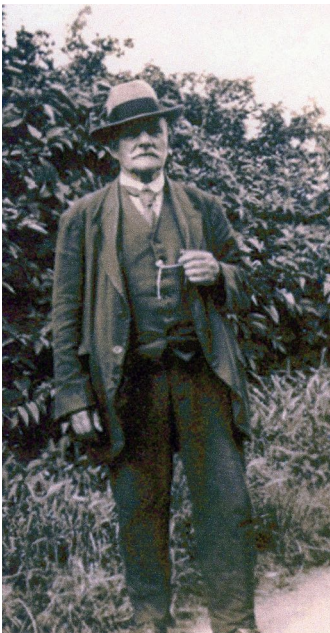




Mrs Christmas

A Fondly remembered Head Teacher

In 1939, a young Tom Youd was evacuated from North London to Earith. He was a pupil at a school where all the children were evacuated and, as he was a junior school pupil he was packed off to Earith to find a family, whereas the senior children were taken in by families in Bluntisham.



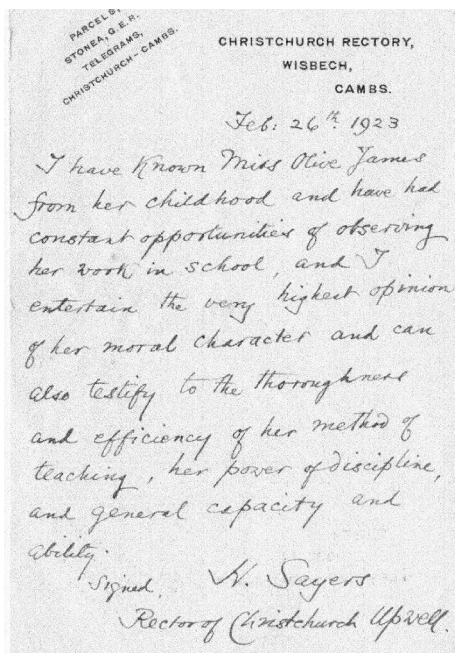
The James Family

The family that took Tom in were the James family of Earith. Mr John James (photo left) , his wife Eliza and their three adult daughters - Grace, Annie (Betty) and Olive. Two of the daughters were headteachers at the two local schools when Tom arrived. Grace being at the School in Bluntisham and Olive being at the school at Colne.

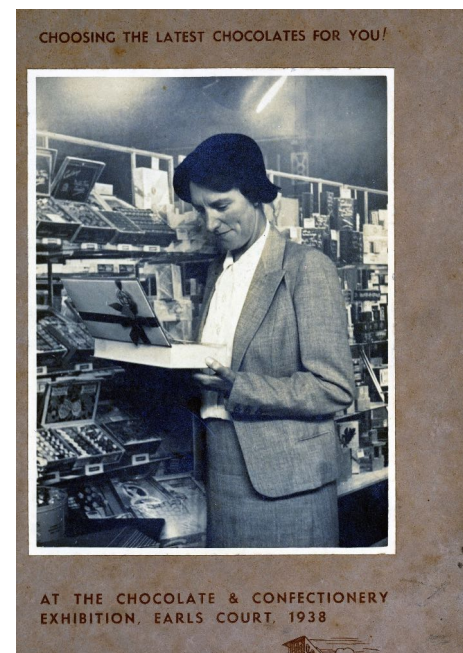
The family lived in Earith, and the 1901 census shows that all three daughters were born in Earith and were contemporaries of Dorothy L Sayers and her family who were living in the Rectory in Bluntisham at the same time. It is thought that the photograph at the start of this document shows Grace James (seated third from the left) and her sisters in the Rectory Garden around 1910 when Dorothy L Sayers was living at the Rectory.

Both Grace and Olive appear to have both studied at Cambridge, with Grace going to Girton College and Olive studying at Homerton. By the time that Tom arrived in 1939 both were established in their positions in the local schools and he recalls that they were both very strict and took no nonsense from a young lad from London.

In the 1911 census Grace James was already teaching, she was living with her mother's family and teaching at a school in Somersham. Olive and Annie were still living in Earith with their parents and Dorothy L Sayers was still living in the Rectory with her family. The relationship between the two families was clear, the following image is a copy of a reference that Reverend Sayers provided for Olive James in 1923 to support her application for a new role



Reference from Rev'd Sayers



Olive Chambers (nee James)

Grace James married Thomas Christmas in 1928 when she was 37 years old and they lived at Longacres on Colne Road, Thomas Christmas was a farmer and Grace a teacher. It is not clear when Grace started to work at the school in Bluntisham but it was probably during the 1920's.

She was certainly in post when Ernest Ward attended Bluntisham School, in his book "Bluntisham - A Village Remembered" he writes "Mrs Christmas was an excellent teacher, although she was rather strict" Ernest Ward was born in 1920 and attended Bluntisham school up until he was around 14.

Alec Moore in his memoir "Boys From Bluntisham" writes that he attended the school in the early 1930's along with David Godfrey "The tiny school was staffed by Mrs Christmas, the headmistress and Miss Pratt and a middle class teacher"

It is clear from all anecdotal accounts that Mrs Christmas was a well respected teacher, who was held in great affection by all those that knew her or who had attended her school. If any one else has any memories of Mrs Christmas we would love to hear about them.

Grace Christmas died in 1949 at the relatively young age of 58. It is evident from the cutting below, taken from the Hunts Post in 1949 that Grace Christmas was held in great regard in the village, it is a report of her funeral held at the Baptist Church in 1949.

The photograph opposite is of Grace, estimated to have been taken sometime in the 1930's.

Grace is buried in the graveyard at the Baptist Church alongside her husband Thomas Christmas, and in full view of the Old School.

Perhaps next time you walk past, pause a while to say hello to Mrs Christmas, and thank her for her contribution to our village.



Hunts Post Thursday July 14

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Bluntisham's tributes to Headmistress

Tribute to the great service she had given to the School during the many years she was head mistress was paid by the Rev. R. F. McNeill at the combined Church and Chapel service at the funeral on Thursday of Mrs. Grace A. Christmas, wife of Mr. T. S. Christmas and daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John James.

The Rector reminded a large congregation that many of Mrs. Christmas's old scholars now had their own children attending the school, and he spoke of the affection and respect which scholars past and present had for her. Prayers were led by the Rev. G. H. Feakin, and Miss Game, as organist, accompanied the singing of the Crimond.

As the coffin was carried into the Chapel a guard of honour was formed by School Managers, Parish Councillors and schoolchildren. More than 70 wreaths lined the pathway leading to the Chapel entrance. The mourners were: the widow, Mrs. B. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Chambers (brother-in-law and sisters); Mr. and Mrs. L. Christmas, Mr. and Mrs. H. Gautrey, Mr. and Mrs. Ring (brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law); Mr. Patrick Donovan and Mr. and Mrs. Donovan (friends); Mr. and Mrs. O. Freeman (cousins, also representing cousins at Cambridge); Mrs. Burns, Mrs. Richardson, Miss Pratt, Mr. and Mrs. W. Smith and Mr. R. Smith (friends).

Parish Councillors present were: Mr. T. Topper, Mr. S. Searle, Mr. A. Smith, Mr. G. Gaunt (also representing the local Conservative and Liberal National branches), Mr. Baker (clerk) and Mr. F. Godfrey, Mr. F. Searle and Mr. Rose (also School Managers).

Other managers were: Mr. Cyril Godfrey (also representing the County Council), and Miss Goodby. Also present were: Mr. T. Douglas (representing the Director of Education and the Education Committee), Miss McKenzie (H.M. Inspector of Schools), Mr. Abbott (School Attendance Officer), Mr. J. A. Searle (friend and also representing St. Ives R.D.C.), Mr. A. Fitch (Chairman of Colne School Managers).

School children accompanied by Mrs. Prior and Mrs. Lord, were: Brenda Galley, Joan Northfield, Sylvia Smith, Mary Gwill, Margaret Darrington, Walter Edwards, Allan Hart, Barry Laid (old scholar), Nancy Barnett, Stella Laid, Pamela Jones, Kenneth Lincoln, David Allgood and Peggy Lincoln (old scholar). Children from Colne School were accompanied by Mrs. Rose, and Miss Croft.

Hunts. Teachers Appeal for more members

Breaking away from the usual practice of meeting at a school building, the County Teachers' Association met on Saturday at the George Hotel, Huntingdon, and during a break in coffee was served, members had better opportunities of getting together than normal meetings provide.

About fifty members present stood in a silent tribute to their late colleague, Mrs. Christmas, of Bluntisham. Reports on a special membership conference at Clonmelton and Mr. Stoughton, who appealed for the Association's support, and the teacher representatives on the Education Committee, Miss Thackray, Mr. W. Vessey Smith, and Miss Scott, were given.

Many teachers took part in the discussion on the re-vised syllabus used in our Primary Schools. A sub-committee, consisting of Miss Scott, Miss Wilson, Mr. Allen, Mr. Woodcock, Mrs. Robinson, and officers, was set up to deal with the Association's social activities.

M.P.'S VISIT
It was reported that J. Kenneth Lindsay, M.P., who addressed a public meeting during the refresher-course teachers, which is being held in September. The course will provide lectures for teachers of infants, juniors and seniors, and lectures on visual aids and broadcasting.

On the proposition of W. T. Carter, it was agreed to send a parting gift of book tokens to Mr. H. O. Fletcher, school dentist, who is giving up his appointment in the county.

Mr. M. H. Stephenson urged members to bring before members the importance of membership of the National Union of Teachers, and gave a resume of the work of the Union's law section protecting teachers' interests.

County dental officer leaves in August

Drift of County dental officers to private practice since the introduction of the National Health Service now being felt in Huntingdon. When Mr. H. G. L. Fletcher, County dental officer for the last 19 years resigns at the end of August to take up a private practice in Kent, the County will be left with one dental officer.



Thank you to Tom Youd for sharing his memories of Grace Christmas, the photographs and the press cuttings