



## THE HISTORY OF CRETING ST MARY PRIMARY SCHOOL

### IN THE BEGINNING

On Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1871, the building that we now know as Creting St Mary Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School was officially opened. At one o'clock in the afternoon the Archdeacon of Suffolk, the Rector of Creting St Mary, parents, parishioners and neighbours joined the eighty children already gathered in the schoolroom. After the Archdeacon had opened the school by Prayer, the Rector said Grace and the children sat down to a celebration dinner. While this meal was in progress, Evening Prayer was read in Creting St Mary Church, after which the congregation made their way back to the school for a meal attended by one hundred and fifty guests.

The substantial menu consisted of roast and boiled beef and mutton accompanied by vegetables, and followed by plum pudding. The meal was subscribed for by the principal parishioners and supplied by the proprietor of the King's Head hostelry.

Later in the afternoon the children went to the Rectory for boys' and girls' races, the prizes including stockings and money. There were also races for adults and according to the newspaper report of the occasion "the women outstripped the men".

The school had originated as a Sunday School held in Creting St Mary Church. In 1837, when the Rev. John Briggs was Rector, the building in the churchyard was erected to accommodate the children. As a result of the Education Act in 1870, by which it became compulsory for all children to attend day school, a larger building was needed and the present day school was erected on glebe land belonging to the church.

The Rector at the time, the Rev. William Laurence Eliot, M.A., Fellow of Eton College, states in his records:

"A.D. 1871 – On the 4<sup>th</sup> October a new school and classroom were opened for the parishes of Creting St Mary, All Saints and St Olave by the Ven. Archdeacon Groom (of Suffolk) in the presence of a large number of parishioners.

This school was built by voluntary contributions from most of the landowners, tenants and inhabitants of the Parishes, aided by grants from the National and Diocesan Societies for promoting education.

The Building and Fittings were completed at a cost of £255 by contract with Messrs. Godfrey and R. Scopes of Needham Market”.

### EARLY YEARS OF THE SCHOOL

The school building in 1871 consisted of two rooms, the School room (for Juniors) and the Class room (for Infants). One hundred years later the School room was used by the Junior children and the Class room was used as the dining room. Enlargements were made to the original rooms in both 1884 and 1894, and the children had lessons in the original school in the churchyard, used now as the choir vestry, while the work was being carried out.

The playground was very small and was divided by a fairly high wall to segregate the boys from the girls, or at least this was the intention. It is recorded that on occasion boys were kept in as punishment for invading the girls’ playground. The wall was not taken down until 1955, by which time it had become unsafe. Morning playtime for the children was first introduced in 1889, and afternoon play was made compulsory in 1897.

At the turn of the century the land at the back of the school was given. It was originally used for garden plots, but much later was made into the playing field.

The school lavatories at that time were very primitive and their condition was criticised constantly by His Majesty’s Inspectors.

Although the school building was small, the number of scholars was large. When the school was first built there were about sixty children on roll, and by 1889 the number had risen to one hundred and four.

Small weekly payments were made by the parents of those times towards the cost of their children’s education, and the school also received the Government Grant. This Grant, however, as assessed on the number of children actually present at school, and not the number on roll. As the period of the year from which the all-important numbers were taken was the Autumn Term, the amount of the Grant depended largely upon the weather enjoyed at that time. It was a constant source of worry to the Head Teachers and Managers to get the children to attend school regularly.

Reasons for absenteeism differed a great deal from those of today. Amongst those recorded were: taking Father’s dinner, mothers washing, mothers brewing, pig keeping, minding sheep, potato picking, bean stalk pulling, leading horse and stone picking.

### TREATS AND HOLIDAYS

At Christmas time an annual treat was given to the children at Creeting St Mary Rectory, while in summer a choir outing took place. Every two years a treat was given at Bosmere Hall.

In 1900 the Relief of Mafeking was celebrated by half an hour’s recreation in the morning instead of the usual quarter of an hour.

A week's holiday was given in 1902 to mark the coronation of Edward VII, and at his death the school flag was at half mast for a week.

Other occasions on which school holidays are recorded are:

- 1887 – Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee
- 1897 – Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee
- 1911 – The Coronation of George V (a week's holiday)
- 1912 – The marriage of Princess Mary
- 1919 – Peace Celebrations
- 1923 – The wedding of the Duke of York
- 1930 – The Prince of Wales' visit to Ipswich
- 1935 – The Silver Jubilee celebrations of George V's accession to the throne (outdoor seats were presented to the school on this occasion)
- 1935 – The wedding of the Duke of Gloucester
- 1936 – The funeral of George V
- 1945 – V.E. Day, celebrated by two days' holiday on May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>
- 1947 – The wedding of Princess Elizabeth
- 1948 – The Silver Wedding of George VI
- 1953 – the Whitsun holiday extended to one week to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II

#### THE SCHOOL IN WARTIME

Only two references to the First World War can be found in school records.

In April 1915 mention is made of seven girls attending a wartime cookery class at Needham Market, and in the following year children who stayed to dinner had cocoa made for them at school. On May 25<sup>th</sup> 1917 the school was closed for one day for a food demonstration of wartime cookery.

The Second World War had greater impact upon the school. In 1937 a hundred years after the original classroom had been established in Creting St Mary churchyard, the senior children were transferred to the new Area School at Needham Market. Although the numbers of children attending Creting St Mary School dropped to forty six as a result of this re-organisation, this number was increased in 1939 at the outbreak of war when the first evacuees arrived from London. These were children from Highlands and Gearies Junior Schools in Ilford, at both of which schools the present headmistress had herself been a pupil several years earlier.

In 1940 the Education Authority agreed that in the event of air raids the children might go to the shelter at the Rectory if time permitted, and if not they were to take cover under their school desks. Air raid alarms were recorded on September 9<sup>th</sup> and October 8<sup>th</sup> of that year.

Canteen dinners started in Creting St Mary on October 5<sup>th</sup> 1942 and on October 19<sup>th</sup> it was reported that two bombs had destroyed Needham Market School, although in actual fact it had been badly damaged.

All children were required to take their gas masks for inspection on the first Tuesday of every month.

During 1943 a salvage campaign took place and in 1944 a rose hip collection produced a quantity of over two hundredweight.

Wellington boots were given by the American Red Cross to children who had a long way to walk to school.

The end of the war in 1945 was celebrated by a holiday on May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, V.E. Day.

### LATER YEARS

One of the major problems that arose each winter was that of heating the school. In early days open fires had been used, and in December 1887 the Rector at that time, the Rev. Vidal, had reported:

“The open fire is not sufficient to warm the school. Children not immediately near the fire are so cold that they are scarcely able to do their work”.

The installation of stoves in each school room improved the situation but owing to the height of the building much of the heat was lost. It was not until the long-awaited mobile classroom for Infants arrived in 1970 that electric storage heaters were installed in the main building to provide additional warmth when needed.

Electric light had been installed in the school in 1952 and in 1956 mains water laid on during the summer holiday. Prior to this the water used in the school had been fetched in buckets from a tap in All Saints Road near the old forge. In earlier times the School Managers had put aside a small sum each year towards the upkeep of the village pump.

During the Christmas holiday in 1956 two wash basins were put in each porch, and by 1963 the school had been connected to the main sewerage system and new toilets had been provided. The old toilets remained standing until 1970 when they were pulled down to make room for the mobile classroom.

There have been many additions to the school amenities in recent years, many of which have been provided by the generosity of parents and friends. Through the years the school has always been fortunate in the goodwill and interest shown by the community, and in 1969 this was consolidated by the formation of the Creeping St Mary School Association.

Each year the PSA, as it is now known, supports the school with its renowned Strawberry Fayre and joins the village for the Midsummer Fair and the Christmas Bazaar. These fund raising events provide more funds for the school to purchase resources. Projects in the past have included an outdoor swimming pool, the adventure play area and the wooden fort.

Not only had the Association “furthered the material well-being of the school”, as stated in its Constitution, but it has also carried out the wishes expressed by the Archdeacon of

Suffolk in his address one hundred and forty years ago, when he asked all those gathered in the newly built Creeping St Mary, All Saints and St Olave National School" to support the school and to further the cause of religious education".

In 1994 a new classroom, library and headteacher's office were added to the school, creating more space for everyone. This classroom was dedicated by the ...

Eight years later, in 2002, another classroom was built and dedicated by Rev. Christine Everett. This allowed the original School room to become the Hall, for once unused as a classroom and available for PE, Collective Worship and a Dining Room. New flooring was later put over the original floorboards allowing for easier cleaning.

A staff and disabled toilet were added to the end of the staff room over the winter months of 2003-4, which meant losing an outside door. Later that year the pupils' toilets were re-furnished (the brightly coloured décor being the pupils' choice!)

An Early Years Outdoor Classroom was set up in 2008, allowing the youngest children safe and free access between their classroom and the outdoors. A canopy above part of this area means that this classroom can be used in all weathers and a playhouse built by parents has added to the facility. This area was opened by Glynis Clint, long time proprietor of Creeping Nursery and Governor of the school.

In 2011, a group room was added to the school, so that small groups or individuals could work in a quiet space. The large windows looked out over the playing field and as it attracted the sun for most of the day it became known as the Sunshine room. Some of the furniture for this room was funded by the PSA so the generous support continued.

A fire exit was cut through the wall of the hall at the same time and the ground level outside was found to be 30cm higher outside than in! This caused great problems for the builders as they were not allowed to make a step up from a fire door.

At this time, Suffolk schools were being re-organised to be in line with most of the country; this meant that middle schools would close and all primary schools would take children from 5-11. For our school this meant more change as we prepared to dissolve long-standing links with the schools in the Stowmarket pyramid and join the schools in the Debenham pyramid. With all change came both positive and negative challenges, but always with the good of our children in mind.

The Diocese funded a brand new early years classroom complete with toilets a purpose built outdoor area. This meant that the field became smaller and so negotiations began to acquire more land at the rear of the school. In the summer of 2014 our first Year 6 pupils took their SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) and moved on to Debenham High School. The school roll rose to 80 with three classes plus an extra morning class.

The field was finally ours and had to undergo a transformation from paddock to playing field so another long wait ensued.

No doubt there will be more exciting plans to make in the future and more funds to raise. Children will come and go, and possibly one day send their own children to Creeping School, as has happened so many times in the past. Countless children have heard the school bell in the morning and hurried, or dawdled, through the door to their lessons.

They are benefiting from the legacy and vision of those landowners, tenants and villagers of the Parishes over one hundred and forty years ago who so generously built our village school.

Headteachers of Creeting St Mary  
Church of England School

Miss M.E. Mason	1875 – 1879
Miss S. Rumsey	1880 – 1894
Mr and Mrs H. Godlington	1895 – 1897
Miss D.E. Frost	1898 – 1939
Miss E.M. Day	1939 – 1947
Mrs K.E. Williams	1947 – 1950
Mrs J.M. Chandler	1950 – 1968
Miss M. Webber	1968 – 1974
Miss R. Suggate	1974 – 1994
Mrs M. Mateer	1994 – 2004
Mrs M. Spall	2004