

NOTES FROM THORNHAM

An unusually dramatic headline appeared on page 5 of the *Diss Express* of 9th July 1937: "Fire at Thornham: village school destroyed". It went on to report that on the Tuesday night a passer-by had seen flames in the roof of the schoolroom. He alerted Mrs Florence Skerritt, the headmistress, and rode on to the village to tell PC Cottrell who summoned the Eye fire brigade and police force. By the time the fire engine arrived the schoolroom was reduced to a shell.

Everything including the furniture, piano and harmonium was



The old wooden fingerpost, the still-familiar schoolhouse and, to the left, the schoolroom which existed until 1937.

lost except for the school records and County Library books which PC Cottrell retrieved from the flames. The schoolhouse was only saved with difficulty.

My photo shows the school as it had been. The house was divided between the small caretaker's cottage on the right and the headmistress's cottage on the left. The schoolroom is beyond. The toilets were down a path at the back of the school.

Although there had been earlier part-time schools in the parishes, it was not until the Elementary Education Acts of 1870 and 1880 that attendance became both free and compulsory for 5 to 10 year-olds. To provide for this, in 1874 and 1904 Lord Henniker enlarged and improved an earlier building to create the Thornham National School (Mixed) with a capacity of 90 pupils.

In its heyday there had been 70 or 80 children on the register but by 1937 it was down to 26, and only three months before the fire Miss Florence Rose who had been assistant teacher for 30 years was re-deployed to Eye National School.

Olive Howlett remembers walking to school the day after the fire and being told about it by a passing cyclist who said she had better return home. After a time at the Village Hall the children were sent to Thorndon School.

APRIL EVENTS IN THE THORNHAMS ● **Thurs 11th:** Steam engine 61306 London to Norwich and return ● **Fri 26th:** Parish Hall film, 7.30pm, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, £5, booking essential, new number 07858 934440