

Earby of Long Ago
In the Building Boom Days
Roguish Children and Fine Chapel Choirs

(Written by John Hartley in Craven Herald 14th February 1936. Transcribed by Stephanie Carter)

I have been favoured (writes 'J H') with some recollections of Earby and the old Wesleyan Day School by two members of the staff 40 years ago (1896).

The first contribution is from Miss M E Teasdale, who is spending her retirement in her native town of Pickering, North Yorkshire.

Miss M E Teasdale

It was in October 1894 that I first set foot in Earby. I had obtained an appointment in the Wesleyan Day School, and as the postal address was then "Earby via Leeds", I was dismayed to find that Earby was 30 miles from the latter place. However, I arrived there, and had a right royal welcome.

I was struck at once by the friendliness of the Earby people, and they took me to their hearts at once.

Mr Lindley was the headmaster, and his assistants were Mr Levi Turner, Miss Maggie Greenwood and Miss Alice Whitehead of Carleton. Some time later Mr Turner and Miss Greenwood got fresh appointments, and Miss Whitehead went to Whitelands Training College, and I believe she had a distinguished career.

Perhaps you will smile, but I thought Earby was a very lively place, as it was simple packed with young people. I had come from a quiet, little market town in North Yorkshire, where there was little employment for young people, who had to go further afield to find work, whereas in this factory village the young folk could find work at home. At the Earby School I made my first acquaintance with half-timers. Half-timers at 11, and full-timers at 13! I can see some of their pale faces now, and I am thankful those days are gone. When I lived in Earby I lodged near a farm at the bottom of Langroyd Lane, and that lane was a perfect nightmare to me on dark nights, excepting when my landlady (Miss Sutcliffe) escorted me with her lantern.

The building boom was just beginning, and a sewage scheme was also in progress, so the roads were in a very bad state. I expect that was the reason why most people wore clogs. I had never seen nor heard of them before, and I wondered if I should ever get used to the noise of the children's clogs, but I did. Once, and only once, I was persuaded to try walking in my landlady's clogs – but never again!

This severe weather reminds me that we had a terrible snowstorm at the beginning of 1895, with frost and ice for at least six weeks. The reservoirs at Foulridge were frozen, and skating became a great pastime. The snowdrift was so bad in Langroyd Lane that we could not get through until a road was cut, and then we had a wall of snow on each side for weeks.

When I went to Earby another thing struck me – that was the unusual Christian names of the people. I remember one family where the children were all names after musicians – Handel, Haydn, Novello, Lloyd and Halle. Another family, their names were Haydn, Lloyd and Jenny Lind; and another, all males, were Jesse, Amos, Darius and Nathan. Then I did not know what was meant by Nat O'Bob's, or Fred o' Bessie's, or Jimmy o' Striker's until my landlady (dear old soul) explained.

What happy times we had at the chapel and Sunday School! I was astonished to find "grown-ups" attending the Sunday School. And what wonderful singing! I soon discovered that what Earby people didn't know about music wasn't worth knowing. They sang choruses from the great oratorios as easily as we at Pickering sang "God save the King". There were some tip-top concerts in those days, and the favourite artists were Edna Thornton, Charles Blagbro' and Dan Billington.

There was really some remarkable talent in Earby at that time (Mr W Hartley, Mr J Foulds, Mr H Currer Smith, Miss Clara Brown, Mrs W Lowcock etc.) and from what I see in the Craven Herald the reputation is still maintained.

How well I remember some of the leaders of the Wesleyan Church – Mr James Brown, Mr James Moorhouse, Mr Lindley (who besides being schoolmaster was the guide, philosopher and friend of all), Mr G P Hartley, Mr Harry Brown, Mr W Pawson, Mr Ralph Pawson, and many others. I think too of the Carlisle family; at least four of them were in the choir. And how well I remember Mr Smith Duxbury and his family! The congregational singing at that time was a real inspiration: I hope it continues to be so.

When I lived in Earby, the only places of worship were the Baptist Chapel, the Wesleyan Chapel and the Iron Church.

Some of my happiest days were spent in Earby. When I visited it last in 1931, I hardly recognised some of the streets. I wonder how many places of worship there are now? I hope they are well attended.

Miss Alice Whitehead

Miss Whitehead, who is engaged on special work in London, writes as follows:

Earby Wesleyan School! What a train of memories that phrase conjured up in my mind! My thoughts went whirling backwards through the years, and finally rested on an L-shaped building filled with rows of bright shining faces. As remembrance took me by the hand, memories came thick and fast, and the difficulty was to disentangle the far-away hours. So many things have happened since those days – so many lands I've wandered through – so many boys and girls and men and women of other lands, in such different corners of this world of ours, I've met and known since then.

But always, when one casts a backward glance at one piece of this varied yarn men call Life, some one thread dominates the whole design; some outstanding thought comes back from out the welter of impressions; and when I think of those Earby school days, I murmur "How happy we all were in our work, and how we all helped each other in our daily tasks". I have taught in many lands, amongst diverse races, but never again, in any school, have I felt such a sense of 'oneness' amongst staff and children.

And the children! The ones I remember best are the naughty ones. I gained my reputation as a teacher, on my capacity for turning mischief-makers into hard-working scholars. I had been a naughty child myself, and often been punished, when I ought to have been given more work to do, and I made up my mind when I was a teacher, that no child under my care should have the right to complain of unjust punishment. I don't remember any parent ever coming up to complain: if one did, I have forgotten.

But I haven't forgotten some of the naughty things done in those days. Even now, I can see one boy, with bright, defiant eyes, refusing to pick up a book he had thrown down in a temper. I made him stay till he did, long after 6pm. His mother was sensible enough to say nothing – I don't think mothers are half as sensible these days – and that boy never gave me any further trouble of any sort; he was one of my shining lights after that episode.

Another young monkey used to use his brains to make the rest of the class laugh. When I asked for the feminine of 'monk' he gravely answered 'monkey', and informed me solemnly that a 'hamlet' was a 'little ham'.

One summer holiday I spent in the infant department, returning once again for three weeks to take charge. After I had explained how tadpoles changed into frogs, one bright-eyed young hopeful asked with shining eyes "I say, teacher, do they mak 'em all like that?" One blue-eyed maiden of five summers, on being told the story of Jesus walking on the sea, asked in thoughtful tones "And didn't Jesus get witcherd (wet shod) one little bit?"

The class I remember best was one composed mainly of boys, who are now scattered far and wide. I have heard of them in many places doing their share of the world's work. They were amongst the best workers I ever turned out, and the best class I ever had for arithmetic and nature study.

My pleasantest recollection is, I think. Of a Saturday morning's outing. We had just formed a school football team, and I arranged that our boys should play Carleton. When I asked my mother if the boys could come to tea – 14 in all – she said "Yes, if you'll make it". You should have seen the way the slices of toast disappeared that winter's day, when those boys came in, tired, hungry and victorious from the football field! Whenever I came back, as I often did, in those years to recite at some of the 'At Homes', those boys always turned up to shake hands and clap for encores.

Memories like these come crowding around when I sit and think of Earby Wesleyan School. They were good days, full of hard work, friendly talk and joyous laughter, and what better gift can life offer than congenial work, mid laughter and the love of friends?

