

Toys were almost non-existent but we used to make up our own games. Hoops, nearly every kid had one, made by the local Blacksmiths of which there were two Mr Dunn and Mr Beer. Of course as there was no traffic on the roads in those days we used to roll our hoops anywhere especially if we were running an errand for somebody. We could always do the job faster that way. The hoops were passed down the family as they never wore out being made of iron.

We played Chestnuts and Marbles. Cat and Dog (this was a game we made ourselves, the cat was piece of wood about 1 inch diameter and 4 1/4inches to 5inches long pointed at each end. The dog was a piece of wood about 18inches long about as big around as your finger.

You made three rings on the road in the dust, (No tarmac in those days) the first ring about 1ft diameter, the third ring about 3ft, and the other halfway in between.

Standing back about 8ft we would take it in turns to throw the cat and try to get it in the middle ring. If you were lucky you would get three goes at knocking the cat, you would hit the cat on the pointed end with the dog which would make it bounce in the air then take a swipe at it and knock it as far as you could. Then you had to guess how many lengths of the dog away from the centre ring the cat had landed.

Other home made pastimes included kite flying for which we made our own kites. Bows and arrows, kicking a ball about or an old tin can if we had no ball.

Hopscotch, Leap Frog, Hunt the Hare (in this game if you are the hare you have to run like mad until someone catches you.) and a host of other games which came round in their season. We were always willing to run an errand for perhaps a few sweets or a cake, or if lucky, a penny.

My early school days didn't leave much impression, except my headmaster was Mr Ham who started teaching at High Bickington in 1881 and retired in 1925 He taught my father and I. Frank Gillard (The famous war correspondent,)taught me for a short spell as relief teacher. Miss Tucker also had a hand in my education at that time. We used 'Slates' to begin with - piece of slate with a wooden frame around and a slate pencil.

In the classroom was a grate in which coal burnt. The coal was kept in the classroom in a big pit under the floor, with a trap-door over the top. Many a time the coal-man brought in half-a-ton of coal in sacks and tipped it in this pit during lessons, just imagine the noise and dust! One of the bigger boys was appointed to go down into the pit to fill the coal scuttle and pass it up to the teacher, this was considered an honour. A chimney sweep called Joshua Folland, from Atherington, used come to do the chimneys from time to time.

The headmaster Mr Ham usually dressed in knee breeches and stockings with lace-up boots, butterfly collar and bow tie and flat cap. He used a stick cut out of the hedge as a cane, which I can ensure you, left it's mark!

The attendance officer Jim Westacott paid regular visits to the school and if you were absent for a day or two, he would soon be enquiring the reasons why. He travelled by pony and governess cart as he had to walk with crutches. (Photo of governess cart available.)