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| BY  W.H. RIDGWAY | A person in a suit  Description automatically generated with medium confidence |

LIFE IN HIGH ERCALL FROM THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

CONTENTS

1. Harvest 70 years ago
2. Incumbents of the Parish
3. Parish Industries
4. High Ercall Charities
5. The Gospel Tree
6. High Ercall Village Halls

HARVEST 70 YEARS AGO

Farmers were the chief employers and their employees were known as farmhands. They lived close to their farmsteads in cottages rented from the farmer, who in turn rented his farm and its cottages from the landowner.

Life was not easy - wages were low, hours were long, and families large. Naturally, there were no mod. cons - water had to be pumped, or drawn from a well, lighting was by oil or candles, and heating & cooking were by wood or coal.

The farmhands were graded as shepherd, cowman, stockman, waggoner and labourer, and they all worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. (4 p.m on Saturdays) - except for the stockmen and cowmen who also had to tend the needs of their animals in the evenings and on Sundays.

Waggoners liked to choose names for their horses, typical ones being Dobbin, Jewel, Dot, Boxer, Bonny; the cowman, too, often named his charges and put-up nameplates over their stalls, e.g., Daisy, Violet, Peggy, Buttercup. The waggoner was proud of his horses and spent many an hour plaiting manes and polishing brasses, especially on occasions such as the Sunday School treats to Haughmond Hill or Grinshill.

Ploughing took place in the late Autumn and early Spring, followed by the sowing of grain and root crops. When the grain showed through, the men checked it for thistles which they destroyed with the aid of a special tool, similar to a spade but measuring only one inch wide and three inches long. They called this task "potching" the thistles.

Next followed hoeing of the root crops - no sugar beet, as this was not introduced until after the first World War.

The hay harvest followed, the crop being cut either by scythes or by the reaper. The grass was turned by hand in the sun and then placed in small cocks, small enough

to be picked up with a pikel (pitchfork) for loading onto a waggon.

A boy followed with an eel rake, collecting the hay which had been left behind. Hedge-brushing was the next job to be tackled, paid at so much per rood. Both this and hoeing were piece-work.

The cut corn was collected and tied by twisting a dozen or more straws into a knot, and placed in stooks of about 5 or 6 ready for loading. According to custom, the stooks were left until the church bells had been heard for three Sundays.

Stacks were made either round or oblong and built on stood cones which had a disc on top, known as stackstones. On top of these were laid poles and a base of hedge-brushings Then the stack was built on top of this. The reason for this method was to prevent the rats climbing into the stack

In about 1906, the binder was invented. This cut the corn and tied it into bundles. At about the same time, the Dutch Barn came into use, thus doing away with the labour of building a brushwood base and thatching of stacks.

In the corn harvest month each man received £1.00 extra, plenty of free beer and cider and a Harvest Supper. Every year until 1914 a showman came with a steam roundabout, sideshows and swings. The Harvest Festival was well- attended, the Church requiring extra benches and chairs which were otherwise stored in the Tithe Barn.

During the winter months the corn was threshed by a threshing box, driven by a steam engine which consumed between one and five tons of coal, depending on the number of threshing days.

And then it was Spring, and time to start all over again

INCUMBENTS OF THE PARISH

The Hon. Gilbert Vane, M.A., brother of Lord Barnard (owner of the estate and of most of the parish) came to this parish in 1890 and later married a Miss Steadman who lived at Ercall Hall. They had one daughter, Lulu, who died at the early age of Seventeen.

The Rev. Vane was a great historian, and it is thanks to his writings that we know so much about the parish. Unfortunately, he did not enjoy good health. He farmed

the Glebe Lands which were given to the living by the Duke of Cleveland. A staff of seven were kept, namely a gardener, workman, coachman, housemaid, chambermaid, cook and nannie. The latter married the young local blacksmith, which, incidentally, is why I am here to write this! Mr. Vane left to take over the living at Wem, but both he and his daughter are buried in High Small churchyard, near the vestry door. The East window wan a gift from him, and the first window on the right of the entrance door was given by Miss E. Steadman and depicts the face of her niece, Lulu.

From 1895 to 1900 the parish was in the hands of the Rev. Freer, and then from 1900 to 1911, the Rev. Philpot, father of a boy and a girl. He also farmed the Glebe Lands but the staff were reduced to 4 - two maids, a gardener and a boy. Unfortunately, he succumbed to a heart attack on the way to Crudgington Station at the start of his holidays. 1895 was the time of the transfer of the Vestry Meeting to the Parish Council. All documents relating to the parish were kept in the church safe, of which the keys were lost. Eventually it was decided to force the safe. No documents were found.

He was succeeded in 1912 by the Rev. A.N.S. Scott, who was a bachelor. He was devoted to the parish and a keen cyclist - all his visiting was done by bicycle. He was very good to the poor and sick and very keen to have a good choir. He strained his heart, skating from Longden to Berwick Wharf and gave up the living in 1938. He never farmed the Glebe Lands but let them instead in two parts, one to the local publican and the other to the schoolmaster.

One memory stands put particularly. The boys' and girls’ playgrounds were separated by a wall. The vicar would periodically visit the school with apples from his orchard and throw them over both sides of the wall for the children to catch.  
  
In July 1940 the Rev. W. Beale came to the parish. He had two daughters. He was padre to the troops during the war, as well as being a County Councilor, Parish Councilor, Chairman of the Village Hall and Playing Fields committees and Superintendent of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. He produced several Nativity plays and sometimes gave a service in deaf and dumb sigh language. He was the first vicar to have the telephone installed and electricity in both the church and vicarage. He did not farm the Glebe Lands. He retired in 1968.

The Rev. S. Bailey came to the parish in 1969 and two of his three daughters were born here. He and his wife took an active interest in the welfare of young people, organising Pathfinders, Brownies and Young wives Groups, and helping to run many other activities, including the Play Group. In 1972 they were able to move into the new vicarage. They left the parish for West Bromwich in September this year.

All the incumbents had a great influence on the lives of everyone in the parish. They are all ex officio members of all the charities, often taking the chair at various meetings. Some notable events were: -

1894-5 A 1690 silver communion chalice was melted down and redesigned. This is still in use today.

1940-68 Bells rehung. Screen moved from choir stalls to belfrey. Font moved. Churchyard closed. Glebe Land sold, as were the School Exhibition lands in Sarn, Montgomeryshire. Garden of Remembrance made. Organ rebuilt and repositioned. Oil-fired central heating installed.

July 8th Pageant held to commemorate the 870th Anniversary 1950 of High Ercall Church.

Vicars of note in earlier parish history: -

1764 The Rev. Wood, vicar and schoolmaster, who taught

Dr. Witherington, the discoverer of digitalis (distilled from the foxglove)

1860 The Rev. G. Bucknall. Alterations to the church were carried out - the gallery was taken down, a beautiful carved oak pulpit was replaced by the present stone one, a Norman stone font was removed to St. Giles' Church, Shrewsbury, where it can still be seen. During these alterations the hand bells were stolen and sold to Berrington Church. Those now in possession of the church, were given by the vicar's wife, who did not want a scandal to develop.  
One of their daughters attempted suicide from

the parapet of the church tower, but, fortunately, she was rescued by a workman.

1663 Grammar School founded. Boys only admitted when

they could read the New Testament. The school was closed in 1887.

PARISH INDUSTRIES

Village and Parish life had change•: very little from the previous 100 years. The population remained the same (2000) over the years, and the village still numbered just over 11,000 acres. The 7 churches and chapels were well-attended. Now, only 3 churches, and 3 chapels, remain.

The parish was more or less self-supporting, all the people depending upon each other for a living.

There were: - 4 blacksmiths, 2 wheelwrights, 1 sadler,

1 nailmaker, 2 boot and shoemakers, 2 bakers, 1 butcher,

*2* general stores, 2 tailors, 1 well-sinker, bricklayers, drainpipe makers, sawyers, woodmen, carpenters, drainers, gamekeepers and thatchers, in addition to all those employed on Lord Barnard's estate.

The nailmaker made nails for shoeing horses and for all the carpentry work. The flats at the end of Cleveland Avenue are built on the site of the nailmaker's and sadler's shops, and the name Lorimer means "maker of horse furniture". The stone which has the name engraved on it bears the marks of the holes where the moulding tools were inserted. Only one blacksmiths shop now remains. The blacksmith made practically everything in iron from a pocket knife to a plough. This included all iron work for the wheelwright, carpenters and the Estate, such as window frames, gate hinges and tools for various trades. Winter was a busy time for the farrier. Horses had to have special nails and studs fitted to prevent slipping. If a horse slipped and cut its knees badly it was invariably shot. The blacksmiths all wore leather aprons and wore their sleeves rolled inwards to prevent sparks from lodging in the up-rolls.

The wheelwright made the farm waggons and carts and did all the repairs to them. The horsebreaker would train horses for riding and to the harness for light vehicles such as

traps and floats etc..

The butcher delivered meat once a week and most of the animals slaughtered were from local farms. The miller at Ercall Mill did all the grinding for animal fodder and the flour for the bakers.

The well-sinker dug and made the wells when required, repaired the winding gear, cleaned out the open wells, repaired pumps etc., there being no tap water.  
  
The carrier took passengers and market goods to 'wellington and Shrewsbury on market days. He would charge a small amount for taking and bringing back goods and one shilling return for passengers.

The post was delivered by horse and a special mail van from Wellington each morning. The mail was then sorted in the post office in the village and delivered by a part-time postman.

The sawyer cut the trees into planks, gate-posts - in fact, all timbers required for the estate. The Head Sawyer would move along the tree which had been laid over a pit

about 6 feet deep with the under-sawyer in the pit. The saw which they then manipulated was about 8 to 10 feet in length. It was worked in an up and down movement. It took about 3 days to saw up a tree - now it takes about 3 hours!

Bricks were made at Walton. The clay was collected in wheel-barrows and put into a mill, mixed with water to get the right texture and stirred by a long pole drawn by a blindfolded horse. When ready it was put into moulds and left in the drying sheds for about 3 days. Ready now for baking, it was taken in special wheelbarrows to the kiln and allowed to bake for a week or ten days in intense heat.

The Oak Cottage was the last house to be built of the local brick, after the black and white thatched cottage on the site had been burnt down.

Drainpipes were made in much the same way as the bricks.

The rest of the population consisted of 3 schoolmasters, *2* vicars, publicans, 1 rate collector, 1 undertaker, 1 builder and a few retired persons.

All eggs, butter, milk and cheese were supplied by local farmers.

The 1914-18 War saw the first changes in the parish, both in food and in pace of living. 339 boys were called to the colours, of whom 39 lost their lives.

The second major change took place in 1932, when all the estate was sold. Most farmers bought their farms, tradespeople bought their premises and some cottagers bought theirs. The Wellington Rural District Council bought land and built a number of council houses. After new inventions had been introduced to the farms less labour was required. Quite a number of farm lads and apprentices took advantage of the £ 10 fare to Australia, New Zealand and Canada and set out to make their fortunes.

1939-45 saw another change - the Air Ministry bought land and built an aerodrome. They laid water mains and sewers, the latter being taken over by the council after the war. Private developers took advantage of the facilities and

bought land whenever it became available to build houses for sale to what are fashionably called commuters. A century of tradition had been eroded within the space of a few decades.

HIGH ERCALL CHARITIES

There are nine charities and they nearly all date from the 17th century. These are: -

High Ercall Grammar School - Richard Steventon by his will in 1652 devised an annuity out of land at Arleston, now sold, and £ 412.13.2d was invested in new consols, towards the maintenance of the Free Grammar School. Founded by Thomas Leake, one of the Barons of the Court of Exchequor in 1663, the original school was a thatched building a distance from the present site which is now converted into a bungalow. The school closed in 1887. Since then the building has been used for the storage of corn and as a community centre. It was agreed by the Charity Commissioners and the Governors to donate the monies received from the rent of the property situated at Sarney in Montgomeryshire. Total income £ 105.6.8d. Two scholars, a boy and a girl, sat before the vicar for the examination and if they passed they received a grant for two years to attend either Newport, Market Drayton or Wellington. Since the 1948 Education Act the money has been given to children of the parish who wish to further their education. Applications are considered at the end of August and grants of between £ 10 and £ 25 are awarded.

Poor Land and Consolidated Charities - the trustees apply the income as they think fit for the benefit of the poor; gifts of bedding, fuel, food etc. for the sick in the parish; grants for the benefit of persons engaged in or preparing for any trade or profession, for providing tools or books.

Subscriptions to Alms Houses and other Charitable Institutions - the Trust meets twice a year, November and St. Thomas's Day (December 21st). The Charities are:

The Poor Land - situated in the parish of Stoke-on-Tern, 3 acres let at £ 25 per annum

Thomas and Edward Thomas Charity £ 484 - annual income £ 12.2.4d

Rodenhurst Charity - £ 88 - annual income £ 2.4.6d Seven bequests consolidated £ 149 - annual income 3.14.4d. Total income 43.1.2d.

The Alms Houses - registered as High Ercall Hospital. Built in 1694 by Sir Francis Newport who became earl Bradford. The inscription in Latin over the centre passage door reads " Almighty God sustain us six people died tired of work, lived their lives praying and praising God until they departed. To poor people I give this house in my will. I dedicate this house Francis Friend from Bradford, died 1694, buried at Harvice, who gave his life to God, rest his soul."

There are seven dwellings in all, including one for the matron. They were maintained by the Estate until 1930.  
In 1922, a scheme was introduced by the Charity Commission to appoint a trust, which, after 1926, was elected. The tenants then lived rent free, the annuity being £ 60 for maintenance. There were 3 earth closets, no bath and no scullery, one pump to supply all the water for the seven houses. Up to the middle of the 18th century conditions were much worse - the dwellings were thatched, no tiles on the floor, only reeds, and the tables were made special: with rails to keep the inhabitant's feet warm. After the sale of the Estate a Rural Councillor, also a Trustee, objected. They were withdrawn and given to the Charity. Years passed by and they became very dilapidated, small wonder with only £ 60 a year to maintain them! It was reported by the then secretary at an annual parish meeting that, when they became vacant, the doors should be taken off to prevent any further lettings. However, they were saved by the introduction of a rent scheme. In 1956, money was borrowed - £ 4772.8.10d. at 71/2 %, - to repair and improve the properties; re-roof, build scullery, bathrooms. toilets, connect water supply and electricity and install fireplaces in all houses.

Again in 1970, extensive repairs and alterations were done: central heating, damp course, new staircases, floors retiled, roof treated for woodworm, decorated inside and painted outside. A further loan was required at 11%. It was then that the Trustees found it necessary to increase the rent to £ 3 plus £ 3 for heating. From 1954 until today, a total sum of about £ 18,000 has been spent upon the property. When this debt is cleared it is proposed to carry out further improvements to the property.

The Candleabra above the Font in the Church was removed from the Grammar-School-when it closed in 1887

Scholars who became famous

Dr. Witherington (Discovered Digitalis)

Cpt. Webb (First man to swim the Channel.

Cpt. Kilvert (Survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade)

THE GOSPEL TREE

It started life on the edge of the old moat that surrounded the Hall. If it could speak, much of village life could be told.

It saw the filling in of the moat and the making of the road as seen and used today. She saw her sister oak trees taken to be sawn up for various building and repair jobs on the Estate. And under her was the village penfold, to retain stray animals. Here were held weekend eel markets, the eels being caught at Ercall Mill in--a special trap, the foundations of which can still be seen. Where the new vicarage now stands, many a happy soul started *off* for home from a public house called "The Squirrel”, and many horses waiting to be shod at the old lacksmith's shop stamped their feet beneath its branches. Most notably, it watched Lord and Lady Barnard plant the three lime trees to commemorate their first visit to High Ercall in 1892.

During the Crimean War in 1856, a soldier was court martialled for giving a Russian soldier a chew of tobacco, and sentenced to 21 strokes with a cat o' nine tails whilst strapped to a gun carriage wheel. He was a cripple for life. This crippled soldier came to the village and took up residence in a cottage in Bodkin Lane, now called Silver Hill - the name was changed by a girl living in the lane who did not like the name Bodkin on her love letters. He became sexton at the church. The cottage where he lived was built in the sand rock, half a cave and half a house, with one room up and one room down.

At this time the Primitive Methodists were holding their meetings in the cottage. When the Duke of Cleveland heard about this, he at once gave notice for the meetings to cease, or else he would evict the tenant. The soldier agreed to the Duke's request.

The Methodists could find no other building in the village, so they agreed to hold their meetings in the open air beneath the oak tree. This went on for many years until a plot of land, not owned by the Duke, was offered at Osbaston, and accepted. A chapel was built on the site

in 1874 and much of the building work was done by volunteers This chapel is now part of a private dwelling.

It is for this reason that it is believed that the oak tree bears the name of The Gospel Oak. The plot of land under the tree is now registed as Common Land, by the Parish Council.

HIGH ERCALL VILLAGE HALLS

The first village hall was erected on the site of the old timber yard in Church Road in 1920. It was an old army hut which had been bought from Prees Heath Camp for £ 90. The dismantling and conveyance to the site cost £ 20 and the foundations and special fittings an extra £ 100. All this money was raised by voluntary subscriptions, whist drives and dances, which, together with concerts, had to be held in the school. In the winter months dancing classes were held in the Grammar School to the music of a melodeon. The first village hall was managed by a committee of 7 plus 4 trustees. Members paid a quarterly subscription of 2/6d, and the membership remained at around 100. Games were provided - billiards, cards, an air Fun etc., and a daily newspaper. Various entertainments were arranged, especially the social evenings, when local talent performed. One special item on any programme was the prize given to the best singer holding a three-weeks old pig with a large pink bow tied round its neck who invariably squealed throughout the whole performance! Favourite songs were "She had a hole in her stocking", "The little shirt my mother made for me", "The smoke goes up the chimney" etc..

The hall became the centre for various organisations such as the W.I., Agricultural Workers' Union, Political & Parish Council meetings. During the war it was used by the Home Guard, Civil Defence Nursing Division and for first-aid lectures.

The Committee organised dances for the Army, Air Force, and the Womens Air Force, proceeds from which were given to organisations such as the Comforts Fund, Soldiers & Sailors Fund etc.. Unfortunately, in late 1942, the hall was burned down and all the equipment was lost. With the £ 395 insurance money which was received a temporary hall was purchased.   
This cost £ 125, but the erection costs were £ 600. A parish meeting decided that the new site should be the playing field In 1945 A new club was registered - High Ercall Social Club - now with 12 committee members but still 4 trustees. Membership numbered 150, and the fee was still 2/6d. per quarter. The hall remained the community centre until 1965. By 1960 the hall had become very dilapidated, so the Committee decided to look into the possibility of building a new one. In order to be able to obtain a loan, the trustees had to be persuaded to resign. The parish council than *became* the custodians, and the way was near to obtaining a loan. A parish meeting approved plans to borrow 2,500 at 7%, the parish council to pay the interest and the committee the capital. An architect was engaged, plans , were passed and a contract for £ 8,000 to build was

accepted. This amount was covered by a grant of £ 4,000 from the Department of Education and Science, the loan of

£ 2,500 and *1", 1,500* raised by various activities, including grants from both parish and rural district councils.

At this time, a scheme also existed to build a hall at the rear of the Cleveland Arms, but planning permission was not obtained. £ 810 had been raised by a football lottery and the Cleveland Arms Committee decided to hand this over to the village hall funds and it was used for the additional expense of building the first car park. The hall was opened on December 10th, 1965. Since then, a considerable amount of money has been spent on additions and improvements and it has all been worthwhile, as the hall has been very well patronised and has proved to be a real community centre.

PARISH RENT DAYS

The rent days for the villages of High Ercall, Walton, Osbaston, Cotwall, Sherlow, Moortown and the greater part of Ellerdine and Rowton were held twice a year - December and June.

The annual rent varied from £ 7 to £ 780. Most farmers, smallholders and tradespeople made a day of it. After lunch, which was provided by the landowner, on the December rent day called by the cottagers and smallholders "Sheep­shearing day", a pigeon shoot was held. The shoot was held on the village football ground, now part of the Ridgeway Estate. The village boys used to hide behind the hedge some distance away to catch the crippled birds. After all the pigeons had been released, sparrows were released the same way.

The sparrows were caught the night before by huge nets spread along the corn stacks. The birds were disturbed by beating the stacks with long poles.

On the June rent day a cricket match and a skittle game were organised after lunch.

In his book " My Shropshire Days & Common Ways", John Beard, C.B.E., gives a description of how he was commissioned to pay the rent as a boy. It was usually paid by his mother or father. This particular day his father could not afford a day off work - he had enough to do to scrape the rent together:-   
"The night previous I was given instructions how to behave and deport myself in the presence of gentlemen I would be sure to meet, one of whom might be the Agent, so I was informed from all that I had heard; I was much afraid of him. My instructions were I had to tell the landlord or whoever belonged to the place that I had come to pay John Beards rent. Then I would be shown where to wait for our name to be called and go into a room where a gentleman would be seated at a table. My father warned me the night before, my mother repeated it the next morning, and my grandmother called me to her bedside ( she was old and bedridden at the time), that when I got into the room I had not to forget to ' make your obeisance as you go into the room', which meant that I had to raise the fingers of my right hand to my forelock with the arm bowed, then bring it down sharply to the right, and say "Good Morning, Sirs." Well, that was what I did. The money, gold and silver, was tied carefully in the knot of a spotless white handkerchief which I had to keep in my trouser pocket and not on any account to take it out until I got into the room. So there I was with three men sitting at the table, the knot untied and the gold and silver handed over to the men, who did their best to keep broad smiles. I got the receipt and a ticket for rolls and cheese. Grown up men and women received a ticket for lunch and a jar of ale, but that was not offered to me."

The last rent day in this parish was June 1930. Since then the whole of the estate has been sold and most of it is privately owned except for council property which consists of about 30 acres out of the original four and a half thousand.

WHEN HIGH ERCALL BECAME CONNECTED TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

It was in the year 1900 that High Ercall Post Office became a telegraph office, to receive and send messages by morse code from the Head Post Office at Wellington. The messages were received by the Sub-Postmaster and delivered to the person concerned by foot or bicycle, to a radius of 4 miles. Over 3 miles was extra postage. The telegram charge was 12 words for sixpence.

The Boer War casualty list was received and placed on a notice board every Sunday morning; this casualty list was also done during the 1914-18 war and placed outside the Post Office.

In 1906, the morse code system changed to the telephone and the lines were extended to Roden and Shawbury. The three offices were connected to a single line, each office receiving a code ring - one for High Ercall, two for Roden and three for Shawbury. This system remained the acme until 1924.

When the first manual telephone exchange was installed with seven subscribers, one subscriber paying for two telephones, the Post Office representative canvassed the area for *2* years to obtain eight subscribers before the exchange could be opened, and then it was only a 12 hour service, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.. A special apparatus had to be installed to receive a 48 hour service which was £ 1.00 a quarter extra. Those subscribers who were on the night service, from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. became a party line, 4 receiving code rings on the x side, and 4 receiving rings on the y side. This system was not very satisfactory, as if one subscribers line became faulty during the night, all 8 were out of order until the change-over in the morning

In 1938, the first automatic exchange was installed and opened with 30 subscribers and 2 lines to Wellington. It was built to provide 200 lines. The exchange generated its own electricity by means of a petrol engine and dynamo (this was the oil lamp and candle age) before the M.E.B. extended their power lines to High Ercall.

Since then, in about 1970, a new building, and a new automatic exchange has been installed to cater for 500 subscribers. The number of working lines is about 450, and several lines to Shrewsbury and Wellington.

This exchange provides STD facilities. With previous exchanges, calls via Wellington & Shrewsbury were extended by the operator.

HIGH ERCALL SCHOOL, 1901

My first introduction to High Ercall School was in 1901. From then until I left in 1910 the headmaster was Mr. E. Pitchford. During this time he introduced Cottage Gardening for the boys and Dairywork for the girls - which included butter and cheese making. The boys did the milking, the cows belonging to the headmaster. There was also bee-keeping.

Mr. Pitchford taught music (piano) and singing, and was

the choir master. He always had about 20 boys in the choir, aged between 6 and 14, and twelve to fourteen men.

He introduced a Penny Clothing Club as the village children at that time were of poor families, mainly agricultural workers.

Another of his activities was Clerk to the Oddfellows, an organisation which included a Health Service, and he encouraged parents to join it as it covered the attendance of a doctor, as and when required.

When Mr. Pitchford joined the school most of the children's parents had had little education, so he started evening classes for them. These were very successful for many years.

He was a strict disciplinarian - and on fine days the children were lined up in the playground (which was rough earth) for a clean shoes inspection. The classrooms had open fires and were very cold in winter, so the desks were

lined up round them. The toilets were primitive earth closets.

Mr. Pitchford organised Whist Drives and Dances which were held in the classrooms, to raise money for charities, there being no other place for entertainment. He also trained the children for the concerts which they gave.

Each year a boy and a girl were selected for the High Ercall School Exhibition and were coached for entry to Grammar School, either at Wellington, Newport or Market Drayton.

Children had to walk from a radius of 4 miles, mostly across fields, to school. They brought sandwiches for lunch, with cold tea in a bottle, and some had bread, dripping and turnip sandwiches.

No organised games were provided, so the boys played tip-cat, marbles, conkers, knife-it, rounders and hoops, and the girls skipping, hop-scotch and oranges and lemons.  
  
In corn-cutting time, the boys looked forward to riding the horses and leading them in the field for loading the corn.

In those days the boys always tipped their caps to the headmaster and his wife when out walking and the girls bobbed a little curtsey.

Although headmaster, Mr. Pitchford also held other private posts; e.g. he was Clerk to the Parish Council (salary £ 5 p.a., now £ 200), Clerk to the Oddfellows, Roddington Branch, Rate Collector for the Parish, and Organist and Choirmaster. He was the father of 8 children, of whom 2, a son and daughter, are still living.