

St James' Church School

This school has been moved from Salop Street, Eve Hill in Dudley, where it was built in 1842, only 5 years after Victoria became Queen.

Until 1912 there were only small windows which did not open but thankfully, these were later replaced with the big windows shown, giving more light and air.

However, there was only gas lighting and the stoves were not always lit - this depended on the money available and whether Lord Dudley had donated coal from his local mines. Often the children had to 'do drill' like PE just to keep warm!

There is a partition in the middle of the room – each room either side held over 100 children being taught all at the same time in 3 or 4 classes.

The teacher was very strict and the children had to work hard at learning their spelling, times tables (shown on the slate below). They learnt a lot 'by rote' which meant by heart, chanting them out loud over and over again. They practised their writing on the slate as well and the teacher would get them to write on them by saying - 'Thin lines up, thick lines down, flowing like waves on the sea'.

On their slates they also worked on £ - s - d (pounds, shillings and pence), the money used before the decimal currency we use today. £ - s - d was used up until 1971.

A pound (£) was made up of 20 shillings(s) and 12 pennies (d) made a shilling (240 pennies in a pound).

When the school first opened in 1842, children had to pay to attend – they brought 2 pennies (2d) every Monday morning to give to the teacher. If they were too poor to pay, they were not able to go to school.

In 1912 schooling was finally made free. At the same time attendance was made compulsory, though for many years after this some of the St James pupils missed classes every September to go picking hops (to make beer) - a working holiday for all the family.

The school day started at 8.55am when a child who was the 'monitor' was chosen to ring the bell at the school gate and the pupils then had to line up in the yard. Other monitors would fill the inkwells for the older children and give out copybooks.

Teachers did not earn very much money as they usually depended on the funds available to the school. In 1860 a male teacher at this school was paid £60 per year, and a female only £30 which was well below the national teachers' pay average of £94 for men and £58 for women.

The teacher was usually a woman (because she was less costly to pay) and used her cane to point at the blackboard and of course as a punishment, hitting the children on their hands, bottom or the back of the legs if they had been doing something very naughty like

fighting or breaking school property. Generally children were not allowed to chatter and were expected to work hard while they were in the classroom.

Other punishments included making the child stand in the corner and bow his/her head in shame, or making them sit on the chair with their hands on their head - very tiring and uncomfortable!

At dinnertime, in the middle of the day, some children would eat their sandwiches wrapped in newspaper but others would have to go home and run errands like taking their father's dinner to him at work. Lessons started again at 2 o'clock until 4 o'clock when they were expected to file out quietly, efficiently and decently as 'silent as a mouse'.

When visiting the school you will be able to take part in a lesson as if you were a pupil in the nineteenth century - very different from life in school today.