

The Tale of Bertie Woods

By Janet Archer

Bertie Alfred Woods was born in 1894 to Samuel Woods and Lydia Elizabeth Seaman. The family lived in Barn Cottage and there were at least 14 children, most of whom went to Salle School.

Bertie first attended school in 1899 :-

"Admitted Bertie Woods this week. He is over five years old and can do nothing."

In January 1900 Bertie and two of his sisters Kate and Ethel are reported as absent with whooping cough but they apparently have not been to school since the previous August! March 23rd brings the comment that Bertie and Ethel are away again.

At the end of 1891 Mary Jane Lomax had taken over the position of mistress at Salle School. Her first tasks recorded in the log book are ruling two dozen slates and drawing up a new timetable. She lived in the School House and stayed at Salle School until the end of 1903, so it is probably Mary Lomax who appears in this school photograph from 1900, and she will have written the above comment about Bertie.

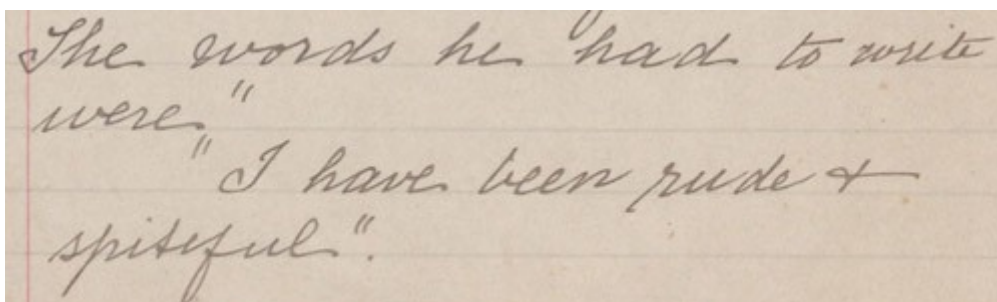


Most entries in the Salle and Reepham logbooks are mundane, daily records of attendance, closures due to sickness or seaside treats, and visits from school managers and inspectors. So the following incident is unusual.

From 1903 the schoolmistress was Minnie Elizabeth Druitt and she recorded the following in the log book in 1906. (By this time Bertie is now about 12 years old and probably keen to leave school and some of his absences may have been to earn extra money for his family.)

"Am sorry to say that Bertie Woods who is the most indolent boy in the school- is also very spiteful (going home) to young children & girls- Wrote a note to his parents but only received a rude answer."

When he next came to school the mistress asked him to write an apology on his slate.



The words he had to write were, "I have been rude & spiteful".

His mother came the following day and said he should sooner leave than write it. Accordingly she took him out of school and the mistress marked him left.

Both Bertie and his brother Jesse left Salle School and instead went to Reepham School (St. Mary's on Norwich Road) where Richard Cornall was the master.

When the First World War began Bertie enlisted in the 5th Norfolks at Dereham. Later he served with the Worcestershire Regiment. He is recorded as having died of wounds, age 23, in August 1917 and was buried in Mendinghem Military Cemetery, Belgium.

His name is remembered on the memorial inside Salle Church, and he has a memorial with his mother and father in Salle churchyard.

Information from National School Admission Registers & Log-Books, 1870-1914, @findmypast.co.uk; military information from ancestry.co.uk

Note :

Bandaghem, like Dozinghem and Mendinghem, were the popular names given by the troops to groups of casualty clearing stations posted to this area of Belgium during the First World War. The sites were later used as military cemeteries near Poperinge in West Flanders.