

This document is a transcript of interview no 4 in an oral history project by Dyrham and Hinton History Group. The interviewer was John Miller. Ann Gay operated the tape recorder. The interview and photograph were taken on 5th August 1992.

The following transcription attempts to adhere to the conversational style of the interview, and adds some punctuation.



Vera Salmon

JM: We are going to talk about Dyrham and Hinton Village school.

JM: I understand that your parents were at the school as well as you, so perhaps we could start by talking about what you know about when they went to school.

VS: My parents were the first pupils that were at the school when the school was opened, and I suppose they went at the age of five you see, and from then on. The school master was a Mister Tovey and he was held in very great esteem. My father always talked about him and talked about Miss Tovey and I think that they were very well respected in the village, and also they took a great interest in the Sunday school and I think he was the church organist and that is all I know and this is only hearsay and what my parents have told me.

JM: The Toveys would have lived in Hinton?

VS: They lived in the school house. I suppose that the school house was built at the same time as the school was built. Previous to that the old school was in Dyrham - you have the records of that I expect - the old school which is still the old school house at Dyrham. But I don't think that my parents went there. I don't think that my parents were old enough to go to that school anyway.

JM: So they were the first pupils in the new school?

VS: Yes.

JM: And you went to the school yourself, and you were born in the village?

VS: I was born in the village, yes. My school days started in 1909 at the age of five and the school master then was a Mr. Cross, Tom Cross, and the infant teacher was a Miss Hunt. I've got rather an interesting story to tell you about Miss Hunt. In my young days the milk from the farms was collected and taken to Mangotsfield station, but there was a milk cart that went every morning at about 6 o'clock in the morning. And they took all the milk from the 7 or 8 farms what were in the village, and it was taken to Mangotsfield station to put on the rail. If anyone wanted a lift to the station you could always get a lift on the milk cart which was an open cart, you see. Miss Hunt was a Bristol person and she used to come out on Monday mornings on the milk cart when the milk cart came back from the station. She used to come out from Bristol to Mangotsfield station, catch the milk cart and come up to the school. She stayed the whole week. She boarded in the village in a farm all the week and then on Saturday mornings she went back on the milk cart 6 o'clock on Saturday mornings. She went back to Bristol on the milk cart but when I was very small, and I can remember this quite vividly, that she would come in perhaps a bit late for school but she would sometimes be absolutely wringing wet because there was no protection on the cart, you see. She would take her top skirt off, which we often laughed about, and she would hang it on the guard which went round the old stove that heated the room and dry her skirt. And she used to teach in her petticoat because we always laughed about this wonderful petticoat that she always wore. That was Miss Hunt.

JM: And she was your first teacher?

VS: She was the infant teacher, yes.

JM: And she took you for 4 or 5 years?

VS: Well, I suppose until I went into the big classroom. This was in the infants' room. And I think there was another teacher and I can't remember who she was. There was the teacher and there was the headmaster in the other classroom so there were 3 teachers in the school. I went onto the big classroom and I think that it must have been about 1911 or 12 when Tom Cross died and there was another teacher came and his name was George Millership. He was my teacher then for the rest of my school days which of course I left school at 14.

JM: So you would have walked to school?

VS: Oh yes, because I lived in the Old Forge with my parents and I was the youngest

of 4 children and we all went to school and my brother left the school quite young and went to some college in Bristol. There were two sisters and myself and we all went to school across the field. I expect you know where the footpath is, across the field, don't you? That is the footpath to the school.

JM: Did everyone walk to school?

VS: Oh yes. And there was a family which came from Dunsdown on the road to West Littleton and there was a family there, I think of 13 children, that all came to Dyrham school. But they used to walk down to Dyrham school from West Littleton and, of course, the people from Dyrham.

There was a little family, I expect *you* know the little cottage down in Doynton Lane which I think they call the Doll's House now, which was a little one up, one down cottage, and there was a family in there, a family of four and the husband worked at the collieries in Pucklechurch. He met with an accident riding on one of the drays underground and he broke his back, and he was an invalid so, of course, the cottage wasn't very big, because it was only one up and one down, and there were four children besides the parents.

The estate built a little room on the side for him because he could not go upstairs, anyway. But she was a marvellous woman, Mrs. Packer her name was, and she was a French woman and I think that she must have come as a domestic servant to one of the big houses in Dyrham and that is how he met her and married her. But she brought up all these four children and there was no national assistance and no DHSS or things like that to help out.

She did dressmaking and she just kept the family going with dressmaking. I must tell you this because in those days the big house, the Park, used to have these great big joints of meat which produced a lot of dripping, and they used to sell this dripping to the poor people in the village and the children used to go and collect this dripping for about 3d a pound, or something like that. She was a very methodical person and she used to send these children off with their lunches to school and it was big doorsteps of bread, fried in this dripping and I remembered as children how we envied these children taking their dinner to school, which was these big doorsteps of dripping. Because there were no school meals then, you see.

JM: You all took your own lunch?

VS: No, we weren't allowed to take our lunch, we had to come back home to lunch every day. We used to long to take our lunch to school. We used to long to take these big doorsteps of bread and dripping for lunch, but we were never allowed to do it. That was beside the point, but that was just one little incident that I can remember so well.

JM: Do you remember how many pupils there were?

VS: I think that I am right in saying that there must have been about 70 or 80. It was quite a full school.

JM: And that was in three classrooms, or two classrooms?

VS: Two classrooms. But of course they went to school until 14. You have got to remember that. They didn't go off at 11 like they do now, you see.

JM: What do you remember about the lessons? Do you remember any of your infants' lessons?

VS: Well it was the old story, reading writing and 'rithmetic. History and geography and so on. The girls learnt to sew which was quite useful really, and the boys did drawing I suppose. We were not allowed to do drawing and painting in those days, but the boys did that. But of course we did a lot of concerts, and we used to spend an awful lot of time rehearsing for concerts, which I think the parents used to think that there was more time spent on that than there was on the education really.

JM: So there was a headmaster and two teachers?

VS: Yes, two teachers.

JM: Did you know anything about any of the governors?

VS: Well, there were the school governors which was the rector at the time and the church wardens, because my father was a church warden and I remember that he was one of the governors. I just wouldn't know who the other governors were. I couldn't remember anyway. The rector was very, very good in visiting the school. He came about twice a week, and he was very, very interested in the school and the education, and he was very fond of boys exactly, because I think that probably Anne has told you that when these men went to the First World War I expect she showed *you* the booklet that contains the letters that this parson always used to send these boys a newspaper. One every week to one of the boys, and then they wrote letters back to him and these letters have been preserved in the archives in Gloucester and they have been compiled into a book which Anne has got, probably you know all about that. So he was very good about coming to the school and of course it was a Church of England school and we had religious service every morning. And then of course we always had a scripture lesson, which after a certain time we had the examiner used to come which was perhaps a clergyman from another parish and take an examination, you see. Which was quite a good thing really.

JM: Did you have any history or geography?

VS: Oh yes, we had history and geography lessons, and we did a lot of church history, which was very useful and then we would get examinations for that because I had a couple of books, I can't remember what happened to them, I had a couple of books as prizes for church history because it was one of my pet subjects I think. I was very fond of history and geography, but I wasn't very clever otherwise.

JM: You won some prizes, though.

VS: Oh yes, and the master at that time also ran a Temperance society, which was rather interesting because we would go in for a competition and we won the banner. I

think that we belonged to the Bristol and district Temperance society or something and we won the banner and cups and things like that. That was done after school hours; that wasn't during the school time.

JM: So were there a lot of out of school activities?

VS: Well, I don't think that there were a lot of out of school activities for the children as much, but of course all the social events took place in the school, and of course it meant a great upheaval because when they got dances and social things like that you see all the desks and things had to be cleared out and of course concerts had to have a stage put up and that was very complicated but it was quite good fun and I think people used to enjoy it. I'm sure they did.

JM: What was the classroom furniture like?

VS: It was the old fashioned desks with the inkwells in and you were appointed to fill up the inkwells and every now and then they had to be taken out and scoured because they were all rather dirty.

JM: Did you sit in the same place all the time?

VS: Oh yes well, of course whatever standard you were in. I think there were in sections, there were four of these long desks in one side which took a couple of standards then the big classroom was in about 3 sections. The seat was combined with the desk in those days, in my time. After then they had the more modern ones, where everyone had their own desk, then we didn't have anywhere to put our books you see, they would be collected every day and put away.

JM: There weren't lids on the desks?

VS: Oh no, no desks as such, only just for writing on.

JM: And did you use the dip-in pens?

VS: Oh yes.

JM: And there would have been a blackboard, presumably?

VS: Oh yes, chalk and blackboard.

JM: Were there any other teaching aids?

VS: No, I don't think so. Of course, we had text books as well. Some of the old fashioned arithmetic books and things like that, you see, that we had to use with all our tables and things in.

JM: So what happened first thing in the morning?

VS: We assembled and we had this religious service which took about a quarter of an hour, I suppose, and then we had about half an hour of religious instruction.

JM: Did you have a register?

VS: Yes, and there was a board where all the numbers were put up on morning and afternoon sessions - how many there was in the morning and how many there was in the afternoon. Then there was the total at the side. I always remember this board was like a blackboard, and they would chalk up the attendance.

JM: What was attendance like?

VS: Very good. There was some people used to keep children away perhaps if they wanted some work done or something like that. Children used to be kept away and the attendance officer used to come and then they were on the carpet weren't they and it was very funny because this little rector that we had then who was Winter Blathwayt, he was a bachelor and he had a big Daimler. He bought this big Daimler. There was one family in particular that one of the girls was kept away from school for so long in the morning to do something for her aunt who was an invalid but of course the school inspector would come and find that she was not present and then he would have a notice to go to court. And the old rector used to send him to court in the Daimler and pay his fine when he got there. He was fined five bob or something of that sort and the rector would pay his fine.

JM: So do remember other people visiting?

VS: We used to get the inspectors from Gloucester. I always remember there was a big man called Mr. Household, who was the inspector that came in my day and everybody was absolutely scared of him. But he was a very big man and a very important looking man, but he was really quite a softy at heart. He wasn't so bad as we thought he was.

JM: Was the headmaster a frightening person?

VS: No, not really. Tom Cross was a very good school master but unfortunately he lost his only daughter and then he became an alcoholic and he had to give up. I don't remember what happened to him in the end, but I knew this new master come, this George Millership. He was a very different man, but they were both very clever musicians, they both were organists at the church. I think each man at the school has been organist at the church, and they took the Sunday schools as well. And that was the end of it when Mr. Millership died, we didn't have a master any longer, but he died after I left school of course, he died in 1927.

Then it was headmistresses, three headmistresses came, and my two boys went to school under the next headmistress who was Mrs. Green. And in my young days there was no chance of sitting for scholarships and things like that, but as time went on Mrs. Green introduced the scholarship system into the school and there were quite a few children who gained from it. My boy went to Chipping Sodbury Grammar school from Dyrham, and there was quite a few Dyrham boys that went to Chipping Sodbury Grammar School, and some went to Rendcomb college at Cirencester which was quite an achievement really.

JM: All the masters and headmistresses lived at the school?

VS: They all lived in the school house, yes. They were very much involved with everything in the village.

JM: They must have been quite important people in the village. Miss Hunt, you said, stayed in the farm?

VS: She stayed at Healey Court farm, with the Crew family.

JM: Do you know much about her?

VS: Well I only knew her as my infant teacher. There were always rows; she and Tom Cross didn't see eye to eye with each other. There were always rows. He would come into the classroom, and there would be rows and he would go out and bang the door. She was a little bit of a Sergeant Major. I suppose we children were more or less frightened of them really because we would hate to see people quarreling like that, but they never got on very well.

JM: What about the third teacher?

VS: There was a third one. I think she was a girl from the village, a Miss Lewis, May Lewis. She took the lower standards after they left the infants class, but I don't remember very much about that part. I don't know why but I don't.

One thing that I always remember, there were occasions that we commemorated like Empire Day. We always had a little ceremony on Empire Day. We went out and hoisted the flag. There was a flag pole on the school and we hoisted the flag and we sang all these National songs, and had quite a nice little service there and then the rector would come with a basket with buns and oranges in and we all had a bun and an orange and sent home for half day's holiday, which was a great thing. But now of course that is all dropped, there is nothing like that. Ash Wednesday, we went to church on Ash Wednesday morning, and when we came home from church we were dismissed for the rest of the day and it was another half day we had. Of course, we didn't get seven weeks in the summer or things like that.

JM: Do you remember how long you did get in the summer?

VS: Four weeks I think. We didn't get half term holidays; we only had holidays at Christmas. I think that we had a week at Christmas and at Easter. And I think that we had a Whit Monday, but I don't think we had a holiday at Whitsun. But there were no half terms or Spring Bank holidays or things like that.

JM: You went into school Monday to Friday. Do you remember the times?

VS: 9:00 to 12:00, then 1:30 to 4:00.

JM: Quite a long day really.

VS: I suppose it was really.

JM: You were not allowed to take food and drink for lunch?

VS: My parents wouldn't allow us to take our food, although a lot of children did because they came from a distance anyway. We didn't live very far away really.

JM: Did the school provide anything?

VS: No nothing then, not in my time. I think that when my boy went to school, he started school in, he was born in '32, he must've started school just before the war then, and I think that they introduced milk into school then, but there were no school meals through his time as school, but he left of course when he was eleven, so I think after then they built the kitchen on then. I think that was when the kitchen was built.

JM: Ah, so that was added?

VS: Yes, that was added.

JM: You mentioned the heating. You mentioned the stove.

VS: That was one of these Tortoise stoves, these round combustion stoves. There was one in each room with a big iron guard round it to keep the children away from it. I think in years before I think there were open fires. I think there must have been open fires during my time but I can't remember that. I remember chiefly these big cast iron stoves that were there.

JM: And they would have been coal fired?

VS: Oh yes, they were coal fires, yes.

JM: And presumably the head master looked after those? Who looked after the stoves?

VS: Well, I think that there was a school cleaner, and the school cleaner would be there and would have to light these stoves in the morning, and I suppose the coal was there and the boys I expect would have to fuel the boilers, the stoves. I'm not quite sure about that. I know that there were always big buckets of coal there waiting to be put in these stoves, so I don't think that the head master had very much to do with that.

JM: There was a cleaner?

VS: Yes, there was a cleaner.

JM: Was there a caretaker?

VS: No, no caretaker as such, no. But of course there were only oil lamps, in the very dark days they had to use these oil lamps. There were oil lamps on brackets around the room and they had to be looked after and cleaned and trimmed every day, and if there were any functions the room had to be prepared for that, because there was no electricity; you couldn't switch anything on with a button, it all had to be taken care

of.

JM: So when did the electricity come to the school?

VS: I'm not so sure. Electricity didn't come to Hinton until the 1950s, I think it was about 1956 when we had electricity in Hinton, but they had it in Dyrham in the 30s, because Dyrham Park was let, because the squire had died, he died in 1936 or 37, and Dyrham Park was let to Lady Islington which I expect you've heard all about. Well before she came, during the squire's time, they had their own plant and made their own electricity, but there was no power, it was only for the lights, and we were lucky because they had it brought through to the church as well, we had electricity in the church. But it was off this power plant. They had a man who always who looked after that, I think that they had storage batteries in the cellar or something, and they used to run this engine and store up these batteries, but there was no power. So when she came she wanted everything on the power, like refrigerators, we had no refrigerators in those days. And she must have paid a handsome sum for the Electricity Board to bring it, so of course Dyrham was very lucky that the estate had electricity put in all the houses there. But they didn't bring it to Hinton.

JM: So the electricity came in the 50s, and we have still got no gas, of course, in Hinton.

VS: Oh no, no gas.

JM: There wouldn't have been running water?

VS: We all had wells or pumps. In the Old Forge there were two wells actually, because that was originally made into two properties, so there were two wells in there.

JM: So the school didn't need it?

VS: The school had a well.

JM: Did it?

VS: There was a well at the school, in the school playground actually.

JM: Where was the playground then, at the back?

VS: Well, round the sides. You know where you go in the gate, well there's no gates there now because the gates have gone, but that was the playground all through round there, and the toilets were right down the bottom of that playground. There was no running water you see.

JM: And what sort of toilets were they?

VS: Just ordinary earth closets, that is all they were. There were no cistern at all you see. But I suppose over the years, I don't know what happened after I left school, whether they were modernised or not. I suppose they must have been, and of course water was laid on, then. Everything was very primitive then.

JM: What about the roads? Were the roads tarmaced?

VS: No, there was no tarmac roads, and of course there were no motor cars in my young days, was there, so the roads were only made up by the council, they were made up with local stone. There was a quarry at Tolldown, you know where the Crown is, well just beyond there on the A46 going down towards Bath, on the left hand side there used to be a quarry there, which belonged to the estate. They quarried their own stone and a lot of this stone was quarried for the roads, but it was that very soft stone and of course it didn't last very long. So eventually as time went on the council used the hard flint stone, but it was years and years before the roads were tarmaced, and they were very muddy in those days, because naturally when it was wet it was very muddy, and it was all farm carts and wagons and things like that, that travelled up and down the roads. It wasn't motor cars was it, so of course there was great ruts in the road.

JM: You mentioned a lot of concerts at the school.

VS: Yes. I have got a lot of photographs of concerts, yes. It was the children's concerts, which I think were very well organised, in Millership's time, not in the other people's time, in Millership's time, more or less in my school days, and she was very talented at producing things like that, and a lot of the costumes and that were made in the school.

JM: When you say she was very talented....

VS: She was very talented and a very good musician.

JM: Who was this?

VS: Mrs. Millership. She used to do a lot for the concerts.

JM: The concerts were held in the afternoon or the evening?

VS: Well, they would have been held in the evening, because that is only when the public could come to them, in the evening. It was two nights the concerts as a rule. It was hard work, it must have been hard work for them, but they did put some very good concerts on. I have got some pictures there. I'll show them to you afterwards. I've got some pictures there of the Empire day concerts representing all the people in the Empire, all the colonies, so it was quite good that was.

JM: Do you remember if there were any other people who used the hall for concerts? Was it all school children?

VS: Not really for concerts. I think some years afterwards there used to be some adult concerts. Of course when the WI came into being they used to put on concerts. Of course as time went on, in 1932 the village hall was built, and then of course all the activities ceased at the school.

JM: What about sport? Was there any sport on?

VS: Not very much, no.

JM: You didn't really have games?

VS: No, they did not have any sport at all at the school. All you had was what you had in the playground, you used to play cricket and rounders and things like that in the playground, but there was never any organised sport group there. Mr. Millership ran the scout group. There was a scout group.

JM: What about outings? Did you ever go out as a school?

VS: I can't remember about outings. I know that we used to go into Bristol. There was no means of going on outings, there was only horses and traps and things like that, but I remember, I don't think I went, but when they ran this Temperance thing, which was not done in school time but was done in the evenings, we went to Temperance in the evenings. We had to go to Colston Hall, I think, in Bristol when the prize giving was and once or twice they won the banner which was hung on the wall in the school.

I don't think that there were any school outings, but the squire at Dyrham Park and his wife used to give us a school treat every year. They used to send about a couple of months before Christmas to the school and say that everybody was invited to the school party, and we would have a present, but we could choose what we would like, so the school master had to make a list what we would like. I mean some children wanted a teddy bear and somebody wanted a train set, but there was a certain limit to what you could ask for, but there was one family that came into the village and they had a boy that came to school, but of course, they had never been accustomed to this sort of thing, so his mother told him to ask for a pair of boots. I always remember the school master said that he couldn't put that down because it wasn't really suitable for a school tea party. He was to choose something in the way of a toy or a book or something that he wanted. I always remember this poor kid was asked by his mother be sure you ask for a pair of boots. That was every year that we had this Christmas party.

JM: And that was in the school?

VS: No, that was up at the Park house. in what they called the Tenants' Hall, which was the baronial hall. We had this Christmas tree and party.

JM: Did you have games?

VS: Yes, it was rather nice. We had this big tea party in one big hall, and then we had this beautiful Christmas tree which was all done up with candles in them days. And all these prizes were on the great long bench. All along the side, all these presents all done up in parcels, and the old boy, the old squire, there was a big oak staircase that came down into this hall, and he would emerge as Father Christmas and come down the staircase, and it was quite impressive really.

JM: Did the school as a body go to the church at all?

VS: On Sunday mornings we went to Sunday School in the school. I think we went to Sunday School at 10:00. We had half an hour at Sunday School, then we marched, two by two, with the school master, to church, and there was a little area in the church where there was some small seats where all the children sat. We sat in these children's seats. He sat on the organ. He had a mirror on the organ that he could see if we were misbehaving, so he would make a note of who was misbehaving in church and on Monday morning we were on the carpet. We sat there all through this service. We had been to Sunday school for half an hour, we had walked to church and then we had an hour's service in the church, which was quite a dirge, you know what services were then, everything was said, psalms for the day were said, and very little music. You sang the hymns, and you had to listen to these long litanies and long sermons you know, and it was very, very boring. In the Sunday afternoon we went to Sunday school again, three o'clock to four, and in the evening we went to church with our parents, didn't we, and that was our Sunday.

Mind you we rather looked forward to our Sunday because we were dressed in our Sunday best. People always had Sunday best in those days, which they haven't got any more. That was really the highlight of Sunday, to be dressed up. I always remember one girl, she went to church and she came in a bit late, and she walked in, she had a new pair of shoes on, or boots they used to wear then. In those days you see new boots always used to squeak, didn't they, so she always made a habit that when she had a new pair of shoes she was always late coming to church, so that everyone would hear her coming in with her new boots on. She used to tell us this story; I think it was quite true actually.

JM: Yes, we haven't talked about clothes or anything like that. Did you have special school clothes?

VS: No, we had no school uniform as such, no. Well, it was rather laughable if you look back now and see what sort of clothes. Boys wore long sort of knicker things, later on they wore short trousers up above the knee, but they used to have these trousers just down below the knee, and caps, always caps.

JM: And what did you wear?

VS: I can't remember. I know this lady, she used to make our clothes, the lady that I was talking about that had the little cottage down the lane. She had to do dress making to earn a living to keep the children going, and she used to make our dresses, and that was one of the highlights, we used to have to go there to be fitted, and of course after school we would go straight from school down to this cottage in the lane, and she had four children and we used to play about with these children and we used to have great fun. And she was a marvellous woman; she was spotlessly clean, very methodical, and very, very gifted, and she brought up these children and clothed them, something out of nothing sort of thing. I just wonder how she did it really with an invalid husband. We all went to school together.

I've got pictures of them; I'll show them to you when we've finished.

JM: You did mention that when you were naughty in church you were on the carpet on Monday. We haven't talked about punishment; what sort of punishment?

VS: We had a cane; they had a cane didn't they. I always remember this blooming cane, yes. And that hurt too! Oh yes, we had a cane all right.

JM: You sound as if you had it!

VS: Yes. I always remember one incident, there were three or four girls of my age, all sat in a row because we were the same standard. At the back there was a row of boys of the same age and they were in the same standard. There was one lad there that use to work with his uncle, his uncle had a little sort of, he didn't have a market garden, but he used to grow a lot of produce and he used to go on Saturday mornings, he used to go down as far as Mangotsfield, down through Shortwood, Mangotsfield, selling all these bits and pieces.

So this boy used to go with him, so of course he used to have all sorts of things, apples and what have you, and he used to bring apples to school in his pocket. He was sitting behind us and he would hand us out these apples. So there was one girl there that wasn't very popular, so she was busy doing her writing, and she guessed something was going on so she turned round and said where was hers, and said that if she didn't get one she would tell the headmaster. So he had to give one to her, but instead of giving her an apple he gave her an onion, and of course she went on doing her writing and when she come to have a bite of this apple (she thought) she found it was an onion so she immediately went to the headmaster, so were all out on the front and we all got punished and we all had to forfeit the apples.

That was the sort of thing that went on in those days. The boys used to scarper in the lunch time. When they had taken their lunch to school they used to go off playing 'fox and hounds' and go all over the fields and come back late and then of course they used to get punished for that. Perhaps they used to raid a farmer's orchard and get some apples.

JM: Not quite as clean as when they left!

VS: Not really.

JM: Well, I think that was very nice of you Vera. Thank you very much.

VS: It was very sad when it all closed. I thought it was an awful pity, powers that be knew best, I suppose.

JM: Here ends the interview.