

Grace Solesbury

Autumn 1999

I came to Bletsoe in 1927 from Rushden to live at 'The Haydens' where my father started a poultry farm. It came as a bit of a shock coming from a town house with running water and modern loos to bucket ones in a building in the garden.

When I started at Bletsoe School there were only nine on the register and this number went down to two during a measles epidemic. The teacher, Miss Holt, cycled out from Bedford each day. On my first day at school one of the girls asked me to go home with her and meet her mum. As it was wash day the table had two tin baths set out on it while at one end pastry was being rolled out with a bottle. The dentist would come to the school once a year to examine our teeth and send a report to the parents. He would return about two weeks later for the extractions (no fillings then). We were taken one at a time to the School House and sat down on a kitchen chair to have them out. We would return with a sweet, usually a pear drop.

At the outbreak of the Second World War I helped to distribute the evacuees around the village. At the end there were five little coloured children left, three boys and two girls, so I took them home with me. They announced that they were Catholics and refused to eat at the same table as us. This batch of children caused so much disruption in the village that they were moved on after about six weeks.

Church services during the war were often very moving. When the Rev. Cheetham gave out the final hymn for absent friends, *Holy Father, in your mercy*, tears would be rolling down the faces of wives and mothers.

I joined the Red Cross in 1943 until the end of the war. During and after the war, I helped other people with Whist Drives, Concerts etc. to start raising money for a Village Hall and the sum of £428 was handed to the Parish Council in about 1948.

Grace Solesbury, outside The Falcon in 1936

