



Cynthia Mary Williams, Miss Bass...

Teacher at Benfleet
Junior School from
1943 – 1964

A Benfleet teacher who had moved to pastures new almost half a century ago - a chance meeting with Archive member John Downer led to a renewed acquaintance and memories shared!

Not a Benfleet native, Miss Bass was born in Peterborough and came straight from teacher training at Hockerill College, Bishop's Stortford to Benfleet Junior School in 1943. She remembered seeing Benfleet for the first time. Arriving by train -

"I looked out of the window and saw the muddy creek I wondered where I had come to.....I was surprised that many of the roads were unmade"



Many Benfleet roads were unmade – this was Kents Hill Road in 1953 (photo Kathy Dyer)

Miss Bass's classes had about 40 children and were housed in the old library across the High Road. (The present site of the new library) The air raid shelter for the school was by the new building at the bottom of the playground by the brook.



“When the air raid warning sounded I had to get my class out of the hut across the road to the playground. The County Council wanted to know how long it took to get the last child into the shelter. It was a ridiculously long time. On one occasion we were crossing the road when the plane went over.....I don't know how much protection the air raid shelter would have given the children as you could pull bricks out of the wall.”



The old library where Miss Bass taught

She remembered wartime shortages - *“Paper was in short supply and children's painting would be done on old newspapers with powder paint. Pencils had to be about an inch long before you could get a new one.”*

Miss Bass specialised in PE and had a few triumphs with the Netball Team. After World War II many things were in short supply, so much so that the PE skirts the netball team wore were made from blackout material! Benfleet School at this time taught pupils until they were of an age to start work. The pupils in the pictures shortly after the war were about 13 years old.



Benfleet School Netball Team 1945. Miss Bass centre, back row



Winners of The Benfleet Shield 1946 Miss Bass is on the left

Fast forward to 1960 and Miss Bass, now Mrs. Williams, is still behind a successful team!

South Benfleet Junior School

Winners of the South East Essex Schools Netball Rally in 1960

Shiner & Holmes - courtesy of Sandra Shortell (nee Collins)



In the picture:

Back Row - from left to right - Gillian Hart, Doreen White, Susan Hill, Miss Bass, Sandra Collins, Marian Chalkley, Diana Wilson
Front Row - from left to right - Janet Bridgeman, Ann Gibbs

Although Cynthia Williams left South Benfleet School in 1964 she continued to teach.

She passed away on 16th December 2016, age 93.

When her death was announced we learned from the local paper that she had been Deputy Head Teacher of Holt Farm Junior School, Rochford

Benfleet School Reception Centre For Flood Victims 1953

A Teacher's Memories of the Canvey flood

It was while still teaching in Benfleet that Miss Bass was to witness the trauma of the devastating Canvey Island Flood. She shared her memories of the rescue efforts with the Archive -

“On this particular Sunday afternoon some friends had told me the news that Canvey Island was flooded and schools were being opened as rest centres.



The flood from Benfleet Downs (Gilbert Wines)

“I went with Dora Harrison to find out what was happening as the headmaster’s wife, Mrs Wood, was concerned as her husband had been contacted very early Sunday morning to open the school. She had not heard from him since then.

“We came back from Hadleigh by bus but they were only going as far as the top of Bread and Cheese Hill. We made our way to the school and found that it had become a reception centre for flood casualties. The WVS were cooking food so we stayed to help.

“The school became a centre for help, we dried the people out that had been evacuated from Canvey Island and King John School received them from us

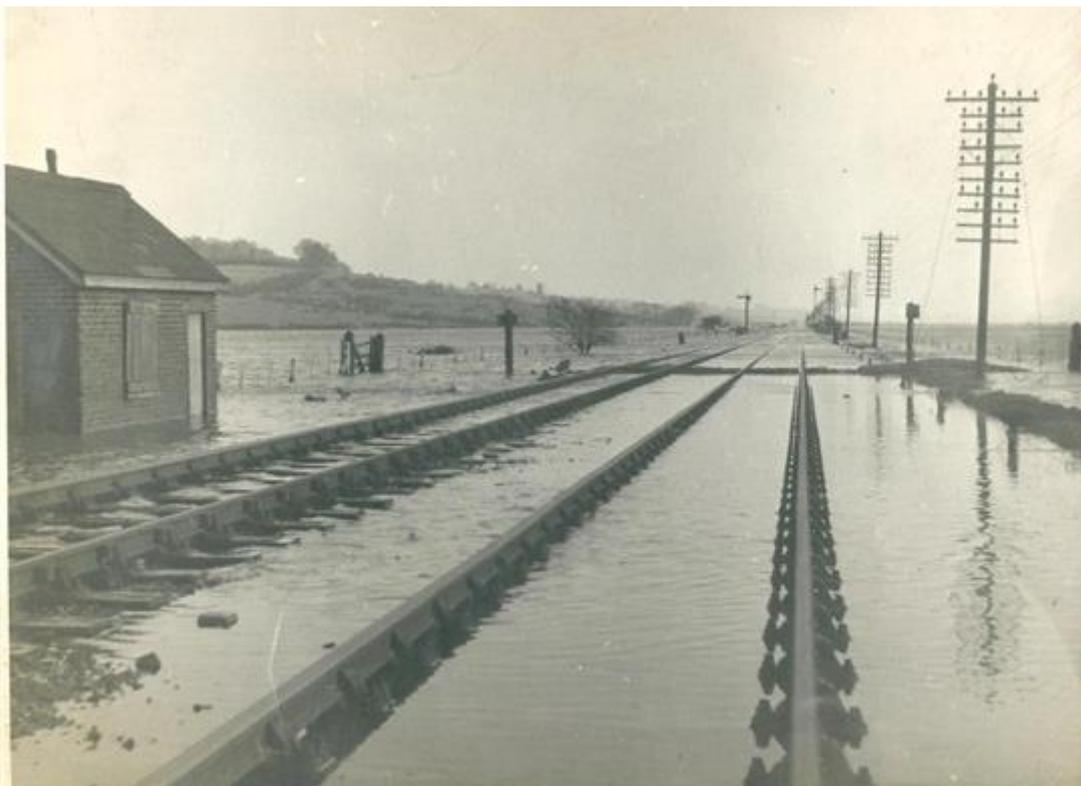
“The WVS cooked breakfast on Monday morning so the men could go to work. The Authorities were afraid that the bridge over Benfleet Creek would collapse as the Army lorries had been using it.



'An official at the refugee centre in Benfleet school giving directions to the refugees from Canvey Island.'

Note: King John School was going to be officially opened on the Monday but, as it was, the school's opening was delayed for four weeks.

Headmaster, Mr Bert.Evans, who died in 1973, received an MBE for his hard work on the events of that night and the following weeks.



“The railway line at Benfleet was flooded towards Leigh. We slept on the school dining room tables and we did not get back home until the Wednesday”.

(Pic.Gilbert Wines)