

Looking back at classrooms and lessons in times past

Fred Knipe was born in 1911 and interviewed in 1990

I came to Central School at Kendal as a teacher in August 1932 when they were just getting over the re-organisation of the education system. Things never stand still in the world of education – they are always making changes.

Central School was opened in 1819 as a National School, built by public subscription. It was built in three parts, the first as the National School for boys and that was really only one big room. The girl's part was not added to the main building until 1824-25. They have made it into flats now (1990)

It was a transitional period as far as books were concerned. There were very few specifically written for juniors or infants so as far as reading books were concerned there was a system that, at the beginning of term you went down to the public library and, in the basement, there were very large boxes and in those boxes would be forty books, all of one sort with a whole lot of stories in them.

For your particular class you could choose two boxes that you thought would be suitable. At the end of term they went back and for the next term you went to the library and chose another two sets of books so that during the year they had six different reading books.

You spent an awful lot of time on adding up, taking away, multiplying and dividing in number, money, length, capacity and weight. A lot of this would be thought of as very unproductive today. You are allowed to do it on a calculator now-a-days. I don't think the basic intelligence of children has changed over the years but they got a solid grounding in numbers.

Arithmetic was mostly done by rote. They could multiply 13×13 which is 149 as you know. I was in a shop the other day. I wanted six new buttons for a pullover. They were 16 pence each. I gave the lady a pound coin and she said: "I'll have to get my calculator!" I said you've no need - 6 at 16p each is 96p; give me fourpence change. She was astonished "How did you know that?" "It's just natural" I said.

A typical day for the pupils started with morning assembly – two hymns, a prayer and a reading from the bible. After assembly was registration and then there was a half-hour of scripture.

Then up to playtime you did arithmetic. Playtime was 11.40am to 11.55am and the rest of the time to midday the children did physical exercises – arms, dorsal, trunk and leg exercises, waving your arms and legs about. There was English before dinner as well – reading such stories as 'The Water Babies.' Most of that was taken up with formal education.

Then, in the afternoon, there was some history, some geography, maybe a nature walk and a games lesson. Girls had sewing and knitting while the boys did handicraft. I did a lot of book binding with them and art was mainly crayons at that time. We also used to do potato prints for books.

The morning session finished at noon and the afternoon started at 1.30pm finishing at 4.00pm, the infants at 3.20pm.

Before the war all the children went home for dinner. Later on we were lucky enough to rent the Fellside Sunday School to provide a meal (for some the only meal) of the day. At one time I was feeding nearly 320 children in two sittings. Most of the children came from Fellside.

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