

## **Pupils of the Past talk to Pupils of the Present**

### **Mrs Lea – interviewed by Shirley and Helen Barrett**

Mrs. Lea attended St. Matthew's National School during the years 1909 to 1921. It was situated on the Irishtown Road beside Dodder Terrace. This building is now A.J. McMann and Company, and is now called St. Matthew's House. There were 3 classrooms with one large room and two small ones opening off it. There were entrances at either end of the large room. Each room had a porch with a coat rack for coats and hats. The other porch had 3 basins with cold water taps. The school was only a girls school except for the infants which was mixed.

The head mistress was Miss Margaret Walker and Jessie Pepper and Miss Davis were here assistants. They couldn't have been too old because Miss Pepper was still teaching when Mrs. Lea's daughter went to school. Miss Davis was the strictest, but she died when Mrs. Lea was still in school. After Miss Davis died they got two new teachers, Miss Brown and Miss Florrie Walsh. They taught the infants. Sometimes on the attendance board there were up to 200 pupils and most of these were infants.

Mrs. Lea said that the teachers were no stricter than her parents. The punishment for being naughty was to be hit on the hand with a cane or a printer. This was usually for doing messy work. They were really too scared of their elders to misbehave. School started at 9.30 and ended at 2 o'clock for infants and 4 o'clock for the older children, with a lunch break from 12 to 1 o'clock. The summer holidays were 5 weeks beginning in July and ending sometimes in August.

In the classroom there were large desks fitting 2 pupils. The older pupils worked with Miss Walker and they sat in long desks. Pupils from the same class were not allowed sit beside each other in case they copied work. There was a cooker in this same room. Sixth class had cookery lessons.

Everyday opened with hymns conducted by the head mistress. In school they were taught scripture, reading, arithmetic, drawing, science, geography, history, sewing, knitting and singing. They had to do very small stitching in school because the teacher didn't approve of what she called "cat's teeth". They wrote on copies but the little ones wrote on millboards which are a kind of cardboard with a shiny surface.

There was a fireplace in each room and the parish paid for the coal. Sometimes there wasn't any coal so the children had to bring in a sod of turf or a log. A senior pupil was asked to light the fire. This was a great honour. The lighting system was hanging electric lights. Most of the pupils walked to school, but some children got a penny to get the tram home.

The clergyman was the Rev. J.S. Carolan and the Rev. R.A. Arched was the curate. The Rector visited the school once a week. He gave them instructions on the catechism. Every Wednesday they had a service from 12 til half past. The boys and girls marched to the church. The boys sat on the right hand side and the girls on the left. Girls had to wear a hat. The school was used for the boy's brigade and girl guides, concerts and ladies' sewing class.

They didn't use books and pictures in the school but they had maps. They had a modulator which is like a map and the teacher had a tuning fork. They also had a ballgame. Unlike us they didn't have art and craft lessons. They weren't taken on school outings or picnics. (The boys and girls played in the same playground). There was also a small field at the back of the school. That field is now the Garda barracks. The grass in the field on the left hand side grew very long and a man cut it with a scythe. He used to own a goat, who grazed in this field. The children brought bread and butter to the school wrapped in paper and the goat ate the paper and died. One day the children hid the scythe on the old man and he reported that his scythe had been stolen, eventually it was discovered and the old man said whoever hid the scythe were rogues and their mothers were rogues to let them do such a thing as steal an old man's bread and butter. They played games like skipping, French tig, and chasing. Mrs. Lea described chasing "there is a den and somebody is on and they have to chase all the other people and try to catch them before they get back into the den".

The school never had a sports day but at the end of the school year when the examination results were out the top girl in each class got a book prize. Mrs. Lea managed to get this prize a couple of times. They had no school concerts. In school they were taught how to prepare vegetables and Mrs. Lea one day started to scrape the carrots before washing them and the teacher was very angry. They were taught how to make scones, stew and semolina pudding. They were also taught how to clean their kitchen. They had to clean a white wooden table with a bath brick which isn't used anymore. They had to also clean the cooker. Mrs. Lea and the older girls had a book in which they wrote their recipes down.

The boys' school was beside the church. It has been demolished recently, between 1970 and 1974. Mrs. Lea thought Miss Pepper was the nicest teacher. None of the teachers are still alive, Miss Walker died quite recently.

### **Mrs. Long - interviewed by Kristen O'Brien Kennelly**

Mrs. Bessie Long attended St. Matthew's from 1908-1917. At that time it was just opposite the church. There was a gallery where all the infants sat, opposite this was a room where the seniors sat and a big room where second, third and fourth was.

It was not a mixed school. Only infant boys were there and then they went to the boys' school, when they reached first class. The teachers were Mrs. Walker, who was from Northern Ireland, Miss Pepper who was a local lady and Miss Davis. Mrs. Long thought they were all strict. If you were naughty you got the cane. Sometimes you were put on the platform with a sign saying "I am a dirty girl". Mrs. Long sat next to Charlotte Tate and Dorry Cerns.

### **Mr. Pullen – interviewd by Mark McCormack**

Mr. Pullen started in St. Matthew's in 1912 and ended in 1917. The school was situated beside the church. The teacher's names were Miss Pepper, Miss Davis and Miss Walsh. Mr. Pullen remembers them as being middle aged and quite strict. For regular misbehaving you were slapped on both hands with a cane, but if you did something really bad the teacher would pull down your trousers and slap you on the bare bottom.

The majority of the pupils came from Ringsend and Irishtown. The games played by the boys were cowboys and Indians, hide and seek and a game played with hats. Mr. Pullen described this game, "you got a hat, put it against a wall and threw stones into them". Most boys could play this game because they almost always wore hats. Prizes of money were given out for good work.

### **Mrs. Mullen – interviewed by Eileen Kelly**

Mrs. Mullen went to St. Matthew's in 1916. The teachers were Miss Pepper and Miss Walker, Miss Walker was very nice and Miss Pepper was very cross. Mrs. Mullen thought the teachers were elderly, but when her child started school they were still there. The teachers were very strict. "If we did anything wrong they gave out hell!" said Mrs. Mullen. The punishments for being naughty was a slap on the head or knuckles or put outside the door. Mrs. Mullen remembers being naughty herself! One day a girl brought a beautiful doll to school, Mrs. Mullen thought it was lovely. She decided to pull the arm out of the sockets and it ripped, the girl told the teacher and Mrs. Mullen had to stay in the corner for the length of a day.

Besides the usual school subjects they had sewing and knitting classes, but no art and craft lessons, like we do. They had to do little stitches or they would get a hiding.

Most of the children came from Irishtown and Ringsend, because Sandymount was too swanky! All the children played in the same playground. They played skipping, ball and hopscotch. Another one of their games was French tig. Mrs. Mullen explained how you played this: "one person would stand at the house and the other people would have to try and get in without being caught". They never had a sports day or concerts. Mrs. Mullen does not remember any prizes being given out for good work.

### **Mrs. Rhodes – interviewed by Jacques D'arcy**

Mrs. Rhodes attended St. Matthew's in 1936. The teachers were Miss Pepper and Miss Lowe. They were both very strict and both middle aged. If you were naughty you were made stand in a corner. In those days arithmetic was the name for maths and it was one of their subjects along with English, Irish, History and Geography. Slates were out of use, they wrote on copies. There was a big stone in the corner of the big hall which heated the school. Most people walked to school then. Rev. Weir was the clergyman in those times. He used to come to school every day. The only crafts were knitting and embroidery and prizes were given for good work. Mrs. Rhodes told me on outings or picnics. Mrs. Rhodes told me that they used to wait for people to die to get days off!

Most of the children came from Ringsend and Irishtown although some came from Sandymount. Everyone played together, boys and girls. The girls used to play chasing and beds.