

Most half-day holidays, however, were for much more cheering reasons. After the morning of the annual Scripture Examinations, the afternoon was always given as a holiday, probably more for the recovery of staff equilibrium than for the children's benefit. A confirmation service produced the same result, or an election day, when the school was the polling station. In the beginning the village was no doubt most pleased to receive such a fine building, and so all functions, from bazaar to concert; ploughing match feast to presentation of temperance awards, were all held in the school. Consequently the children were either given a holiday or sent home early. The dislocation did not end there, for if the men were late in coming in the morning to re-instate the furniture, lessons might not begin until 10, or 10.30.

As each red-letter day came along, it must have been viewed as the height of rejoicing, but with the whole hundred years to choose from, certain days stand out. In 1900 when Mr. Hurrell was organist at the wedding of Miss Coombe of Charlton, the children were allowed to participate by being presented each with a slice of cake and two oranges as a memento. (The kindness of Mr. & Mrs. Heal of Creech Heathfield ought to be mentioned in the same breath as 'oranges', as for several years about the turn of the century they gave one to each child after the Christmas prize-giving, and the tradition was carried on by Mr. T. Richards at the Christmas party until very recently). And there was that Village Fair of 1929 which lasted for two days (in aid of school funds be it said). And a free treat in 1904 when Mr. Sommerville of the paper-mill gave all the children "tickets entitling them to free admission to the bazaar and to refreshments on giving up their tickets". There was the day's holiday to mark Mr. Hurrell's 20th year (Queen Victoria's 60 years were marked only by a dedication service for the Diamond Jubilee clock !) Peace celebrations in 1919 included a whole week's holiday, and a babyshow, held in school (does the winning baby still reside in the village?) After the very properly sober "address on our late beloved Queen whose funeral takes place tomorrow" (1st February, 1901), we find the equally proper celebration of the Coronation in 1902 marked by a week's holiday.

The two royal weddings in 1922 and 1923 of Princess Mary and the Duke of York, prompted "the express wish of his

Majesty the King" that the school close for a holiday. But they paled into insignificance beside the full week's holiday awarded in 1935 for the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. On Jubilee Day itself, 6th May, "the school proceeded to church in procession with the other corporate bodies of the village. The special form of Thanksgiving Service was used. At 2 p.m. there were children's sports and the whole school took part, prizes provided by the Jubilee Celebration Committee. At 3.45 the children were given a sumptuous tea for which the vicar paid. The whole village was entertained to tea or to a buffet meal of which over 1,000 people partook. Each child up to the age of 15 was given a Jubilee mug. At 7 p.m. there was a Social, concert and children's party, followed at 9 p.m. by a dance for adults". When, some 8 months later, we read "His Gracious Majesty King George V passed away at 11.55 p.m. last night", we can be sure the children of Creech must have been aware of him as a very real person actually affecting their lives. The headmaster held "special prayers and the children chanted the Nunc Dimittis and the 23rd psalm". Next day, 22nd January, 1936, the children "listened to the broadcast of the Royal Proclamation of Edward VIII as King Emperor relayed from London". This seems to be the first recorded instance of the radio being used in school. No reference then is made to the subsequent abdication, or the accession and coronation of King George VI, but it is known that there were sports, a tea for the children, and each child received a Coronation mug.

Thus ends the account of all legitimate treats in these years, and we pass on to those illegally taken, though stolen days off were really not very frequent after the 19th Century was left behind. The majority of the children were very afraid to miss school, or be late. Although one girl, after being punished, ran home and never went back to school again ..... Indeed, the oft-repeated insertion of one manager would appear to hold good, on the whole. "Visited, and found all buisey at work", he says. And once "desoplin verry good" (unlike his spelling !) Club Days seem to have died out, after a final flurry at Thurloxton in 1912. Bridgwater St. Matthew's Fair can "seriously affect attendance" and the blackberry picking season in the 1920's produced "listlessness during school hours". There is a sad

little note in the register of evacuees in 1941, of an eleven year old, possibly driven by homesickness, playing truant and "running away from billet", with the consequence that he was "sent to hostel". But no truancy surely can have surpassed the furore created by a "highly strung child" who, one spring morning in 1931, took herself off to Taunton causing "Miss Sedwell to be despatched on her cycle to look for the child". Police were sent for. The reason for the girl's fear of coming to school was her having been threatened at home with dire punishments for picking sweets from a dung heap and eating them. There is a certain bewilderment about the head's additional note "She is also supposed to have eaten a snail, but I can get no actual proof of this."



However, the little girl's fear was founded, perhaps, on the traditional image of the schoolmaster and his cane, an image which does have a certain basis of fact. Henry Stingmore, one of our very early scholars, was aptly named, being one recorded recipient of this form of punishment. Mr. Hurrell's cane, very thick and highly polished, was reputedly a piece of an old ship - which piece we are left to surmise. He would poke the children with it during classes, no doubt lest they forget its existence. Offences too mild for this nautical memento were paid for by a caning with a ruler. Other punishments, almost a part of folklore, were actually in use and can be vouched for by former pupils today - the writing out 100 times 'I must not talk', missing lunch and play-time, staying in after school, standing at the door when late - the whole session, until it was time to go home; or - (was this really Creech, or some heroic P.O.W. camp?) - standing on a form with hands above head, often long after the remainder of class had gone home. Sometimes a child would be set work for a whole week - and then ignominiously ignored. Whichever one of these chastisements was deemed appropriate for the sin of carving one's name on one's desk, did indeed deter, for very few such initials are to be found.



Children, hopeful of avoiding correction, were careful to answer 'Yes, Sir' when their names (always surnames only) were called for register; they prepared their shoes well beforehand for the daily shoe inspection, or, failing that, they surreptitiously rubbed the toes against the backs of their stockings, fortunately black. They were solicitous

in avoiding a crossed nib in their wooden penholders, and took pains to ensure their writing adhered to the set model - thin up-strokes, thick down-strokes. Boys endeavoured to be furtive in their flicking of ink-soaked blotting paper pellets, and secretive in dipping of girl's plaits in the ink well. And they curried favour by emptying and washing the china inkpots every Friday night. Infants sharpened their slate pencils assiduously on the outside walls in the front of the school, and the marks may well be there still if one cares to search. And all, big and little, alike, took care to sit upright as expected, with hands behind backs. Tables were chanted, spellings said aloud, much use was made of the blackboard (the "chalk and talk" routine), and no talking was allowed in school time. (When speaking to the teacher, the children no doubt used their "best" speech, but in the playground lapsed into the more comfortable Somerset dialect; and again when they went home they would speak yet another language). We can imagine the joyous release that came at the end of each school session, and the daily race to be first boy to touch the bell rope at mid-day, so earning the right to ring the bell after lunch.

A fearsome incident, prominent because such scenes are very rare indeed in our school's history, occurred in 1918, jolting Mr. Hurrell into unaccustomedly vivid prose. A 12-year old boy "ordered to stand in corner of class, refused to obey, took up a fighting attitude, and using fearful language, sprang at me, tore away my spectacles, and I had great difficulty in mastering him." The consequence was he was sent to an "industrial school" by Magistrates Court. The report is signed as correct, appropriately enough, by Capt. Wildeblood. Such a happening does indeed stand out when the usual comments of inspectors and other visitors were in the vein of "the children behave nicely and appear to be on good terms with their teacher" (1917); "Kindly and effective discipline (1918); "happy with their teacher" (1921).

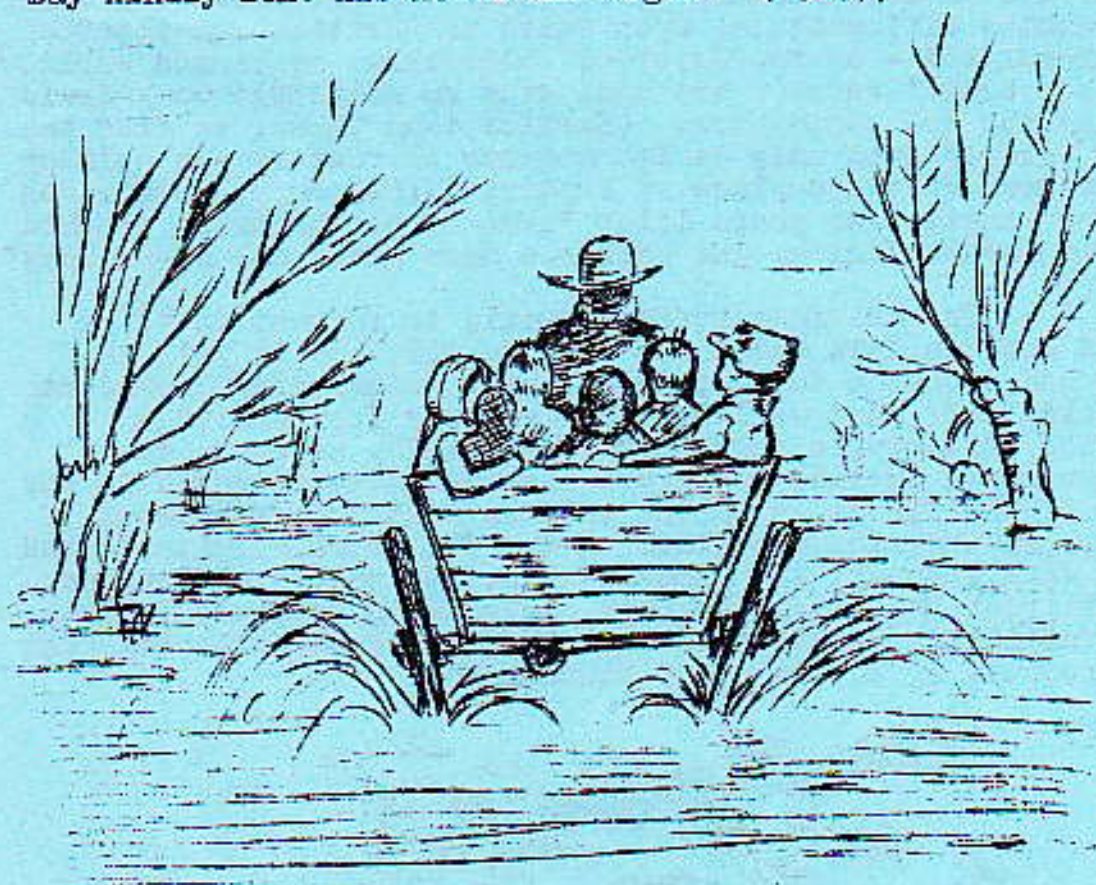
What else was there to disturb the even tenor of life in Creech? The weather, we must admit; those regular disruptive floodings. "The inability of children to attend in consequence of floods, is one of the greatest drawbacks here and must seriously affect their advancement". Thus pronounced Mr. Barrett soon after his arrival, and he

spoke for all teachers before him, and a great many after him. In fact as recently as 6th December, 1972, we find "Floods rose rapidly today and the road to Ruishton was blocked. Children were sent home early and the coaches taking children to Ruishton had to go via Walford Cross". And this despite the new cut near the slaughterhouse.

"Owing to the hurricane of the previous night", wrote the visiting Diocesan Inspector in 1887, "The attendance was small". Perhaps the choice of word is rather heightened, but to the stricken villagers it may have seemed apt. Year after year, in any of the winter months, the roads to Ham and Ruishton would become impassable; very often Bull Street and Mill Row as well, and the roads at North End. At times the flooding would last for two months or so - albeit intermittently - a few days of flooding, a few days to clear, and so on. The water would rise very rapidly, and sometimes although the children had managed to reach school in the morning, they had to be sent home early in order to reach there before the roads became useless. An entry for November 1926 gives details concealing behind its straight-forward account what must have been a great to-ing and fro-ing of messages, of popping out to see the state of things, of hurried consultations between staff and managers. "This morning there has been a very heavy down-pour of rain. A number of children were away and a number arrived wet through to the skin. The children who were very wet were sent home at once. At 9.45 a.m. the floods began to rise rapidly and I had to send the children living in the flood areas, home. Mr. Hart of the New Inn drove the children through the rising water. There was nearly 2' of water at Lane End, and about 18" over the Ruishton Road, and the flood was rising rapidly."

As we see then, private enterprise sometimes got the children home through the floods, as also when "Mr. J.

Day kindly lent his horse and wagon" (1903),



and as when the children sailed home to Ham by boat in 1910..  
... in 1904 we find the County Council's offer "to fetch and  
take home in carts the children who would otherwise be kept  
away by the flooded state of the roads", but it was an offer  
that soon petered out, it would seem.

So, such exigencies brought the teachers in 1923  
to the idea of holding a Whist Drive to raise money to buy  
18 pairs of shoes and 8 pairs of stockings (a puzzling  
discrepancy) then "those who came with wet stockings and boots  
were provided with the dry ones kept at school". Thus were  
avoided closures such as that in March 1909 when, after a  
snowstorm "so many had such wet feet that I decided to send  
all home and abandon school for today".

The British climate may well be the cause of those qualities of companionable fortitude, and determination under increasing difficulties, upon which the British are so often congratulated - by the British. Certainly, as hinted earlier, the log books' entries are made with an admirable sang-froid during the Two World Wars. (Earlier than these, we find the Boer War recorded only in its moments of victory - a holiday "in honour of the capture of Pretoria" (6th June, 1900), and almost exactly two years later "news of peace having reached us from South Africa, the children were given a half-holiday").

The briefest reference only to the war is to be found between 1914 and 1916; we are told how in 1915 the head had occasion to display a poster "concerning dependants of soldiers"; and we learn that one boy leaves with a special war-service certificate. In 1916, however, the larger world outside is twice allowed a tiny foothold in the life of the school, when the infants send "contributions of eggs, gooseberries and flour to the Red Cross Hospital", and when Jack Cornwall is honoured after the Battle of Jutland. A full year goes by, with only one passing reference, until the intriguing business of the horse chestnut collection "at the request of the Board of Education".

