall showing each individual child's progress, as well as the sheer horror of having to stand up in front of the whole class and recite them.

Playtime would go through phases, such as the marble phase; skipping (for the girls if not the boys) with one very large rope with one person at each end to turn/swing the rope whilst the rest took their turn running in/jumping over; ball games played against the wall to the right of the main school entrance; creating "hideouts" in the hedges on the Rec-one for the boys and one for the girls-we took "prisoners" and then had to be rescued by our friends, and, in the winter making giant snowballs.

School dinners in the Reading Room delivered by the green school bus in aluminium containers and served by the dinner lady, Mrs Broomhall; travelling to school in the shooting brake driven by Bill Sweet of Evershot; listening to special schools' programmes on the radio as part of our lessons; Thursday afternoon being devoted to games and a team ball game called "Shinto" which I hated. I feel privileged to have been educated at this small village school. **Jean Paulley (1952-1958).**

My first day at school Dad had to take me on the tractor – I had to be stopped from running off. **John Burbidge (1954-1959).**

Esme Flatman was not only my infant teacher but also my godmother through her long standing friendship with my uncle, Richard House. I do not remember the name of my first junior teacher but I do remember Mr Dewey who lived at Stavordale Cottage (as did the later head teachers).

Friday afternoon was board games and similar, and there were nature walks in the "Rec" led by Esme. Milk was warmed

on the big heaters in the main classroom where the juniors were. It was ghastly and I was glad to go to "big" school to avoid having to drink it. I do not remember homework except having to learn our tables. Lunch was taken in the Reading Room watched over by Mrs Broomhall. On Sports Day we were in colour groups and we did egg and spoon races and sack races, and I remember us playing cricket, all on the "Rec". There was PE in the Village Hall. There were new loos during my time. It was previously garden, as I remember one of the boys putting a gardening fork through his foot there.

My father, Charlie House, landlord of the Rest & Welcome, had the contract to take the outlying children (Stockwood and Warden Hill) to school and I could only have a lift if there was room as we lived within the elected walking distance. **Jean Card (nee House) (1953-1959).**

I remember winning a medal at school sports for the most points on the day (I still have it). Mrs Peach's toffee apples: gorgeous. Mr Dewey smacking my brother, Stephen, after repeatedly catching him stood up in the "little classroom" when Miss Flatman had gone home at lunchtime to feed her dogs. Mr Jackman, the supply teacher. Having reading time outside in the Rec in the summer and making daisy chains. Walking down to the church to decorate it for Easter. The Christmas party and choosing a present to the value of £1. **Sheila Davis (nee Bowditch) (1956-1963).** (Six Bowditch children attended the school between 1956 and 1976).

Class being taken in the Rec and nature walks with Miss Flatman. Always happy if I was chosen to help Mrs Peach clear up after lunch in the Reading Room. Looking forward to Easter with the Easter garden and after all these years, I come to see it and feel very emotional. **Pauline Davis (nee Bowditch) (1958-1964).**