

BILL HUDSON – Interviewed by his granddaughter for Park Lane School's 150th Anniversary, in 1999

Bill was born at his grandparents' home at 'Brooks End' on 30th March 1905 and baptised William John Hudson in All Saints Church, Birchington on 28th May 1905 by the Curate, the Revd. A. C. J. Pace. His parents' names were William and Edith and his father is listed as 'labourer' in the Baptism Register. William Snr. was a bricklayer by trade, but had to do military service during the 1st World War.

Bill said he and his family moved to Mill Row when he was just a few months old. It was from here that he started school when he was five years old in 1909. The Infant School was in Albion Road at the time. Mrs Gray, the owner of Birchington Hall, had bought the redundant Primitive Methodist Chapel building in Albion Road in 1892 and then rented it out to the community at a peppercorn rent. Initially, the children did not attend Park Lane School until they were seven years old, but after the arrival of the railway in 1863, the numbers of children under seven made it imperative that they began to receive education. There was not enough room up in Park Lane, so when the Primitive Methodist Chapel became available, it was put to this use. Bill remained there until he was seven, in 1912, when he was moved up to the Park Lane School. He seemed to think that he took sandwiches for his lunch each day (school dinners were not introduced until part way through the 2nd World War) as the walk home at lunchtime was too far.

He said that the Girls' and Boys' Schools were separate buildings and he thought that his Boys' part had three classes. The youngest class was taken by Miss Bartlett. (I wonder whether she any connection with 'Bartlett's Cottages' which used to stand in Albion Road, next door to the Primitive Chapel.) The next class (called Standard III and VI) was taken by Mr Stephens. He was there in about 1914, and he was still there in 1940, when Bill's daughter was evacuated during the 2nd World War. The top class was taken by the Headmaster, Mr Laming and the boys from his class were sometimes used as monitors to help teach the younger classes in subjects they themselves were good at. Bill was sometimes asked to help with 'figures' or 'sums'. (He insisted it was not called 'Maths' in his day!)

Another subject they had once a week was woodwork. Bill's Father wanted him to take up woodwork when he left school, but the subject he most enjoyed was 'figures'. (This was probably why he was happy in

later life to do the milk rounds-man's job, which entails some very accurate book-keeping!) If children didn't behave at school they received a stroke across their hands with the cane. (Bill said he had received this a few times!) If they were really naughty, they were caned across their behinds by the Headmaster.

The school day began at nine o'clock with Assembly, when all the doors of the classrooms were opened up. (There was no real 'hall' in the accepted sense of the word. Possibly, there were folding partitions between at least two of the rooms, as this was a very common way of making an improvised hall.) Bill spoke of the Headmaster playing the 'organ' for a hymn each day. This may have been a pedal driven harmonium, but he may have meant a piano. Bill said that all the boys were called by their surnames and that they addressed their teachers as 'Sir' or 'Miss'. When asked about homework, he was quite sure they did not have any official homework, but was sure he had done some voluntarily. The school day ended at 4 pm.

His memory of holidays was that there were only three during the year, all quite short. He spoke of August Bank Holiday - including the first weekend in the month, (not the last, as it is now) Christmas, Easter and Whitsun ('seven weeks after Easter'). (This adds up to four in my reckoning, but Whitsun was probably only one day.)

He remembered that in winter the school was heated by a coke stove in Mr Stephen's room, and open fires in Miss Bartlett's and Mr Laming's rooms. One of the boys was given the job of 'coke monitor' to keep the stove fed with fuel during the school day. His memory of clothes was definitely not a school uniform. He thought he wore knickerbockers, which ended just below the knee, with a strap. There are photos of boys dressed like this in the archives. They also all wore caps. Bill recalled that on one occasion he was awarded a medal for making a whole year's perfect attendance. This was quite an achievement, when childhood ailments were frequent and often severe.

Bill was quite sure they did not have 'P. E.' but if he been asked whether they had 'drill' this might have changed his reply. Many school children were doing 'drill' by this period - usually outside in a freezing playground! When asked about 'play-time' he said they had a break at 10 am. One of the games he remembered was called 'dropsy'. The children used to collect cigarette cards and they would stand by a wall and drop a card, then the next person had to stand in the same place and drop one of their cards. If the second card covered the first, he 'won' the card. Bill

said that he had enjoyed his schooldays. Another thing Bill remembered from his childhood were the metal hoops, which the children used to bowl along the rutted roads. This took a lot of skill to control and keep up with them!

He and his family stayed in Mill Row until the latter end of the 1st World War – about 1917, when Bill would have been 12. They then moved across the field to Canterbury Road, into one of Park Villas. These are two large, balconied houses facing across Canterbury Road towards Mill Row. His family was not there long, because his Mother and Father split up. He went back down to Brooksend to live with his Grandparents. He left school when he was 13, in 1919, and worked on the farm with his Grandfather for a couple of years. All the farm work was done by horses at this time and the work was very hard. He then saw an advert for helping on a milk round in Birchington, so he applied for and got the job. There is a lovely photograph of him beside his milk truck, standing outside the steps that led to Uncle Tom's Cabin, at the Bay Hotel.

His next job was with the building trade as a bricklayer. He commented that he had had a huge number of different jobs in his lifetime. Apart from his jobs of farm work, milkman and bricklaying, he also worked on the railway at one point, when he joined his uncle's 'gang' of workmen. Then, during the 2nd World War, he was in the Auxiliary Fire Service. After the war, he went to work in the paint spraying shop at the Central Garage. It was from this job that he eventually retired.

Bill died in the latter end of 1999 at 95 years old.