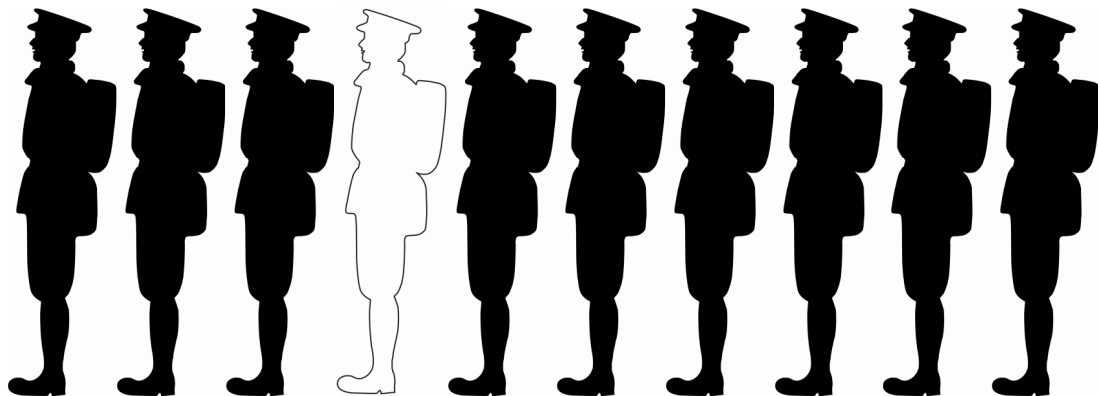


The Great War
Our Community Commemorated
Education



Booklet 10: Cath Cameron



Holmes Chapel and District U3A Local History Group

This booklet, tenth in a series about the effect of the First World War on Holmes Chapel, describes the effects on Education.

The chapters are titled:

- Education before the War
- What was school like then?
- The War Effort
- School Visitors from the Armed Forces
- Teaching Staff
- Attendance
- Sickness and Health
- Newcomers
- Sunday Schools
- Conclusions

The photograph on the Front Cover is of Group 2 in front of Cranage School taken in early 20th century.

EDUCATION IN HOLMES CHAPEL

1 Education before the War

Before the First World War, children from Holmes Chapel generally attended either Holmes Chapel Mixed School or Cranage Mixed School. A few children were educated privately by Miss Kendall, who had been the church organist for 26 years. In the South Cheshire Suburban Directory of 1913 for Holmes Chapel, Miss Susan Kendall is noted as living at the Ladies' School, Beech House, The Village (the tall building opposite St Luke's Church doors). Holmes Chapel School (the site of St Margaret Ward RC Church) was situated on Macclesfield Road and consisted originally of two storeys. Cranage School was situated on the Knutsford Road (opposite the Old Vicarage Hotel) and is currently a commercial property.



Picture 1 - Holmes Chapel School on Macclesfield Road



Picture 2 - Cranage School

The three churches in the village; the Parish Church, the Wesleyan Chapel and the United Methodist Chapel all held Sunday Schools with special events and outings.

From annual reports in August 1903 it was recorded that “both schools were doing very well. Holmes Chapel school received a grant for 83 pupils and Cranage school a grant for 87 pupils.” By 1905 there were 104 children on roll at Cranage School. In 1909 Cranage School was extended – an old cottage attached to the school was demolished to make way for a new classroom.

From the Parish magazines, and Head teachers’ log books it would appear that school routines and activities were organised on a regular basis, for example “on 24th May 1911, both Holmes Chapel and Cranage schools were involved in Empire Day celebrations, when patriotic songs were sung, and the children were addressed by General Sir Henry Dixon. Many festivities took place on this day, ending with

dancing in the evening.” In January 1913, at Cranage School, “Mrs Carver presented prizes for conduct, punctuality and attendance to Older Scholars and Infants.” However, in November 1913 at Holmes Chapel, “many of the children were late on the afternoon of 17th on account of the Hunt being in the fields around the school”. Also, on 3rd May 1916 – the Circus was in the village, and the school closed early.



Picture 3
Holmes Chapel School.

St Margaret Ward Catholic Church was built on the site.

2 What was School like then?

The classroom

During World War One, school children may have sat at a long wooden bench with a desk fixed in front. The seat was a hard narrow plank and benches were usually made for two people, but sometimes up to five children sat at one. Children of different ages sat together in lessons. Often there were as many as sixty children in one class. If the school was large, boys and girls would be taught separately.

At the front would be a big wooden blackboard on a stand, on which the teacher wrote using chalk. The teacher's desk was often raised on a platform and teachers sat on tall chairs so they could watch the children at their desks. Near to the teacher's desk would be an iron stove, with a coal fire during the winter. The fires were often small, and in winter, children at the back shivered their way through classes.



**Picture 4 - A classroom in Holmes Chapel School.
Note the type of desks, and the posters on the walls**

School Dinners

After a law was passed in 1906, schools were allowed to serve a school dinner every day for the children to eat in their classroom. Dinners were solid and stodgy. Children might get pea soup and bread baked in dripping, followed by fruit pudding. For the poorest children, it was the only daily meal they had. Some schools in very needy areas also served breakfast: cocoa, porridge and bread & butter.

However in both Holmes Chapel and Cranage Schools, children still went home for lunch during the War.

Equipment

A classroom during World War One was bare and simple. There were just a few books, as most learning was done straight from the blackboard. There was no carpet. On the walls there might just be a map of the world, showing the British Empire shaded in pink or red; and portraits of the King George V and Queen Mary. Pupils learning to write used a slate with a piece of chalk – the two together often making a very squeaky noise. Children spat on the slate to clean it and to rub out any mistakes they had made. Older children wrote in exercise books known as “Copybooks”. They used wooden pens with metal nibs which they dipped again and again into inkwells made of china. It must have been very tricky to write neat joined up handwriting without making smudges or blots.

Lessons

At school children learned reading, spelling, handwriting, arithmetic, history and geography. The teacher wrote the lesson on the blackboard and the children were expected to copy it down and then memorise it. Children who made mistakes in their copying or chanting earned strict punishments. Pupils had PE lessons known as “drill” where girls and boys marched on the spot and did simple stretches. To build up their strength, they swung large wooden clubs and in some

schools boys were also given boxing lessons. In the afternoons, some schools taught crafts or trades that would be useful in later life. For example, boys would learn carpentry and girls learned how to sew, knit, cook and how to use a flat iron. At some schools boys and girls were also taught gardening.

Sunday School

It was compulsory for all children to attend school from Monday to Friday. On Sundays, each church also ran lessons for an hour or two, but these were not compulsory – but parents were often keen to have a couple of hours on their own. At Sunday School, children sang hymns, or listened to Bible stories. Sometimes they had an outing such as a picnic, or a walk in the countryside. Prizes were often awarded annually for attendance, behaviour, conduct etc.

Teachers

Teachers were formal and stern. They punished bad behaviour very strictly. Children often sat in silence for their lessons, with their hands behind their backs to keep them out of mischief. If someone made a mistake or forgot a lesson, they might be made to wear a tall, cone-shaped hat made of paper with a large letter D written on it, which stood for “Dunce” – a stupid person. If children were lazy or rude or broke other school rules, the teacher might hit them on the hand with a wooden cane. Pupils who behaved well were rewarded with special classroom jobs and were called “Monitors” – these included the Ink Monitor who had the job of topping up the ink-wells from a big bottle of black ink; the Blackboard Monitor who had the job of cleaning the blackboard with a duster; and a Bell Ringer who would go round the classrooms ringing a hand bell to indicate the end of lessons and the start of playtime or the midday meal or going home.

Female teachers were not normally allowed to teach once they had married. Although this rule was relaxed during the War.

School Life

The Law said that children had to stay at school until they were at least 12 years old. After that children from poor families had to leave and go out to work. The school leaving age was raised in 1918, the last year of the war to 14. Some children did go on to secondary School, either in Sandbach or Crewe.

In August 1916, two boys from Holmes Chapel School Francis Lee and Hubert Street succeeded in winning scholarships to Sandbach Grammar School.

Play Time

One of the few things that we would be familiar with today is the occasional “rough and tumble” of the play ground, as can be seen from the entry in the Holmes Chapel School Log on 12th January 1917:

“Accident to Edith Bailey

10:50 am in the playground. Mabel Royle, May Veneables and Joyce Lea were playing a game of “tick and hit”; so were Edith Bailey, the injured girl, and Isabel Street. May Venables was chasing Mabel Royle, when Edith Bailey who was running away from Isabel Street, collided with Mabel Royle. Edith fell very awkwardly in the middle of the playground. Miss Pimlott carried her in, her right limb was put into a temporary splint and Dr Picton was summoned. He found the right shin bone to be broken. “

3 The War Effort

In the early stages of the War, it would appear that the girls at Cranage school were quickly involved in helping the war effort with their sewing skills: On “4th September 1914 – During the needlework lessons the girls are already sewing for the Red Cross Society”. The Parish Magazine reported that “In response to an appeal by a nurse working with the British Field Hospital at Furness, the children had collected a parcel of articles, despatched on 1st November, and had already collected another parcel ready for despatch. Such work illustrates the contribution to the war effort made by the school children of Holmes Chapel. The Parish Magazine recorded that on 19th December 1914, a Jumble Sale was held by Cranage & Holmes Chapel Schools to raise money for Queen Mary’s Work for Women Fund and for wool; to be purchased for children to make socks, belts, mufflers, etc for soldiers and sailors. £10 was raised altogether. £2 2s 0d went to the Queen’s Fund and the remainder went to buy wool. There was another Jumble Sale on 11th December 1915 at Holmes Chapel School to raise funds to send Christmas presents to all Holmes chapel men serving overseas.

The Holmes Chapel War Savings Association was formed on 10th July 1916 with the object of purchasing War Savings Certificates, and similar Associations were formed at both schools. In order to encourage school children to save their money and purchase certificates, Mr W Carver generously promised to pay the last shilling for every certificate purchased by the children. In other words, as soon as a child had saved 14s 6d, Mr Carver added the final 1s and the child was immediately able to buy a Certificate.

In December 1916 William Carver gave 21 shillings to Cranage School making a total of 45 shillings. The total of certificates bought by the School Association was 75.

On 9th March 1917, Holmes Chapel School was closed all day to celebrate the success of their Victory Loan week in connection with the Holmes Chapel War Savings Association and on 18th July, an “Open Day” was held at Holmes Chapel School to draw attention to Food Economy for 100 parents. An exhibition of work was presented which included songs, drill and dances. £1 12s 6d was collected on behalf of the British Prisoners of War Fund.

In March 1917, the Cranage School Savings Association reported that the current total was 160 Certificates purchased representing £124 14s 9d; and that Holmes Chapel School had purchased about 150.

4 School Visitors from the Armed Forces

As the war progressed the children were made constantly aware of the sacrifice former pupils were now making. On 3rd March 1916, it was recorded at Cranage School that the flag had been flown at half mast since Wednesday, when news had been received of the death of two more old scholars, Alfred Brown and Fred Street, who had died of wounds. A few months later in July, the news came of yet another old scholar, Alex Mottershead, who had died of wounds in France.

During 1916, several visitors came to Cranage School to explain their role in the war effort. In March, a naval officer from the Alcantara, sunk in the North Sea visited. In June Joseph Harrop, wounded at Gallipoli was also in attendance. Sometimes the Schools received good news. In July 1916, an old scholar of Cranage School, Percy Sankey received promotion for bravery and in October 1917 Herbert Bolshaw received the DFC.

In October 1916 James Billington, a former scholar who had emigrated to Canada, addressed the top classes on general farming operations in Ontario and Saskatchewan. He had been the first boy to have his name on the Medallists' Board in school. Sadly, in September 1917, news of his death was also received.

5 Teaching Staff

As early as November 1914 in Macclesfield, the Borough Education Committee was forced to resolve that “on account of so many Teachers entering the Army and Camps of Training ... the Committee views with grave concern the dearth of Male Teachers ... and the Board of Education be requested to allow Students in training to work on ‘supply’.”

Obviously there would have to be a difference in pay as demonstrated by two staff employed by Holmes Chapel School in October 1914. The Education Committee Minutes record that a Miss Bessie Preston, Temporary Assistant (Uncertified) was engaged to teach from the 1st October 1914 at a salary of 18 shillings per week whereas a Miss Florence Poole, a certified Temporary Assistant started teaching from 13th October 1914 at a weekly salary of 30 shillings per week.

In June 1915, Mrs A Hodgkinson, acting under medical advice resigned from the post of Headmistress which she had held for 10 years. On 5th June 1915, Mr Arthur Oakes BA (Lond.) was appointed as the new Head teacher (Grade A) of Holmes Chapel School at a salary of £120 per annum. He had formerly been the 1st Assistant Teacher at Sandbach Council Senior School. It is interesting that six months later he felt it necessary to record in the Head teacher’s log that “he had been absent on 7th December 1915 due to visiting the recruiting office in Wilmslow where he was examined and declared medically unfit owing to a deformed toe on the left foot and a goitre.”

Three months later on 10th March 1916, he also noted “The Head teacher left the school this morning at 9:20 am in response to a notification summoning him to re-present himself at the Recruiting Office in Crewe.” Also on 24th May 1917 – “The Head teacher was away today to appear before the Medical Board at Chester.” And again on 15th May 1918 – “The Head teacher was away all day having being

recalled for examination at Northwich.” The fact that he was examined four times over the duration of the War indicates either that the Examination Boards were becoming more and more desperate or that somebody in the village resented the fact that an apparently able-bodied man had not gone to the Front.

In fact Arthur Oakes left Holmes Chapel School on 30th April 1920 when he noted in the log “Finished duties as Head master of this school today. Good Luck to my successor.”

During the War, several teachers had to perform different roles, for example: in September 1916 the Head teacher of Holmes Chapel School recorded “To avoid the disorganisation that would have arisen through a member of the staff attending as nurse on an Official day at the Somerford Hospital, and the absence of children, an emergency half holiday was granted.” Also, “27th March 1918 – The School closed for the Easter vacation. But the following day, Thursday, the Teachers were engaged elsewhere to write out Meat Ration cards.”



Picture 5 - Group in front of Cranage School – taken before the First World War

6 Attendance

The gaps left by men serving at the Front were felt in other ways. In February 1915 the Board of Education for Cheshire enquired into the number of children “who would normally under the byelaws have been required to attend school, but owing to scarcity of labour and other circumstances connected with the war have been allowed to leave school for the purpose of entering employment.”

In July 1916 the managers of the Holmes Chapel and Cranage Schools decided to ask the Administration Subcommittee to allow them to alter the usual arrangements with regard to the Summer holidays. The proposal was to have two weeks holiday commencing on 28th July, and another two weeks at the end of September or beginning of October so that the children would be available for potato picking. By this arrangement it was hoped to avoid a good deal of interruption of school work which was caused the previous year, and it was considered advantageous from the farmer’s point of view. The managers stated “We fear this may interfere to some extent with the teacher’s holiday arrangements but we are glad to think that our teachers are quite ready to sacrifice their own enjoyment in order to comply with the suggestions of the managers”.

By May 1917 at Cranage School, attendance was becoming a problem:

“4th May 1917 – Attendance poor. Several children helping farmers.”

“18th May – Six children have applied for their attendances with a view to getting total exemption from school.”

“5th June – Several boys away with exemption certificates.”

Early October has always been the time to pick potatoes. As early as 20th September 1915, the Head teacher of Holmes Chapel School recorded that “He was informed that all boys over 13 years of age who wished to do so might help Mr Ellison, farmer, with potato getting. Four boys Albert Steele, Charles Thompson, Charles Dakin and William Sant received permission.” On 1st October 1917, at both Holmes

Chapel and Cranage Schools a decision was made to close the schools for a week on account of the numerous applications from farmers for boys for potato picking. When the schools were reopened on 8th October it was noted that the attendance was “far from satisfactory”. And as late as 15th November 1917 it was recorded at Cranage School that several children were still away working on the farms.

On 24 July 1918, R.H. Carr of the Ministry of Food wrote to the Secretary of the Board of Education that “owing to the comparative failure of the Country’s fruit crop ... it is a matter of extreme difficulty to provide enough Jam to meet the requirements of the Forces and the civilian population ... the systematic collection of Blackberries throughout the country has become a matter of paramount importance.” He was asking for children to become involved and was offering the “substantial remuneration” of 1d per pound; and for children to be released from school to take part, but not for more than three half-days.

By September 1918, the Schools had become involved in the Blackberry Scheme, which had been introduced to them by Mr W Draper. It would appear that both schools were not keen to show their low attendance figures, so they were either closed or the registers simply not taken:

“12th September – This afternoon the School was organised for a Blackberry Picking Expedition. Some 40 pounds of fruit were gathered. Registers were not marked.”

“20th September – The School was ‘closed’ this afternoon for a Blackberry ramble. The younger children were retained in school. Some 60 pounds of fruit were gathered.”

“27th September – This afternoon the registers were not marked, the older scholars having gone blackberry picking.”

Other experiments were tried at times to help the War effort. For example on 14th November 1916, Holmes Chapel School only opened at 1:15pm and closed at 3:45pm for a week to try and save on coal and lamp oil.

7 Sickness and Health

During the early part of the twentieth century children were very susceptible to infectious diseases and epidemics were prevalent at certain times of the year, and the war years were no exception in Holmes Chapel. Holmes Chapel School recorded that “during the whole of 1914 infectious complaints have seriously affected the attendance”. For three months in 1916, February – April, there was a serious outbreak of whooping cough which culminated in the closure of Holmes Chapel School by the authorities. The Head teacher wrote:

“17th February 1916 – There are now 10 children away through whooping cough. The attendance for the last two days has only been 99 out of 123.”

“20th March – I have scheduled four more children on account of one of the family’s suffering from whooping cough.”

“22nd March – An official called today bringing material for the disinfection of the school on Saturday next. At 1:38 pm a notice was received dated 18th March from the correspondent ordering closure for whooping cough. I immediately dismissed the children, cancelled the attendances already recorded in the Register for this afternoon, informed the caretaker of her duties and made further arrangements about the disinfection of the school.”

“10th April – Reopened the school this morning. There are still 11 children away with whooping cough.”

The school was also closed down for a whole month in June 1918 because of whooping cough.

In September 1917 and January 1918 there were outbreaks of Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria amongst the children. Dr C H Bennett, the District Medical Officer of Health visited the school on 25 September 1917 to discuss the serious situation. He noted that “only 70% of the scholars were present that day due to illness.”

It is a common misconception that Spanish Flu arrived after the end of the War. In fact, Spanish Flu arrived in Holmes Chapel on 10th October 1918 when 10 cases were reported that day at Cranage School. A week later the number had risen to 33! At Holmes Chapel school by 17th October, “the attendance was only 58% of the numbers on the roll”.

Even Mr Oakes the Headmaster succumbed to the disease (described as triple pneumonia in his case), but fortunately survived and returned to his duties on 16th December. The Medical Officer authorised the closure of both village schools until 18th November 1918 – hence the reason for no record of celebrations for the end of the War. Clearly a real crisis.

8 Newcomers

The arrival of Belgian refugees in the village would have been a momentous event for the children. On the 11th December 1914 at Holmes Chapel Mixed School it was recorded that “there are now three Belgian children attending school”, and the children from the Upper Standards at Cranage School heard a lantern lecture on “The War and Belgium”.

Strangers were still an unusual sight in the village by June 1915 when it was recorded at Holmes Chapel Mixed School that, “Mr Aston visited to enquire into the rumours which have arisen owing to the presence of Chinese in Holmes Chapel. Three children attend the school and the eldest was questioned as closely as possible by Mr Aston who finally decided to make enquires at the College.” Presumably they were children of students at the Agricultural College.

9 Sunday Schools

Although all three churches in the village held Sunday Schools, there is very little information available concerning the Wesleyan and United Methodist Chapel's Sunday School arrangements, other than that a Club met in the Wesleyan Sunday Schoolroom. Fortunately, with the preservation of the Parish Magazines there is a wealth of information about St. Luke's Church Sunday School. It was well attended by both boys and girls. In February 1915 there were five classes with 70 children in total on the register – 31 girls and 39 boys. Prizes were distributed for special attendance by Mrs Hulme. Among those receiving prizes were Ida Street, Walter Street, Hilda Street, Clifford Sankey, Herbert Hathway, Willy McDowell and Stanley McDowell.

By February 1916 it was noted in the Parish magazine that there was a shortage of Sunday School teachers as a number of them had volunteered as VAD Nurses at Somerford Hospital. In August 1916 the Sunday School celebrated their anniversary with a children's service in the afternoon at church, and children brought gifts of vegetables, eggs and fruit for Somerford Hospital. Afterwards, the Vicar received a letter of thanks from Lady Shakerley thanking them on behalf of the soldiers at the Hospital for their "most acceptable gifts".

This was repeated again in September 1917, and Lady Shakerley wrote the following letter of thanks:

"St John Auxiliary Military Hospital,
Somerford Park.

September 19th

Dear Mr Armitstead,

Will you please thank all your kind people, who sent us such a splendid supply of fruit vegetables and eggs on Sunday September 9th. All the good things were most gratefully appreciated by the patients, and not less so by the Quartermaster, who finds house keeping anything but a joke in these war days.

I sometimes wonder if Holmes Chapel realises what a help their weekly gifts are; noting comes amiss and everything is useful and used.

With very many thanks,

Yours gratefully,

Hilda Shakerley.

(The Vicar also thanked Mrs Picton for taking the produce over to Somerford Hall. Had it not been for her, he did not know how they would have arranged to transport the produce there.)”

Occasionally, lessons and outings had to be cancelled or postponed due to illness. In January 1918 the Annual Sunday School Tea Party had to be postponed for three week due to Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria, until 26th January. Mr W Hocknell was thanked for providing milk and butter for the party. As were Mrs Street, Mrs Merrill, Mrs Bracegirdle, Mrs Wharton and Mrs Dewson for cutting up the bread and butter.

10 Conclusions

The children of Holmes Chapel and Cranage, like the adults, helped significantly in the War effort. They had to adapt quickly to changes both at school and also at home, where often their father or older brother had “gone off to war”. There was an increase in bad behaviour of some boys whose fathers were absent.

In general, the children were keen to help in practical ways with the girls busy knitting and sewing, and the older boys helping out on the local farms. Schools were closed from time to time due to infectious diseases; shortage of coal and lamp oil; and for absences of staff. However keen the children were to help, there was always that reminder of the sad realities of war, with news of fatalities, missing men and the injuries of former pupils being announced at school, with the worry and expectation that their fathers or brothers might be soon amongst them.

Sources

- Holmes Chapel School Log Book
- Holmes Chapel School Admission Log
- Cranage School Log Book
- Holmes Chapel Parish Magazines 1914 – 1918
- Grant, Peter Russell (2012). Mobilizing charity: non uniformed voluntary action during the First World War. (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, City University London) p178

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This is one of a series of booklets produced by the Holmes Chapel U3A Local History Group describing different aspects of life in Holmes Chapel before and during the First World War. The full list is as follows:

1. Holmes Chapel before the War
2. Village People 1914 – 1918
3. The Men Who Went to War
4. Refugees come to the village
5. Beating the Drum – Recruitment and Communication
6. The Community Response
7. Feeding the People
8. Rationing During the War
9. Rules and Regulations
10. Education
11. Life Goes On

For copies of booklets see web site
www.holmeschapelhistory.co.uk

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WW1 and Holmes Chapel District

In 2011 a local branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A) was set up in the village and one of the activities under its umbrella was a local history group. This attracted people who had been involved in research in the past as well as some new volunteers eager to learn more. After an initial period of encouragement and training for the newcomers it was decided that the group would work together on a topic - The Story of Holmes Chapel and district during the First World War.

What you hold in your hands is one in a series of booklets describing different aspects of life in Holmes Chapel and district before and during the First World War. A full list of the booklets is given on the inside of this back cover.

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