

In living memory ...

Dinah Lee, schooling and teaching

Information Box:

Moving from my green-fielded little village school to secondary education in a large town outside of London was a shock to my system aged 11. *Ecce Romani* was the Latin text book I used in my modern bricks-and-mortar education, and *puella est romana* - meaning 'the girl is Roman' - stays with me, as well as the declination of the noun *baculum* - stick. For my fascination with plants and languages, knowledge of Latin has proved an invaluable aid.

During the Middle Ages, schools were established to teach Latin grammar, and for those working towards a practical occupation, apprenticeships were the main routes. It was the Church of England that was responsible for most education during the 19th century, with the Elementary Education Act 1880 enforcing compulsory attendance from 5 to 10 years of age. This was difficult for poorer families who relied on children for an extra wages.

In 1918, the education act commonly referred to as the "Fisher Act" increased the leaving age to 14. The age rose again to 15 in 1947, to 16 in 1973, to 17 in 2013, and most recently to 18 in 2015.

The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced the National Curriculum, league tables of performance statistics, and formula funding, which meant that the more children a school could attract, the more money it received.

During the 1997 General Election, the Labour party mantra was "Education, Education, Education" and, during their time in office, they set a maximum class size of 30 for 5 to 7 year olds.

Born in 1930 and a life-long resident of a small corner of Nidderdale, Dinah Lee attended local village schools in Lofthouse and Middlesmoor before going on to Ripon for further education and becoming a teacher herself. I spoke with Dinah about her life and about education 'Up Dale' at the end of the road north from Pateley Bridge.



“My childhood was spent in Stean,” Dinah tells me as we sit together in her home in Pateley Bridge, “- that’s where I was born and where I lived. I went to school initially at Lofthouse, then at Middlesmoor, and then I went to Ripon, the Girls’ High School.”

Stean, a handful of homes, is at the end of a narrow road, past the local attraction How Stean Gorge. During Dinah’s childhood it was a remote and isolated place. These days it is popular with walkers, there’s a café at the Gorge, a Post Office, commercial outdoor activities, and campsites.

“We owned the farm at Stean. It was still in the village but just maybe a field or so out. Mother kept hens and rabbits. We had a vegetable garden at the side of the house, and we grew potatoes. There was always a pig on the go, which they killed each year.”

Following her father’s death (a man who had arrived in Nidderdale by walking his entire farming stock over from Swaledale), Dinah’s family sold up and moved up the hill to Middlesmoor. The year was 1939, WWII was beginning, and stock prices were rock bottom.

“Mother and I moved to Middlesmoor, right bang in the middle of the village, and I went to Middlesmoor School after that.”

The school building still stands, but these days it is used as a village hall.

“There were two classrooms,” Dinah continues. “The younger children were in the smaller one and the bigger ones were in the large one. But you see it was from five to fourteen in those days. Some of the boys were very big, and a bit rough. When I look back and think about her, the headmistress, Miss Ridley, she was very very stern, you daren’t hardly breathe, but she had to be. I mean these big boys, they would have soon been the boss of her if she hadn’t.

“Things were very isolated in those days - there were very little links with other schools. There weren’t many books. I remember we read the same book over and over again. The County supplied library books and they were in great big boxes. They would change periodically and we were allowed to choose one each week to take home. I loved those because you got a bit more variety. But by the time they changed them you’d read all those that were your age group.” Dinah smiles as she recalls her young days reading. “Yes. I’ve always enjoyed reading, and these big boxes full of books were a real treasure trove to me.

“There were two yards outside and the younger children played in the top one and the older children played in the bottom one. There were some steps outdoors and the toilets were out there. Girls at the top, boys at the bottom. There was a cold water tap in the porch, and coal fires in both classrooms.

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