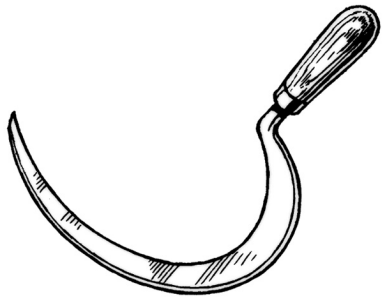
THE

BURSTON SCHOOL STRIKE

1914 TO 1939

AN ACCOUNT OF THE FIGHT FOR PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN NORFOLK

Including a brief HISTORY OF THE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS' UNION and THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS



PUBLISHED BY SERTUC

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FOREWORD

BURSTON is a Norfolk village near Diss and close to the border with Suffolk.

The story of the Burston School Strike is inspiring, encouraging and a testament to the courage and determination of the children and their parents.

Life was hard in rural England, exploitation was severe and the rise of the Agricultural Workers Union, along with the changing political circumstances did much to alleviate this.

But this is not only a report of trade union organisation, it is also the tale of the commitment of the Higdons as educators to enriching and improving the children's lives and increasing their chance of a better life.

And finally, it is a story of solidarity, whether of Burston's residents sharing the fines imposed upon their number by the establishment, or of the solidarity for the strike that flooded in from around the country and the world from political organisations, trade unions and individuals.

This booklet is not intended to be the last word in the story, nor to compete with the many other reports and research. Rather we look at the strike in the historical and political context provided by the contemporaneous circumstances, national and international.

However, I must note that this booklet did not write itself.

The research and writing was carried out by journalist and writer PETA STEEL to whom I express my sincere gratitude for her commitment and skill.

I know it will add to the knowledge and pride of workers in our Region in our past, and reinforce our commitment to ensure a better world for future generations.

Megan Dobney
SERTUC Regional Secretary
September 2016

Our previous publications celebrating the campaigning and fight of workers in our Region are *The Spithead and Nore Mutinies of 1797* and *The Levellers Movement*. Both are available free at https://sertucresources.wordpress.com/sertuc-publications-general/

THE BURSTON SCHOOL STRIKE 1914 TO 1939

Of the poor's poverty the causes moot,
The Parson scarcely cares to know the root.
Tom Higdon

THE classroom in the village school was nearly empty, outside could be heard the voices of children marching and singing as waving flags they paraded around the village green in front of the school. On Wednesday 1 April 1914, 66 pupils of the 72 attending the Burston village school in Norfolk went out on strike. They were taking action to get their teacher Kitty Higdon reinstated following her dismissal by the school's management committee.

The strike which was to end some 25 years later is the longest to take place in this country's history. It was to cause a wave of support that would echo not only locally but nationally and internationally. Sylvia Pankhurst, Labour leader George Lansbury, Tom Mann MP and Leo Tolstoy, the son of the Russian playwright, were to become some of the strikers' most ardent supporters, lending their voices to the protest and raising money to help them.

The strike wasn't just about school children fighting against their teachers' dismissal, it epitomised the battle against the injustice and the way in which agricultural workers and their families had been treated by the ruling classes, which included the church. It was

a fight to get a more equal life for people who had been kept subject to the whims and vagaries of the landlords and wealthy farmers. In many ways it was a rebellion against a form of life that still echoed the attitudes of the middle ages, with workers and their families tied to the strings of those who employed them.

The lives of the children in that area were as much attached to the needs and requirements of the farmers and landlords as those of their parents. Although the 1902 Parliamentary Education Bill offered education to working class children, 'education' meant they were not expected to receive more than basic instruction, an education to make them fit for the lives they were already living and were expected to live. In the case of the children living in the agricultural areas, they were still expected to put working on the fields before the need to get an education. The appointments of Annie Higdon (known as Kitty) as headmistress and her husband Tom as an assistant teacher were to change the lives of the pupils and their parents in Burston.

The Higdons arrived at the school on 31 January 1911 following a dispute with the Norfolk Education Committee over the way in which they had run their previous school, Wood Dalling County, where they had sided with the farm labourers and fought to improve the cold, insanitary conditions of the school. They had protested at the way in which farmers had illegally prevented children attending school by taking them out of the classroom to work on the land when they needed them. The school management had been made up of the parson and local farmers and landowners, the row between them and the Higdons had led to a total breakdown in relations leading to the Education Committee giving them the

choice of either accepting dismissal or moving to another local school. By the time they left conditions at the school had been vastly improved, and a local branch of the Agricultural Workers Union had been set up by Tom Higdon.

First appearances taken by the Higdons of a pretty village made up of pink-washed cottages were revealed to be wrong; hidden behind this bucolic vista were dilapidated cottages which were little more than squalid buildings with holes in the roofs and damp dark rooms. These were tithe cottages owned by the workers' employers who could sack them from their jobs and throw them out of their homes. At the same time they were still required to pay rents. A government report of 1867 had criticised the supply of cottages and stated that they were 'in very bad order, small and overcrowded'. Nothing much had been done to improve them. It was not surprising that the newly formed Agricultural Workers Union saw the area as being ripe for recruitment. At that stage there were no Labourers' Union branches anywhere in the area with the result that wages were low.

Conditions at Burston School were as bad, if not worse than those at Wood Dalling. Higdon himself was to describe the school premises as being: "ill-lighted, ill-drained, badly heated and wretchedly ventilated". The Higdons had no doubt, as Tom claimed, that they had to try and improve things: "thus there was much radical wrong, which for conscience sake, as well as for all practical and healthful reasons, must needs be faced".

The Higdons, with Tom acting again as a local organiser for the Agricultural Workers, once more allied themselves with the landworkers, and were soon locked in conflict with the newly arrived

rector, the Reverend Charles Tucker Eland, who had been appointed chairman of the School Managing Body. Many of the Church's previous powers had been lost to the parish council, and Eland was determined to recover them. He looked on himself as having the rank of an estate owner demanding deference and recognition for his position which he saw as leading the local community. His own lifestyle with a large annual salary of £581 and the provision of a comfortable rectory bore little in common with those of the farm labourers and their families who barely existed on an average wage of £35 a year; most of them surviving by planting their own vegetables on strips of 'glebe land' rented out to them. The Rev Eland who owned 54 acres of glebe land, part of his parson's 'living', was one of the foremost owners. He believed that education at the school should be based on teaching children what they needed to know and which would not raise any aspirations. They should know their place, and that was to work for their 'betters'.

Although there had been improvements in the provision of education, the attitude that it was only to be a basic one fit for what they were expected to do with their lives was as prevalent in Burston as it had been at Dalling amongst those who ran the school. The Higdon's approach to education was totally different with children encouraged to enjoy lessons and to imagine how they could achieve better lives through receiving and using education to enable them to do so. The Higdons were both Christian and Socialist and wanted to ensure that the next generations would not accept the status quo but would seek more fulfilling lives.

Their beliefs were totally opposite to those of the Rev Eland

who expected respect as an entitlement; the Higdons believed that it had to be won, and that everyone both rich and poor should be treated with respect. Kitty soon became unpopular with Eland after she failed to curtsey to his wife, an action that he looked on as being a great insult to his dignity. She in turn had also been shocked to make her first acquaintance with him when he arrived at the school demanding to see the registers. The fact that the Higdons did not attend his church, and that they attended a small chapel, added to Eland's list of complaints against the couple; they in turn felt that Eland was more concerned at driving people in to the church than leading them there.

The Higdons, who were still depressed from their departure from their previous school were quick to react to the appalling conditions and tried to make the schoolroom as habitable as possible. Mrs Higdon's decision to light a fire so that children could dry their clothes off after their long walks through the rain to school, and to provide hot water for bathing those children whose hair was infested with lice, a common occurrence in those days, was criticised on the basis that she had not asked permission to do so.

The Higdon's felt they had a moral duty to change the environment that the children were being brought up in. Writing in his book *The Burston Rebellion* Thomas Higdon recalled: "Indeed on looking round and looking back, it seems to be the place the H's had been providently directed for these very special purposes".

The Higdons kept up a steady stream of complaints about the state of the school and the way in which the farmers were pulling children out of school to work for them. They quickly won the support and the trust of the children's parents, and the children

themselves who revelled in what they were learning and in the way they were treated by people who they felt cared for them. For the first time children found they were being dealt with on a 'one to one' basis and were being encouraged to take pleasure in their classes.

Kitty taught the children how to play the organ, and to type and to do shorthand. There was even an Esperanto class and older boys learned how to develop photos in a darkroom. Realising that some of the pupils had little food, Kitty often made sure that there was a stew bubbling away. Pieces of orange or cake were on hand to be given out.

One of the pupils recalled: "She was an extremely efficient teacher. For example we were taught... very elementary, but at least we did learn some French, we learnt some Russian". (Later some Russian boys would board with the Higdons and attend the school.)

It wasn't simply education they were being taught, they were also learning a sense of fair play and justice; and more importantly that there was a life outside Burston, and there were opportunities to be taken other than working on the land for other people. It was a form of practical socialism. Attendance rose as the children and their parents realised how much education could help them.

At the same time that the Higdons were earning the ire and displeasure of the school management committee under Rev Eland, Higdon himself was becoming even more unpopular with the local farmers having become involved with the local agricultural workers. Tom Higdon decided to stand for the parish council, dominated by Eland and the land owners, and encouraged other villagers to stand. They were duly elected with a huge majority, throwing out the previous incumbents.

Although Eland and his friends had been thrown off the parish council, he and some of the former councillors still held positions on the school management committee and now they aimed their anger at Mrs Higdon as a way at getting back at her husband.

A series of complaints was manufactured: Mrs Higdon was accused of being discourteous to the management when they had told her off for lighting a fire in the school; of supposed cruelty to two girls from Barnado by beating them as a punishment for lying and having left them in school with wet hair, and of writing letters of complaints about their foster mother; the final charge was that Kitty had been rude to school managers.

Using these complaints as the basis of their action they demanded that the Higdons be dismissed from their jobs. Kitty and Tom responded that there should be an inquiry set up to look in to the complaint, which was duly arranged. Kitty was represented by the National Union of Teachers. She was cleared of the charges of hitting and mistreating the two Barnardo girls and of contravening the rules by lighting the school room fire, but was found guilty of being discourteous to the management committee. This was enough for the Higdons to be given three months' notice, which despite offers of support from the NUT to continue fighting, they duly and very reluctantly accepted. A leaving date for the end of March was fixed upon, and the Higdons started to pack up their equipment.

The children themselves had no doubt of the Higdons' innocence. Emily Wilby, a pupil, wrote: "We came on strike on April 1 1914. We came on strike because our governess and master were dismissed from the council school unjustly". The children held

the 'Parson' as being responsible for fabricating the untruths. The Higdons, she said, had no idea that the children were going to go on strike: "Governess did not know we were going on strike. She brought us all some Easter Eggs and oranges the last day we were at council school."

As Emily described it, the strike was planned meticulously: "Violet brought a paper to school with all our names on it and all those who were going to strike had to put a cross against their name".

On 1 April, on entering the school room with the new teacher, the management committee found the classroom nearly empty. The words 'we are going on strike tomorrow' written the previous night were displayed on the blackboard. Becoming aware of a clamour outside the school they emerged to find a group of children, helped by their parents and led by Violet Potter playing her accordion, marching down the street playing instruments and carrying placards declaring 'We want our teachers back'. A banner in front read 'Justice'. Marching through the village, the young protesters came upon another sign 'Victory' which had been put up in the garden of the foster mother of the two Barnardo children; the pupils duly uprooted it and added it to their own protest. The march took them past Rev Eland's house where they stopped to boo.

The march ended in a public open air meeting with the Higdons giving an emotional thanks to the children and their parents; and the parents, led by George Durbridge a fishmonger, declared their wish to have the Higdons continue as teachers to their children, rather than have someone new, a stranger who they didn't know, selected by a committee in whom they had no confidence, come in and take over.

The school would continue under a makeshift tent set up on the village green. The 66 pupils would be taught by the Higdons, for whom a cottage was found. Unpaid, the NUT later arranged for Kitty to receive payment from its victimisation fund. The classroom might have been temporary but the way it was run at Kitty Higdon's insistence with strict discipline and procedures, showed that it was going to stay. Registers were kept and a timetable for classes, including sports and games drawn up. The remaining children who had voted not to go on strike continued with their education in the old school. The school continued on the green and as winter approached, new premises were found in an old unused workshop facing it.

The school management committee was determined to stop the strike. Eighteen parents were summoned to court and fined for not sending their children to the state recognised school. Violet Potter's father was one of those to be fined. These fines and subsequent ones were paid by collections taken outside the court room from members of the local villages and eventually from the wider public as stories about the strike spread. News of the strike had already reached national level by 3 April, with one paper recording the belief that the decision to sack the teachers had been political.

The parents' determination to make sure that their children would continue being taught by the Higdons eventually persuaded the judiciary that further attempts to coerce and fine them would be futile. Further cases were dropped. A school inspector visited and couldn't find any fault with the teaching. Although legal attempts had failed, the farmers continued to take action by sacking their

employees, threatening to evict them and taking over their glebe land. The Rev Eland cancelled the leases on his glebe property, threw the workers off the land, and evicted them. This was the first time that a Rector had taken such action putting into jeopardy the lives and well being of the workers and their families.

Emily Wilby was to write: "He took some Glebe land away from three poor men. One of the men was blind; the parson took his Glebe because he lent us his shop for a strike school. He took Mr Harry Lings Glebe away because he would not let daughter go to the mock inquiry or go himself to tell a lie. He took Mr Garnham's Glebe away because he attended the strike school meetings".

Eland also sacked without notice two of the strike parents who received payment for scavenging at the school. The school caretaker was also threatened with being dismissed if she didn't send her child back to the council school. She refused to change her mind, Eland eventually backed down and the caretaker's child continued at the strike school. Ambrose Sandy, the blind man, a friend of the Higdons who had lent them the workshop, was forced to leave the village, departing before the eviction took place.

News of the strike school spread, particularly among the trade union and labour movement and quickly caught the imagination of the wider public. On Sunday 14 July 1914 the first of what would be many great demonstrations took place on the green. Eighteen trade union banners were placed around it, a brass band from Norwich played and a special train from London brought down another brass band and hundreds of railwaymen who had, as it was described: "taken the cause of Burston to their hearts". There were speeches,

children sang and there was country dancing.

The suffragette and socialist Sylvia Pankhurst brought the politicians George Lansbury and Tom Mann MP with her to visit, as Burston became a regular place for members of the newly formed Labour Party locally and nationally to gather with the workers on the village green. Philip Snowden, Labour's future Chancellor of the Exchequer came down with his comrades and got off the train to be met by a band. News of the children's strike also spread overseas and Leo Tolstoy, the son of the author of *War and Peace*, sent monies over to help the school.

On Tuesday 28 July, the First World War began. The advent of the war and the demands on agriculture to provide food to the forces meant that workers became a resource to work on the land, a point made by Tom Higdon as the farmers were forced to re-employ those able bodied men not serving in the forces. Better wages were negotiated as the Agricultural Union opened more branches in the area.

With the departure of Ambrose Sandy, the strike school, now nearing its first birthday, continued in a wooden shack specially constructed for them. In 1917 following the suggestion of Kitty Higdon, a new premise was built, raised from donations following a National Appeal. Trade unions and branches of the Labour Party, and other supporters across the country, including Scotland, raised over £1,250. Equipped with proper facilities it was opened by strike leader Violet Potter on 13 May with the words: "with love and thankfulness I declare this school open to be a hall of Freedom".

The foundation stone was laid by George Lansbury. Amongst the crowds including trade union and Labour Party brass bands,

demonstrators from co-operative parties and local Labour Party groups throughout London and the South and East gathered there that day were Sylvia Pankhurst and a party of supporters from London. The Agricultural Workers proudly unfurled their new banner.

Writing for *The Woman's Dreadnought* Pankhurst described the scene as they arrived at the green: "There was the old carpenter's shop which first housed the strike school. Here was the temporary wooden structure erected for the scholars when they were obliged to leave the carpenter's shop. And there, all new and sharp cut, with its windows unglazed, and woodwork yet unpainted was the new Strike School.

"A thousand people assembled on the green to hear Violet Potter open the school... and to see her lead in the 50 little scholars."

Fixed to the front wall of the strike school are many impressive plaques commemorating the names of the individuals and groups who contributed to its erection. One name thus recorded is that of Leo Tolstoy. Another includes the names of the National Committee set up to raise the money to run and build the school. The president was George Lansbury, later head of the Labour Party; Tom Higdon's name is also recorded.

The bitterness caused by Eland's treatment of the school's supporters deepened. The First World War had a profound effect on the area. The Higdons took opposing views on the war with Tom Higdon helping to recruit for the army and Kitty being bitterly opposed as she tried to teach the children about its perils. Sacked landworkers may have been re-employed as members of a needed workforce to produce food supplies for the army, but many were

called up and died. Several men from Burston joined up including Rev Eland's own son Arthur as well as strike supporters George Durbridge and his son George, and Harry Garnham's son.

There is a plaque in the church at Burston which became the subject of the anger still felt by at least one of the workers towards Rev Eland. One of those killed was Harry Garnham's son. Garnham was one of the first of the parents to protest at the dismissal of the Higdons and he was one of the first to be sacked. Unbeknown to him, his brother-in-law arranged for a memorial plaque for his nephew to be put up in the church. Hearing what had been done Harry and his daughter Daisy, angered at the thought of such a memorial being in a church run by Eland, tried to take it down. A row between the Garnhams, Eland and his supporters broke out which rapidly became physical and eventually landed in the courts as all parties countersued each other. Garnham was eventually given a month's jail sentence and a large fine, which Tom Higdon amongst others offered to pay.

In 1920 Rev Eland left Burston. His departure heralded a more civilised relationship between the Higdons and the church, as the new rector Francis Smith was far more agreeable to dealing with them. The two schools – the church-run council school and the strike school – continued providing education to the children of Burston, but this time there was a friendly rivalry as they competed against each other at sports. Smith frequently provided additional religious education to the strike school pupils.

The strike school's enlightened education still appealed to the local parents and by 1930, half of the village children were being sent to it as opposed to the council school. Its reputation had also

attracted children from other local villages, sometimes a few of these would board freely at Burston. Two Russian boys, sons of members of the Soviet Labour Legation, were sent to board with the Higdons and attend the school; news of Burston was well known in Russia, perhaps Sylvia Pankhurst and other intellectual left wingers had raised the school's profile with the Soviet authorities.

In August 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Tom Higdon died. By that time Kitty was aged 75 and was finding it increasingly difficult to run the school. The school was closed a few months later. The pupils, some the grandchildren and children of the original strike school were transferred to the council-run school whose facilities had been much improved. For years afterwards generations of former pupils of the school would say that without the Higdons their lives would have remained stagnant and that all that they had achieved had been as a result of the Higdon's teaching.

Twenty-five years after the strike first began it finished, making it the longest running strike ever. It had lasted from the beginning of one world war to that of another.

Kitty Higdon died on 24 April 1946 and was buried next to her husband, in Burston's churchyard not far from her beloved school.

THE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION

EVERY year thousands of trade unionists travel to Tolpuddle in Dorset to pay tribute and remember the lives of six agricultural workers, who in 1834 were imprisoned and deported for taking an oath to try and form a union. It would be years later before an agricultural union was formed.

The union was first established as the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers and Small Holders Union at a conference of Norfolk agricultural workers held at the Angel Hotel, North Walsham on 20 July 1906.

It was founded by its first secretary George Edwards, and its president was George Nicholls. There had been earlier attempts to try and form a union. One had been in the 1870s when Joseph Arch, a Warwickshire hedge-cutter had formed the National Agricultural Labourers Union. Branches developed all over Norfolk with workers benefiting from increased wages. The union collapsed during the agricultural depression as farmworkers were evicted from their homes when farmers sacked their workers to cover their losses. One of its branch secretaries, George Edwards, lost his job and his home when he went on strike, but Edwards continued with his work to try and unionise the farmworkers. Elected as a Liberal Councillor he agitated for land reform and a vote for farm workers, which they were granted in 1884. In 1889 he set up a local Norfolk Farm Workers Union which collapsed after six years.

A general election in 1906 saw the Liberals winning with Labour

increasing its seats to 30. Norfolk farmers, staunch Tories, took their revenge on their own workers whom they accused of voting against their party by sacking and evicting them. Edwards reacting to the unrest and anger of the workers against this injustice set up a new union: The Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers and Small Holders Union. This time the union proved to be a success and by the end of 1906, its membership had grown to 1,600 and would rise to 3,000 over the following year.

The union was built up by years of work from George Edwards, by that time a paid official earning 18 shillings a week cycling miles through the countryside dealing with local unpaid organisers such as Tom Higdon, who although a teacher's assistant, having come from an agricultural background was much involved in trying to help the local agricultural workers. Local farmers would take action against those they suspected of being union supporters; in Tom Higdon's case the farmers' wrath was aimed at his wife whom they managed to get sacked from her job. He would eventually become the union's National Treasurer. Despite the threat of intimidation the workers still went on strike and gradually their wages increased.

The lives and work of the agricultural workers changed in the First World War with 400,000 farm workers joining up to fight, causing labour shortages. The farmers found themselves having to make compromises to try and keep workers on the land with the result that County Agricultural Wages Boards (forerunners to the Agricultural Wages Board) were set up and farmers were forced to pay 25 shillings a week. By the end of the war in 1918 the union had grown to over 170,000 members. In 1920, the union changed its name to become the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers. Its strongest bases were in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Dorset with over 90% of agricultural labourers being in membership.

Agriculture went into depression in the 1920s resulting in farm workers' pay being reduced from 46 shillings to 28 shillings. In 1923, in

response to continued action by the farmers in cutting wages and lengthening working hours to 54 a week, the union set up local disputes committees and called what became a rolling general strike of over 10,000 workers. This was the first time that 'flying pickets' were used as union members cycled around the area organising support for the strike. Help from the trade union movement poured in to help the agricultural workers which enabled the union to pay their strikers 12 shillings a week (plus sixpence for each child) and six shillings for single men. The strike ended with a compromise following the intervention of Labour leader Ramsay Macdonald. Wages remained at 25 shillings a week for what became a statutory 50 hours week.

In 1982 the union merged with the giant Transport and General Workers Union to become its Agricultural Section. Employment in agriculture in many ways is still governed by the wants and needs of farmers with workers still tied to them. The tithe cottage system still operates, accidents in the agricultural industry still remain amongst the highest in British industry and wages are still low. The Agricultural Wages Board, set up during the First World War, continued to be responsible for setting the minimum rates of pay and other terms and conditions of employment. But in 2013 the Conservative government abolished it – with the exception of in Scotland where it still exists – leaving many of those employed on small farms, those doing seasonal work and along with the increased migrant workforce vulnerable as a structure that laid down the way that wages were agreed and conditions were operated was wiped out.

A BRIEF
HISTORY OF THE N.U.T.

THE National Union of Teachers, of which both Tom and Kitty Higdon were members, was founded as the National Union of Elementary Teachers (NUET) at a meeting held at Kings College, London on 25 June 1870. It was set up for all teachers in England and Wales and coincided with the introduction of the Forster's Education Act which saw the setting up of elected local school boards to build elementary schools. In April 1888, it became the National Union of Teachers.

It started with some 400 members and grew rapidly, doubling in size between the years 1895 and 1910, during which time Kitty and Tom Higdon joined it; a weekly journal *The Schoolmaster*, previously launched in 1872, connected teachers with each other, helping to encourage the union's growth.

The union worked to improve teachers' pay, as well as to reform, extend and improve state education for the children, and for the teachers who worked in it, aims which it still fights for. The national union was set up in response to 18 years of having to deal with the Revised Code, brought in under the Act, which saw teachers being paid by results. The size of school grants and the resulting level of teachers' salaries depended on their pupils' exam results; the system was finally abolished in 1897.

Campaigns were carried out to obtain security of tenure and also increased salaries – teachers in rural schools such as at Burston and other Norfolk schools, were poorly paid – and against an additional requirement that some teachers were expected to play the organ at Sunday church services. In 1898 it succeeded in getting a pension system, cancelled in 1862, reintroduced.

By the early 1900s, many of the union's initial aims had been achieved, primary education was compulsory and free, and the school leaving age had been raised to 12. The NUT played a major role in getting the 1902 Education Act (The Balfour Act) introduced which affected children such as those in Burston by sweeping away the school boards, replacing them with local education authorities who ran the elementary, secondary and technical schools, and also teacher training.

In 1896, the union had won its first dispute following strike action by teachers in Portsmouth, backed up by national support, which saw the reinstatement of four teachers sacked for refusing to start work at 7.55am; a pay increase was won and with it a change in starting time. This was followed by another successful strike over pay in West Ham in 1907 which forced an anti-union council to recognise the NUT and agree a settlement.

The dispute at Burston, took place whilst the union continued with a major campaign for improved salaries and was having increased success in winning its aims when war broke out. Kitty Higdon was represented by an NUT lawyer at the inquiry into the complaint against her, a member of the local education committee also argued her case, but she was found guilty of one of the minor charges and was dismissed. Surprisingly the NUT did not support the strike, and initially refused to pay her victimisation pay. Following pressure from a group of members at the union's annual conference, the NUT agreed to pay Kitty Higdon victimisation pay which was backdated to her dismissal and also agreed to continue payments after the normal five year rule.

In 1915 it moved into new offices in Mabledon Place, London where it remains to this day. Many of its members were away fighting, and with pay levels falling, the NUT called for the introduction of a national salary policy. In 1919, the Burnham Committee, made up of teachers, Local Education Authorities and government representatives, was set up to become the negotiating forum for teachers' pay and conditions. This was

eventually abolished by the Conservative government in 1986.

In 1919, the union was thrown into controversy when it approved the principle of equal pay. A group, the National Association of Male Teachers, was formed within the NUT to further the interests of male teachers; a year later it changed its name to the National Association of Schoolmasters and left the NUT in 1922. It is now amalgamated into the NASUWT, the second largest teaching union in the UK.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s there was a series of disputes as the NUT fought to prevent pay cuts as the depression took hold. It played a major part in the development of education reforms, and in 1943, during discussions on what would eventually become the ground breaking 1944 Education Act (The Butler Act) which brought in free secondary schooling for all, raised the school leaving age to 16 (from 15) and set up a tripartite system of education through grammar, secondary modern and technical schools, campaigned for the introduction of experimental comprehensives. The 1944 Act also made statutory the payment by LEAs of Burnham Committee agreed pay. Women teachers would no longer be forced to resign from their jobs on marriage. In 1946, the Royal Commission recommended equal pay for women teachers, this was eventually agreed and phased in over a number of years.

Since then the NUT has been at the forefront of fighting for better wages and conditions for its members at the same time as advocating improvements to the education system which has and still does find itself drawn into conflict with successive governments.

The NUT finally affiliated to the TUC in 1972, although it has never affiliated to the Labour Party despite attempts made back in the 1910s. By the time of its centenary it had nearly 300,000 members. The NUT is now the largest teachers' union in Europe.

SCHOOL PUPILS' STRIKES

BURSTON was not the first strike by school pupils; there had been others with a series of strikes throughout the country of children protesting at poor education, beatings and over-work. Some coincided with, or followed trade union action taken by their parents. The Burston pupils' strike stood out from the others in that instead of demonstrating to get improved conditions for themselves they went on strike to get their teachers reinstated.

The first strike of pupils in early Autumn 1889, began after the Great Docks Strike in London and the dockers 'go-slow' in Glasgow and lasted for nearly a month. The strikes began on Monday 23 September in Scotland's borders and spread rapidly through the country to Edinburgh and Dundee and then across the borders into England to West Hartlepool and Middlesborough, and to London as well as into South Wales. The pupils were protesting against the use of the cane, the long hours, lack of holidays and homework.

Three weeks later, with the disputes growing, thousands of children had abandoned their classrooms to take part in a series of demonstrations and protests. Hundreds of children in the East End, many of whose parents had taken part in or been affected by the Docks Strike and were educated at the board schools and other schools in London took to the streets waving red flags and carrying placards. The strikes were modelled on the industrial actions taken by their parents and included similarly drawn up demands. School property was attacked and those children who refused to join the strike were attacked and denounced. Eventually after strong police action and resistance from the educational authorities and faced by threats of having to stay on at school for an extra year, the withdrawal of government grants which would affect their parents and local council rates and expulsion, the strikes came to a halt.

On 5 September 1911, pupils marched out of Bigyn Council school in Llanelli, South Wales, demonstrating against the caning of one of their own. This strike, which was to involve thousands, swiftly spread to some 60 towns throughout Britain, including Liverpool, Sheffield, Glasgow, Birmingham and London as students took to the streets protesting at the cane, discipline, leaving age, hours and lack of holidays. Like the previous strike this one followed local industrial action taken by parents; in Llanelli and other local towns there had been unrest in the railways and docks, and with soldiers brought in, resulting in several fatalities. Most of the pupils' demonstrations were peaceful but in East London, boys were seen armed with sticks, irons and belts.

Some of the authorities did recognise the validity of the pupils demands and looked for ways to improve home-school relationships, others called for firmer action to be taken against them. The strikes gradually petered out and the pupils returned to school. Some were to be punished severely, often beaten in front of their school mates. Reprisals were out of proportion to the actions of the pupils and were meant to intimidate truants and possible future rebels.

Caning in state schools and partly-funded private schools was outlawed by the government in 1986; and banned in other private schools in England and Wales in 1998, in Scotland in 2000 and in Northern Ireland in 2003.

School pupils and students have taken action since then, the most recent ones being more political such as those in protest against the war in Iraq.

The Burston School Strike was supported strongly by the Agricultural Workers and other unions, and although the others followed on behind other industrial action taken by parents, this one did not. Instead of protesting at injustice to pupils, the children at Burston went on strike in protest at the injustice they saw being doled out to their teachers.

EDUCATION LAW

IN 1902 Parliament passed a new Education Act which reorganised the administration and provision of education at local level. It was this Act that generated ill feelings amongst local landowners as it required children to receive fixed hours of schooling; this conflicted with the expectations of farmers that children should work upon their land. And it was how this Act was implemented and interpreted by teachers that would form the basis of the Burston School Strike. The Higdon's approach to giving the children an education that would support the chance to improve their lives lay directly contrary to what the local establishment expected to be provided by educationalists.

There had been no national system of education before the 19th century, only a small proportion of children received any schooling. Sunday schools in the late 18th century provided by the local church or chapel became popular, receiving charitable backing from the middle classes. This provided some children with the rudimentary elements of reading and writing and was looked on as a way of combatting poverty.

Most opportunities for formal education were limited to town grammar schools, charity schools and what were known as 'Dame' schools, run by old ladies or retired soldiers who received small fees to teach the three r's of writing, arithmetic and reading to the children of poor tradesmen. Grammar schools, although civic foundations, many dating back to Tudor times and run on commercial lines, often failed because of their precarious finances. Education reformers worked closely with factory reformers to limit children's hours of work in the hope of enabling them to receive some form of education. State grants were allocated to schools partly on the basis of examination results conducted by school inspectors. Rural and industrial areas which had no schools usually remained without them.

The 1870 Education Act was the first specific piece of legislation to deal with the provision of education in Britain. It allowed voluntary schools to carry on unchanged but established school boards to build and manage schools in areas where needed. These were locally elected and were funded from local rates. Unlike voluntary schools, religious teaching in the board schools was to be 'non-denominational'; this angered the churches who were facing a decline in worshippers. They were also against the establishment of the boards, as these schools, funded by ratepayers, proved to be more popular than their own leaving them with a loss in revenue. Later in 1897, the Voluntary School Act provided grants to public elementary schools not funded by school boards; these were more likely to be church schools.

The Elementary Education Act 1880 insisted on compulsory attendance from five to 10 years of age. Poorer families in many instances found this requirement difficult to fulfil as often they were reliant on the extra income brought in by a wage earning child. Children under 13 who were employed were expected to provide a certificate to show that they had reached an 'educational standard'. Thirteen years later the minimum age for leaving school was raised to 11 and in 1899 to 12 years.

Elementary schools had been publicly funded throughout Europe and America to provide educated personnel for the new industries. The public system of education in England and Wales (Scotland had and has its own educational system) had been slow to respond. Higher elementary schools had been recognised from April 1900 providing education from the age of 10 to 15. Concern that British industry could lag behind the continent with the lack of educated workers, led to the Conservative government introducing a new Education (Balfour) Act in 1902.

The 1902 Act made radical changes to the whole educational system of education in England and Wales. It abolished school boards creating local education authorities (LEAs) based upon the county councils

and borough councils established by the 1888 Local Government Act. These new LEAs were responsible for the secular curriculum of voluntary (church) schools and also provided grants for school maintenance.

The Act laid the basis for a national system of state education which integrated the higher grade elementary schools and the fee paying schools, and which created two types of state aided secondary school; endowed grammar schools which were funded by grant-aid from LEAs, and municipal or county secondary schools maintained by the LEAs. Socialists like Sydney Webb welcomed the scheme, others like Keir Hardie did not. The vast majority of children were expected to be educated in elementary schools.

The labour movement had fought against the abolition of the boards on the grounds that they had at least given local ratepayers some control over their schools. In *Justice*, published in October 1902 it was observed: 'Instead, however, of perfecting direct popular control, the government is seeking to abolish it altogether... In the rural districts a committee appointed by the County Council composed of parsons and squires having the least possible interest in the education of the children of the people, except to make them mere humble and obedient wage slaves.'

Introducing the Act, Prime Minister Arthur Balfour warned the House of Commons that "England is behind all continental rivals in education" and ran into opposition from both Liberals and members of his own party who were concerned that the cost of popular education would lose them the support of the local landowners and industrialists who were the main taxpayers. They also realised that local farmers would resent not being able to call automatically on the services of the children to work on the land. And this is certainly what happened amongst the farmers in Norfolk and in other agricultural areas. Industry and the need to make sure that England had an educated workforce that could compete with future markets in Europe and maintain its position in world trade ensured that the

Bill was passed. Commerce and not concern for the welfare and future of the children themselves was cited as being the most important necessity for the Act becoming law.

The arguments over the religious clauses had prolonged debate on the Act. Non religionists and dissenters and doubters objected to state funds being used to support denominational schools, including those of the Church of England, and in particular Catholic schools. 'Rome on the Rates' became a familiar cry. Churches would be responsible for the building and maintenance of denominational schools; something again that the Bishops had argued against during the debate, bringing them criticism from the Labour Party.

The LEAs were required to consider the 'educational needs of their area'. The education of children was to fit what was required to fulfil the needs of employment in that area and not to provide them with an education which would fulfil their aspirations for better or different lives. It was this policy that brought the Higdons into conflict with Rev Eland at Burston.

Other reforms were introduced which in 1906 saw local councils being allowed to provide free school meals, and a year later the introduction of school medical inspections.

In 1918, The Fisher Act made secondary education compulsory to the age of 14, and gave the responsibility for running them to the state. Higher elementary schools and endowed grammar schools were able to seek to become state funded central or secondary schools. Most children attended primary (elementary) schools until they were 14.

The next great change in education would not happen until 1944 with what became known as the Butler Act. This would see a complete reshaping of education which would answer some of the social and educational demands created by the war.

THE LABOUR PARTY

LEADING members of the newly formed Labour Party were amongst the supporters of the Burston School Strike. George Lansbury, later to become head of the Labour party, was to chair the committee set up to raise money to build a new school house and to give support to the strikers. And his name is shown on the plaque struck to commemorate the school's opening. Other MPs such as Tom Mann and Philip Snowden, who would become Labour's first Chancellor, were also prominent supporters.

The Labour Party was created in 1900, and grew out of the trade union movement and a collection of groups such as the Independent Labour Party, the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation and the Scottish Labour Party. The ILP, formed in 1893 had already had success in getting some of its members elected to local councils, and in 1898 had taken control of West Ham council, but it was having difficulties making progress nationally having received only 44,325 votes in the 1895 General Election.

The leader of the ILP, Keir Hardie, believed that to obtain success in parliamentary elections, something he felt was important if the party wanted to bring real change to people's lives, the party would have to combine with other left-wing groups if it was going to get elected.

His views were shared by members of the trade union movement who pushed for action to bring together all the left wing groups to set up a group that would sponsor parliamentary candidates. In 1900 a conference was held at the Congregational Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street on 26 and 27 February.

The 129 delegates passed a motion moved by Keir Hardie which

called for the establishment of 'a distinct Labour group in parliament, who shall have their own whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to cooperate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interests of labour'.

The new alliance, called the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) to which the various organisations affiliated, was intended to co-ordinate support for MPs sponsored by the trade unions. Keir Hardie was elected as its first Secretary and began the difficult work of bringing all the parties together. In 1900 the LRC stood 15 candidates, of which two, Keir Hardie in Merthyr Tydfil and Richard Bell in Derby were elected.

The new organisation rapidly built up support after the Taff Vale case of 1901 which saw a legal judgement awarded against the railway workers after a strike fining them £20,000 damages. This meant that it would be impossible to hold strikes as employers would be able recoup losses from unions. Members realised that they now needed their own party if they were going to get proper representation against draconian actions taken by employers supported by the Conservatives, and by some of the Liberals.

In the following 1906 election the LRC won 29 seats and on 26 February duly adopted Labour Party as the name of the party. Keir Hardie was elected its first chairman. Home Rule in Scotland and Ireland, Votes for Women, and Abstinence were declared as its major aims. The Liberals and Labour had worked together following an alliance they had made in the run up to the election with an agreement that the Liberals would stand down in 30 constituencies so the LRC candidates could have a free run at attacking the Conservatives; in exchange the LRC would allow the Liberals to modify some of its claims.

One of the first acts of the new more progressive Liberal government was to reverse the Taff Vale judgement. Other acts such as the Workers' Compensation Act 1906, the Mines Act 1908, the Old Age

Pensions Act and other measures such as compulsory medical examinations in schools were introduced with the support of the Labour Party. The first bill moved by the party to become legislation was the Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906.

The 1910 election saw Labour winning 42 seats. The year before the House of Lords had passed the Osborne Judgement which ruled that trade unions could no longer donate money to fund election campaigns or pay the wages of MPs. In 1913, the Liberal government, bowing to pressure from the large unions, passed the Trade Disputes Act which allowed them to reintroduce their funding. By then, backed by Labour, unemployment and health insurance bills had been passed.

Success in parliament was mirrored by increased representation on municipal and county councils where members pushed for reforms in education and the treatment of children. Education was very much at the heart of Labour policy with the strike at Burston swiftly receiving support from the party who along with the trade unions helped to raise money to enable the school to keep running. Support for municipal housing and slum clearances, fair wages, the eight hour working day, and work for the unemployed featured heavily at the top of Labour's agenda.

The First World War saw the Labour party split between supporters and opponents, with opposition growing steadily throughout the war as thousands died on the battlefields. Ramsay Macdonald who was now leader of the parliamentary party resigned. In 1915, the party entered government as the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, reaching out to the trade unions for support appointed Labour MPs as Ministers. Arthur Henderson, then Secretary of the party became President of the Board of Education, the first member of the Labour party to hold a government position. Others joined him in posts which mainly reflected Labour's aspirations for pensions and employment. They were able to force through legislation which enabled them to help working class interests.

Labour had become a fully recognised political party of government and gradually over the years after war would appeal to many of those who wanted to see a social change to the country which they believed should never return to its old order; rifts were opened between classes and with the advent of the Russian Revolution both the establishment and the working class realised that old orders could be challenged and replaced. The Labour Party, now linked to the co-operative movement and having reached agreement with the Co-op party, grew.

There was widespread suspicion amongst the establishment and concern that the Labour Party might follow the wave of unrest instilled in Europe following the Russian Revolution and espouse the Communist Party's programme and rise up against them. Attempts by the new Communist Party of Great Britain to persuade the Labour Party to take direct action to achieve results were rejected, as were attempts made by the CPGB in 1921 and 1923 to affiliate to the party. The decision by the Labour Party to use the rule of government as a way of furthering their programme did much to assuage the middle class's fear and also to give confidence to the Labour Party that they could achieve change without revolution. Suspicions that the Labour Party would work with the Soviet Union and communists to bring down the government would be used by the ruling classes against them repeatedly throughout the future.

In 1922, as membership of the Liberal Party declined, the Labour party won 142 seats in that year's General Election, making it the second largest political group in the House of Commons as it became the official opposition to the government. In the space of 22 years, the Labour Party had emerged to become a political force which finally gave representation to those who had formerly been downtrodden and ignored. Two years later it would for the first time, with the support of the Liberals despite only having 191 MPs (less than a third of the House of Commons), form the government.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

NEARLY every town or village in Western Europe has a memorial to those fallen in the First World War which began in Europe on 28 July 1914 and ended on 11 November 1918. Every continent in the world was affected by what has been described as the first industrial war. Over nine million combatants and seven million civilians died. It was one of the largest wars in history with over 70 million military personnel, including some 60 million Europeans, being affected.

The war saw a different type of warfare with the introduction of fighting equipment such as tanks and planes, and an arms race which would see huge profits being made for armament manufacturers. It was also the first war to see battles being fought for months over the endless trenches that marked the front that spread through Western and Eastern Europe. It would see the use of mustard gas and the sacrifice of thousands of men for a few yards. Revolutions would follow in its wake and the map of Europe would change as new countries such as Czechoslovakia were created, old ones such as Poland were restored and boundaries were redrawn and imperial regimes and empires fell.

Every town and village in this country was affected by the war, Burston being no different. Several men from the village joined up, including the Reverend Eland's own son Arthur as well as strike supporters George Durbridge and his son George, and Herbert Garnham. The Higdons themselves had taken contrary views to the war with Tom acting as a recruiter and Kitty opposing.

The war was fought between two lots of opposing alliances, with countries that were ruled by cousins on either side. It was a war between

the Allies which united east and west, based on the triple alliance of the British Empire, France and the Russian Empire, against those of the central powers in Europe, Germany and the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. Italy, an ally of the last two through another triple alliance, did not join them but later came in to the war on the side of the Allies. The United States and Japan would later join the Allies, and Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, which included Turkey, joined the central powers. The war was about who controlled the Balkans. It was looked on as being the first world war of modern technology.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, on 28 June 1914 by the Yugoslavian nationalist Gavrilo Princep in Sarajevo was the trigger to war. The beginning of the 20th century had seen a series of bitter struggles as various countries turned on each other as one large empire such as the Austro-Hungarian annexed other territories, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina which had been previously an Ottoman preserve. A series of wars known as the Balkan wars had been fought throughout the area. A 33 day war in 1913 saw Bulgaria attacking Serbia and Greece in which it lost more of Macedonia to Serbia and Greece. Tensions between the countries were fraught as Archduke Franz Ferdinand visited the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. His assassination by the Bosnian Serb Princep saw a wave of anti-Serbian riots and was seized on by the various powers to deliver a series of ultimatums as each of the countries mobilised took sides as to which country they were supporting.

On 4 August Kaiser Willem II of Germany asked his cousin Tsar Nicholas of Russia to suspend his general mobilisation. When he refused, Germany issued an ultimatum demanding that he ceased to support Serbia. Another ultimatum was sent to the French asking them not to support Russia if it came to the defence of Serbia.

On 1 August, Germany mobilised and declared war on Russia

after it had turned down the ultimatum. Threats to France brought a mixed response, the French withdrew their forces from the frontier but increased their mobilisation. On 2 August Germany invaded Luxembourg and on 3 August declared war on France, and on 4 August against Belgium after it refused to let Germany cross its borders into France. Later that night Britain declared war against Germany. Millions throughout Europe were to be mobilised, and Great Britain was to call upon its empire to produce soldiers and sailors.

The German invasion of Belgium and France saw rapid success until the march on Paris was stopped and the battle for the Western Front got bogged down into a series of battles over trench lines, where thousands were killed for the sake of a few feet of land. Soldiers from all over the British Empire fought in places like the Somme, and in the Dardanelles. As the war continued, more countries were drawn in to the conflict.

The war in the East spread as Japan attacked Russia's furthest eastern lands. The savagery of the battle on the Eastern Front and the mismanagement of its army as well as the hardship caused by the lack of food, guns and good generalship saw the collapse of the Russian government in March 1917 and a revolution in November saw Russia seeking peace terms with the Central Powers via the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. 1917 saw the entry of the United States into war and the provision of fresh armies to die on the fields of foreign countries.

Germany, now at peace with Russia, launched an offensive along the Western Front in the Spring of 1918. The allies, backed up by new American forces were able to launch a series of attacks that gradually, slowly pushed German and Austro-Hungarian armies back. On 4 November the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now a shadow of what it had been, sought and agreed an armistice, to be followed seven days later by Germany, now being threatened internally by its own revolutionaries. On 11 November 1918, peace finally came to the world, but at a terrible cost to

mankind. Whole generations of men had been wiped out, the civilian population had seen their lands crossed with trenches, towns and villages had ceased to exist and whole populations had been uprooted.

Norfolk paid a heavy price with almost 12,000 men being killed. The figures were above the average. One person out of every 42 Norfolk people was killed as opposed to the national rate of one in every 57. The soldiers from Burston returned still shocked from what they had seen. Young George Durbidge died from his wounds in France just one month after the end of the war, he was aged 21. His father returned a changed man, angered by the death of his son and the effect of serving, he turned to drink. The lives of the people would change irrevocably as the old orders, even in the countryside, were changed as questions were asked about what it had all been for.

Peace talks were to carry on for years. The war meant changes to nearly every country in Europe. Despite promises of jobs for all ex soldiers, there was large scale unemployment. The price that Germany was made to pay for its belligerence was to lay the foundation for the depression of the late 20s and to the rise in nationalism which in the 1930s would see Adolf Hitler and the Nazis lead Germany into another world war.

The seeds of the Second World War were directly born from the ending of the First World War, the war that became known as the Great War.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

THE Russian Revolution was a series of revolutions which began in the Russian Empire in 1917. It saw the end of the Tsarist authoritarian regime and the establishment of what became the Soviet Union.

Russia was run by Tsar Nicholas II in a dictatorial manner which had not changed for centuries. The peasants were only given their freedom from serfdom in 1861 and in many ways the country was still bogged down in archaic rule with little democracy.

The 1890s had seen the lives of the people improve as the growth of Russian industry increased, attracting workers to the cities, and with it grew a general unrest against the terrible working conditions and the poverty of their lives. Political parties were formed not only in Russia, but in other parts of the Empire.

The basis for the Russian revolutions lay in a demonstration on Sunday 22 January 1905 when unarmed protestors, marching towards the Winter Palace in St Petersburg to present a petition to the Tsar calling for improvement to their conditions, were fired upon by soldiers of the Tsar's Imperial Guards. This murder of innocent protestors caused widespread outrage and a series of strikes which spread throughout the Empire and overseas. This led to Nicholas II creating an elected parliament called the Duma. This was elected for the first time in March 1906. But it became increasingly unpopular with not only the left wing but also with the right, and only met three times before the Tsar abolished it, leading to even more anger among the population at his autocratic rule. Many of the revolutionaries who would eventually overturn the Tsar were forced to leave the country.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 at first brought a patriotic fervour but as the failure of the Tsar and his generals to ensure soldiers received their supplies – in 1915 soldiers were being sent to the front without guns – that fervour turned to antagonism against the establishment. Failures in communication and the deaths of over three million Russians added to the anger, not only of the populace but also of the soldiers themselves. In 1915 Tsar Nicholas moved to the front to take over running the army himself leaving his German born wife, Queen Alexandra, a woman even more out of contact with the life of Russians, in charge of running the country.

The first revolution came in February 1917, and began with demonstrations by people over shortage of food in St Petersburg. These led to a series of strikes and by the end of the month the closure of all the factories. On 25 February Nicholas ordered soldiers to stop the strikes but instead the soldiers, along with the police, joined them. The government collapsed and on 13 March Nicholas abdicated with a temporary government taking over the running of the country.

Alexander Kerensky, leader of the Provisional Government trying to improve things by allowing freedom of speech and releasing political prisoners, found himself under increasing pressure from a large group of workers who had formed the Petrograd Soviet, and was unable to bring any stability as wages went down and food became short. The national debt grew to 10 million roubles.

Foreign exiles allowed back by the Provisional Government returned; amongst them was Vladimir Lenin, a communist who returned in April 1917 to lead the communist group the Bolsheviks. His return gave them a new impetus as they stepped up their demonstrations and attacks on the government. In July, Lenin was forced to escape to Finland after a series of demonstrations had led to the army attacking the Bolsheviks. He returned in August after the Bolsheviks were asked to defend the

government against a takeover by the army. They and their supporters were supplied with guns to help them to fight.

The row between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks continued with the latter refusing to work with the government until they could reach a compromise. On 10 October, the Second Revolution, known as the October Revolution (or 'November' according to the Russian Gregorian calendar) began as the Bolshevik Central Committee led by Lenin voted to start it. Thirteen days later, revolution broke out in Estonia, and two days later in St Petersburg. In comparison to the previous uprising this one was mainly peaceful with many people turning on the Provisional Government for not improving things. The Bolshevik Red Army took over government buildings without a fight and ended the revolution with the arrest of the Provisional Government and the takeover of the Tsar's winter palace on 26 October.

Moscow became the new centre of government as the Bolsheviks took over control of the country and began to sue for peace with the Germans. In March 1918 the Treaty of Brest Litovsk was signed between the two countries bringing to an end the participation of Russia in the First World War.

A civil war broke out between the Bolshevik Army, known as the Reds, representing the Russian people, and the Anti-Bolsheviks (Whites) made up of an uneasy alliance between some members of the previous government, aristocracy and anti-Communists (partly supported by overseas countries such as the UK, France and America.

In July 1918, as the White Army approached the town in which the royal family was imprisoned, Tsar Nicholas, his wife and their children were killed. The wars would last until 1922 when the Japanese finally withdrew from Vladivostok.

By that time, Russia would be ruined and devastated, and in the West, and in particular England there would be widespread fear amongst

the establishment that socialism and trade unionism might lead to similar revolutions.

The Burston School Strike would have its own connections with Russia. News of the strike reached Russia and Leo Tolstoy, the son of the author, would send money to support the school building. Two sons of members of the Russian Legation in London would in the 1930s be sent to board at the school.

SYLVIA PANKHURST

SYLVIA PANKHURST, the daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the Suffragettes, and herself a leading suffragette was one of the major supporters of the Burston pupils' strike, visiting the school and writing about it.

Sylvia was born in Manchester in 1882, and was the second daughter of Emmeline and Richard Pankhurst who were members of the Independent Labour Party. Both parents encouraged their children to study politics and ask questions about how women were treated, and to protest at the inequality of the lives of most people.

Sylvia, was educated, along with her sisters Christabel and Adela, at Manchester High School for Girls and afterwards studied art at the Manchester School of Art. In 1900 she won a place at the Royal College of Art and moved to London. It was whilst studying there that she first met Keir Hardie, the founder of the Independent Labour Party and later Labour's first MP who became a lifelong friend; she also made close contacts with other people in the labour movement.

In 1903, Emmeline and her daughter Christabel founded the Women's Social and Political Union to fight for the vote for women. Three years later Sylvia dropped out of college and joined the WSPU to work full time alongside her mother and sister. She produced the WSPU's 'Votes for Women' banners, designed the organisation's membership card and was secretary of the National Committee based in London. In October 1906, she was sent to jail for the first time for protesting. She would be imprisoned many more times and subjected to force feeding when she went on hunger strike. She remained close to the working class movement spending most of her time organising and campaigning for the East London Federation of the WSPU. She contributed to the WSPU's

newspaper *Votes for Women* and in 1911 published a history of the WSPU campaign. She continued, in the meantime with her art, and in 1907 had travelled through the industrial towns of Northern England and Scotland painting working class women. Many of the scenes of poverty and inequality were to remain with her for the rest of her life.

Sylvia took a far more left wing political stance towards the station of women and the working class than the rest of her family, as she fought for equal pay and better working conditions not only for women but for their families too. This brought her into frequent disagreement with her mother and sister at the way in which the WSPU, which remained independent of any political party, was conducting its campaigns and at the way it was focussing its aims. She wanted a socialist organisation, aligned with the Independent Labour Party which would tackle a wider field than only women's suffrage.

In 1913, she left the WSPU and helped by Keir Hardie set up her own organisation called the East London Federation of Suffragettes, which changed its name to Women's Suffrage and finally to the Workers Socialist Federation. She also set up her own paper *The Woman's Dreadnought*, and it was within its pages that she wrote about the Burston school strike.

Her clash with her mother intensified with the advent of war, as Emmeline and Christabel and the WSPU took to the streets urging workers to join up and fight for their country. Sylvia was fiercely opposed to the war urging her followers not to support it. Members of WSF hid conscientious objectors from the military authorities and police. Sylvia had become involved with the international women's peace movement, and in 1915 attended their International Peace Conference held in The Hague to protest against the war. Women from all over the world, including America and Germany, attended and it led to the forming of the Women's Peace Party.

She campaigned hard against the war lobbying generals as well as

politicians. George Bernard Shaw was to write of her: 'Like Joan of Arc she lectured, talked, won and overruled statesmen and prelates. She pooh-poohed the plans of generals leading their troops to victory. She had unbounded and quite unconcealed contempt for official opinion, judgement and authority'.

In 1918 with the ending of the war, Sylvia and a revolutionary Italian journalist Silvio Corio were by now working for communism and she had renamed her magazine the *Workers Dreadnought*. She was invited, along with others sympathetic to his cause, by Lenin to Moscow. The WSF had continued with its transition from being a women's suffrage outlet into becoming the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International) which was different to the official Communist Party of Great Britain, which eventually would absorb it. She parted ways with the party when she was asked by the CPGB to hand over her paper to them; refusing, she was expelled from the party. She then set up the Communist Workers Party as a rival to the official party, but this folded in 1924.

Travelling frequently to Italy she became an anti-fascist having seen the violence they used against those who opposed them, and following the murder of the Italian Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, founded an anti-fascist pressure group, the Women's International Matteotti Committee.

In 1927, then living in Woodford, she gave birth to a son Richard. She refused to marry his father which led to a total split with her mother Emmeline who refused to speak to her again, breaking off all contact.

She supported the Spanish Republicans in the civil war, and helped Jewish refugees escaping from Germany. Her hatred of fascism led her to campaign on behalf of the Ethiopians as they faced invasion from Italy and in 1936 set up the *New Times and Ethiopian News* to keep the public alert to what was going on in that country.

Anti-racism became an early cause for her and she was one of the

first people to employ a black journalist. Her activism had brought her to the attention of MI5 which in a file dated 1948 described what to do to "muzzle the tiresome Miss Sylvia Pankhurst". Her involvement with Ethiopia continued as she was appointed as an advisor to its ruler Haile Selassie and moved to the country where she set up *The Ethiopian Journal*.

Sylvia Pankhurst died in Ethiopia on 27 September 1960, and was given a state funeral. Haile Selassie made her an 'honorary Ethiopian'.

THE IRISH SITUATION

THE first decades of the twentieth century saw huge changes and much turmoil as old ideas were challenged and old autocratic regimes fell. There was one long standing conflict which would rise to the fore, and that was the one regarding Ireland and the English. Wars and battles had been fought over the soil of Ireland for centuries with armed rebellions being put down with great cruelty. The name of Oliver Cromwell who had suppressed the Irish is still hated to this day. In 1916, the Easter Rising saw an armed insurrection in which Irish Republicans rose up against the English.

The Acts of Union 1800 had united the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland, as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, abolishing the Irish Parliament and instead giving the Irish representation in the British Parliament. The Irish Parliament, which agreed the Act, and in which only Protestants could sit was not representative of the vast majority of the Irish population who were Catholic and were therefore disenfranchised. Only landowners were allowed to vote in any election. Years of conflict followed with several risings such as the Fenian in 1848. Other opposition came constitutionally from the Repeal Association and the Home Rule League.

The Irish Home Rule Movement had sought to achieve self-government for Ireland within the United Kingdom. In 1886 the Irish Parliamentary Party under Charles Stewart Parnell succeeded in getting the First Home Rule Bill introduced in parliament where it was defeated. The Second Home Rule Bill of 1893 was passed by the House of Commons but rejected by the House of Lords.

The promotion of an independent Ireland separate from Britain

came as young and more radical nationalists became increasingly impatient as they identified more and more with a growing involvement in Gaelic traditions and culture. Leading writers and intellectuals such as W B Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory and organisations such as the National Council and the Sinn Fein with their own papers brought a new exciting stimulus to the call for independence. The newly formed Labour Party under Keir Hardie made the call for Home Rule for Ireland and for Scotland a basic platform for the principles on which they were set up.

In 1912, the Third Home Rule Bill was introduced by Prime Minister Asquith. Its defeat largely manufactured by the Protestant Unionists led by Sir Edward Carson sparked indignation amongst the larger Catholic nationalist community. Carson and the Protestants did not want to be ruled by a Catholic dominated government.

In January 1913 the Unionists formed their own paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteers (UVF), to fight any attempts by the Catholics to get home rule. This was the first of the paramilitary groups to be founded in 20th century Ireland. Later that year the Irish nationalists formed their own rival paramilitary group, the Irish Volunteers, which was supported by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Its aims were to 'secure and to maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland'. The Irish Citizen Army was founded by trade unionists following the Dublin lockout, a major industrial dispute over the workers' right to unionise involving 20,000 workers and 300 employers which lasted from 26 August 1913 to 18 January 1914. Emotions running high between all the groups were exacerbated when the British Army fired at civilians as they tried to thwart the Irish Volunteers from smuggling guns into Dublin. British officers threatened to resign if they were ordered to take action against the UVF. Civil War seemed imminent. The outbreak of the First World War brought the crisis to an end. A Home Rule Bill had been enacted but was now postponed until the end of the war as was the Scottish

Home Rule Bill. Irish men flocked to the British Army, as the government suggested that it would only implement home rule in exchange for conscription.

As the Irish and English enjoyed a day out at the races on Easter Monday 24 April 1916 an armed insurrection was launched by Irish Republicans to end English rule in Ireland and establish an independent Irish Republic. Organised by a seven man Military Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood it lasted for six days. Centred around major locations in Dublin such as the Post Office with isolated actions taking place in other parts of the country it saw fierce street fighting as the British army moved swiftly to quell the rising. British retribution was fierce as the government ordered their forces to defeat what many described as being treachery during war. A plot by Germany to send over guns was thwarted just before the rising.

Many of the leaders, including trade union leader James Connolly, head of the Irish Citizen Army, and Patrick Pearse, a schoolmaster and head of the Irish Volunteers, were executed. Some 3,500 people, many of whom hadn't taken part in the conflict were arrested and 1,800 of them were sent to internment camps or prisons in Britain. 500 people were killed in the rising, just over half of them being civilians, 30% were British military and police and 16% were rebels.

The savagery of the actions against the defeated insurrectionists was such that it increased the popularity of the Republican cause. This was reflected following the end of the First World War by Republicans represented by Sinn Fein winning a landslide victory in December's General Election. They refused to take up their seats and instead on 21 January 1919 they convened the First Dail and declared the independence of the Irish Republic. The Irish War of Independence began which saw violent action being taken by both sides; the British poured former soldiers known as the Black and Tans into the country along with auxiliaries and

their own army. A Republican Army of some 15,000 faced joint forces of 42,000 ranged up against them. The Royal Irish Constabulary was to work with the British exacerbating action against the ordinary Irish civilians. In 1920 the government declared martial law in the South. The armed conflict between the Irish Republic and its Irish Republican Army and the British Crown forces was to last for three years and was to lead to the deaths of many innocent civilians as well as those fighting. Cities such as Cork saw its centre burned out by British forces. Violence in Ulster and particularly in Belfast saw a high number of Catholic civilian victims as the Protestants turned upon them.

In December 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty brought an end to the three year war and saw the establishment of the Irish Free State, established as a Dominion of the British Commonwealth and consisting of 26 of the 32 counties, a division between North and South. A civil war broke out on 28 June 1922 as two opposing groups, the Irish Republicans led by Eamon de Valera and Irish nationalists and Free State Forces led by Michael Collins, fought over the treaty which nationalists supported and the republicans looked on as being a betrayal. Many of the combatants on both sides had previously fought alongside each other in the Irish Republican Army. The civil war which ended on 24 May 1923 was won by the Free State forces which had been heavily equipped with weapons by the British government; Ireland itself was not to become a Republic until 1945. The ramifications of this war were to last well into the next millennium with what was known as the Irish troubles continuing with prejudice and violence on all sides in Northern Ireland which was to affect England as well.

BRITAIN IN THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

BRITAIN changed hugely in the 20th century as the whole world seemed to have been turned upside down as new technologies, new regimes, new countries were created, wars were waged and those downtrodden found a voice to raise them from their subjugation.

Life for the working class in Britain was hard at the beginning of the century; poverty was rife with surveys at that times showed that between 10% and 15% of the population were living at subsistence level, and that between 8% and 10% were living below it.

Government at that time was mainly controlled by the Conservatives who ruled on behalf of the establishment maintaining the status quo. The Balfour Education Act of 1902 fitted that pattern in that it benignly offered education to all, but on the condition that those from the working class would only be required to learn the little to help them provide a service for what was required from them by their employers. Grammar schools were in 1907 opened up to poorer students with the giving of grants if they would provide 25% of places to poor pupils.

In 1906 a Liberal government was elected that introduced a number of reforms. From 1906 local councils were allowed to provide free school meals, and a year later school medical inspections began. In 1908 other reforms saw miners limited to an eight hour day, and the setting up in 1909 of trade boards who fixed minimum wages in low paid trades. The same year saw labour exchanges set up to find work for the unemployed. Small pensions for people over 70 were introduced in the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act. In 1925 pensions were paid to men over 65 and to women over 60, widows were also given pensions. In 1911, the National Insurance

Act was passed which required all employers and employees to make payments to a fund so that if a worker was ill he or she could receive free treatment from a doctor. Anyone who could not work because of an illness was given a small amount of money to live on. These arrangements only applied to the workers themselves and not to their families.

Women were still not allowed to vote. In 1897 groups of women formed local suffrage groups; in 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union was formed under Emmeline Pankhurst; a radical organisation it took the battle for women's votes on to the street as they protested against the continuing rejection by successive governments of their rights. Women were imprisoned and force fed. The First World War saw the campaign postponed as women filled the workplaces left empty as men went to the battlefields. In 1918, some women were finally given the right to vote – but only those over 30 years of age. A year later Nancy Astor became the first active woman MP and in 1929 Margaret Bondfield, a Labour MP, became the first female cabinet minister. In 1928 the age requirement for women to vote was lowered to 21, as for men.

The First World War, which broke out on 4 August 1914 when Britain declared war on Germany, was to wage for the next four years with millions killed on battlefields ranging from France in the west to the far eastern borders of Russia. The world was never to be the same again as revolutions and defeat changed the lives and boundaries of people and countries. The Russian Revolution saw the end of Russia and the creation of the USSR and the spread of communism. Men returned from war demanding change, but many found unemployment and poverty.

Trade unions grew as workers became more dissatisfied with their pay and conditions. The return of a Conservative government in 1923 coincided with the decline of old industries such as mining as new ones grew. Cuts in wages to miners in 1921 were followed in 1926 with proposals to cut wages further at the same time as increasing hours of work. A bitter

general strike started by miners followed, which affected workers in other industries who came out on strike in support, and then collapsed as the government moved against them mobilising the middle and upper classes to take over their jobs to keep the infrastructure working. The strike ended after nine days, though the miners remained out for another six months when they finally returned to work defeated. In 1927, the Trades Disputes Act made general strikes illegal.

The first of hunger marches by men protesting at the depression and loss of jobs took place in 1922 as workers marched to London from Glasgow. Others would take place as the world plunged into an economic depression in 1929, the most famous being from Jarrow in 1936 when 200 shipyard workers accompanied by their MPs marched down through the country to London. The marches gained a great deal of publicity but in reality little was done to actually reduce unemployment.

From 1922 the people of the country learned more about each other as the BBC began broadcasting radio programmes. News, education and entertainment broadcast to the masses meant that communications grew providing more information about living conditions. Cinemas were packed out as people saw the first 'silents' and then the talkies; news segments meant that again people could learn about what was happening to others.

The Treaty of Versailles which was supposed to bring peace at the end of the First World War instead laid the foundation of poverty and repression and sewed the threads of future wars. Punitive actions against Germany meant that fascism begun in Italy would find a welcome home in Germany. Racism and oppression would become the order of the day. In 1939, Britain would go to war again.

TOM AND KITTY HIGDON

AND THE

POTTERS

TOM and Kitty Higdon worked together as a team, not always in agreement when it came to topics outside the school such as pacifism, but certainly in tandem when it came to running the schoolroom and in fighting to improve the lives of the local children. They seldom argued and their loyalty to each other remained strong, especially when put under pressure.

Annie Catherine Higdon was born on 30 December 1864 in Cheshire, the daughter of Samuel Schollick, a foreman shipwright and his wife Jane. There were rumours that her family had been Austrian aristocrats, political refugees who had arrived at the beginning of the 19th century. Known to everyone as Kitty, she had fully trained as a teacher, becoming a school mistress and had left home to teach firstly in Somerset and then in London. A small woman with a determined air, she had received the schooling of a middle class young woman, spoke French, played the piano and sang. A cultured woman, she was, when it came to domestic affairs, useless, often choosing to do something else like going for a walk over washing up. Later her pupils would be paid to do it for her. She was also a pacifist and a vegetarian, the latter a matter of principle, which meant that once she was married the couple would mainly survive on bread and cheese, though she would make efforts to make sure that a vegetable stew was kept bubbling away in the school for those children she knew needed feeding. Women in the villages where she taught would often send their children over to the school with a bowl of soup and some apple pie, treats for the Higdons. Kitty in return would buy the children little treats

out of a small private income she received. The pacifism would cause problems with her husband during the First World War when she campaigned against it and Tom for it.

On 4 July 1896 she married Thomas Higdon, a fellow teacher, some five years younger than her. Tom was only a Certified Teacher, which meant that he had received training through the pupil-teacher system, which was one of the few ways in which the children of labourers could receive some form of secondary education. Whereas Kitty was small, Tom was a strong broad-built man, rather bombastic in nature who could also be kind and easy going. He could if necessary be tough and aggressive when it came to representing those who needed his help. He was once charged with assault having stood up to a farmer who in contravention of the 1902 Education Act had taken a pupil out of school to work on the land. Tom having spotted him had marched out to bring the boy back, the argument had ended with an affray and a fine for Tom.

His background in agriculture couldn't have been more different from that of Kitty. He was born on 13 December 1869, the son of Dennis Higdon a farm labourer in East Pennard, Somerset, and Ann, who could not write, signing Tom's birth certificate with a cross. This life where he directly learned about the daily problems facing farm workers to survive plus influences as a lay preacher for the Primitive Methodists, a democratic sect who encouraged their members to preach the gospels and whose chapels (used for early farm labourer union meetings) were the centre of political as well as religious life in the late 19th century, instilled within him the ambition, shared by Kitty, who had been brought up in the Church of England, to improve the lives of children and by doing so the lot of future generations. Tom and Kitty would describe themselves as Christian Socialists, and would attend the local chapels in preference to the Church, which would bring them into conflict with the Reverend Eland when they moved to Burston.

They initially lived in London, with Tom teaching as an assistant master at St James's and St Peter's School in Piccadilly, a Church of England school in what was then the poor quarter of Soho before moving to Wood Dalling when Kitty was appointed as headteacher to the local school, with Tom as an assistant teacher. His glowing reference from that school's headmaster as being an 'energetic and conscientious teacher' who had taken the First and Second Standards comprising 60 boys, and had also loyally carried out any suggestions made to him showed that he had the aptitude to learn plus the dynamism to carry out the work.

Life in London had brought them in contact with other young people who sought to make changes, with Tom becoming a member of the Independent Labour Party. They were both strong trade unionists and were members of the National Union of Teachers. Tom through his background had close connections with the Agricultural Workers Union, and it was his work on behalf of the union which would bring the couple into conflict with the various education authorities, most of whom had strong representation from local farmers and landowners. Tom would eventually become the union's National Treasurer, a position he held from 1916 to 1920, and would serve on their executive committee from 1914 to 1938, with a short gap of three years. He served as his union's County Secretary and cycled miles on union business. He was also on its County Emergency Committee, giving support to agricultural workers when they were on strike.

Both believed that education wasn't just about teaching the basics but should give children an understanding in subjects far in advance of their time including the French and Russian languages, astronomy, politics and poetry – which they believed would open up an understanding of the world and life normally denied to the working classes. Tom was a keen poet, not only teaching it to the pupils but also writing poems to be published in *The Labourer*, a union paper. The children responded with great enthusiasm.

One child was to write a little ditty about Tom: "Mr Higdon was a very good man. He tries to teach us all he can, Reading, writing and arithmetic, But he doesn't forget to give us the stick".

They had first taught in Wood Dalling where their radical concern for pupils and Tom's involvement with the local agricultural workers had brought them dismissal. These guiding shared principles of enlightening the lives of the children brought them into conflict at Burston with the Rev Eland, who saw things in a totally different way, doing his utmost to stop them. Tom Higdon was to write a poem which summed up his feelings about the Reverend. "Of the Poor's poverty, the causes moot, the Parson scarcely cares to know the root".

Whether or not the Higdons had orginally meant to spend the rest of their lives in Burston that is exactly what they did. The Strike School had been set up because they had been sacked, and the Higdons' lives and those of the people of Burston were to be linked until Tom's death. They became an integral part of the community. Tom would take charge of many of the ceremonies that took place on the village green even to the point of presiding over local events. In 1923, during the school's ninth anniversary, Sylvia Pankhurst was to join him as he took charge of a celebration, held instead of a christening, to name three babies.

The Strike School became in many ways the centre or heart of the village as the Higdons welcomed everyone to it establishing a place where people could meet and talk, take part in entertainments which would see Kitty playing the piano, often accompanied by her young pupils and where Tom would read poetry, or visiting poets and writers would talk about their work.

But it wasn't just the school that was opened up to the community. Kitty and Tom also opened their home to help others. During the 1926 General Strike six miners' children lodged with them and attended the strike school. Two young Russian boys, sons of a member of the Soviet

Trade Legation also stayed with them and attended the school; in return their grateful fathers presented Tom with the picture of Daniel in The Lion's Den which hung in the school.

Old age didn't stop Tom from taking an active part in local affairs; he continued to fight to help the local villagers and workers. A member of the Management Committee of the Diss Co-operative Society, and an active Rural District Councillor he fought for social justice. In 1938 he spoke up strongly against the idea of giving grants to farmers to build houses as these would in fact be tithe cottages. Tom and Kitty were quick to give help to those mistreated by farmers. In 1937 they offered temporary accommodation to one family evicted from their tithe cottage. Tom was to say: "It is the only thing between them and the Workhouse. This eviction is the most unjust, outrageous and barbarous thing possible in these days of supposed advanced civilisation".

Tom's death on 17 August 1939 caused much sadness in the community. Win Potter described the funeral: "Mrs Higdon was heartbroken when Tom died. His body was not taken in to the church. He was taken in to the Strike School. It was crowded to overflowing with personal and trade union friends. Mrs Higdon knelt down by the coffin and sang beautifully".

Kitty was bereft, she declined mentally and physically. She spent her last days at a home in Swainsthorpe near Norwich and on her death in April 1946 was brought back to be buried next to her much loved husband.

In her description of Tom's funeral Win Potter described the part played by the extensive Potter family, who had carried the coffin into the church, spoken at the school and driven the farm cart which had drawn the coffin. Violet's brother Tom was also responsible for reviving the annual rallies. The strike at Burston calling for the reinstatement of the Higdons was led by Violet Potter and several of her young friends. She and the Potter family, who were claimed to be descendants of Romany gypsies were

the most loyal of the Higdons' supporters; and that friendship and the effect that the Higdons had upon them would influence the lives of future generations of the family.

Violet Potter was 11 years old when she first met the Higdons, and like the other pupils grew to love and respect them. The elder girls amongst them including Violet were also taught how to type giving them a new skill which would provide them with a choice of jobs outside that of working on the fields. She was only 13 when she and her friend Marjory organised the strike, taking along papers to the school in which the pupils were to put a cross to say whether or not they would strike. Only six refused. Her father John, later a tenant farmer, was one of the first to be fined for not sending his children to the village school. In 1918 Violet left Burston and went to live in Forest Gate with friends she had met when she and her mother had visited London to take part in a public meeting organised by the National Union of Railwaymen. She got a job as a ledger clerk in Stratford, East London but returned to Burston in 1920 and the following year married a cowman who worked for several farmers. They took over the local pub which they ran for 16 years, three of their children, along with other members of the family, attended the Strike School. Violet, who loved letter writing, became an ardent church worker and was involved in organising many of the social activities for pensioners. She died in 1979.

Her brother Tom was born in 1914, and named after Tom Higdon; both he and his brother George were christened on the village green. He was also educated at the school and responded to the Higdons' teaching, in his case becoming politically active as a communist and as a trade unionist, he refused to leave the Communist Party when offered a job working for a Labour MP and served as a District and Parish Councillor for many years. He wrote frequently for the Agricultural Workers Union publication *The Landworker*. Taught to read early by Mrs Higdon, he claimed that *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was one of his favourite

books and that he could read *The Times* when he was six. Mrs Higdon paid for him to attend his local grammar school after he failed to obtain a scholarship on the grounds that the Strike School was operating outside the established education system. Tom worked with his father, years later taking over the village post office. He would frequently say that he owed everything that he had achieved to his education.

In a book about the Potter family written by a member of it, Anne M May, she refers to comments made by the family: "There is a sense of pride, not only in our own family, but in the steadfastness of the people who stuck to their principles".

THE AFTERMATH
OF THE
BURSTON SCHOOL STRIKE

THE Burston Strike School was closed in 1939 after the death of Tom Higdon. It may have ceased to be a school but the story of the strike had caught the imagination of the trade union movement and of the left at both home and abroad. It became part of trade union history and is rated along with the Tolpuddle Martyrs as being one of the great legends of the movement, to be proclaimed and be proud of. It is now a museum, visitor centre and educational archive.

Initially the building was used as a venue for meetings and social events. In 1949 the National Union of Agricultural Workers registered the Burston Strike School as an educational charity. Sol Sandy, a member of the union and the last surviving trustee, was joined by three additional trustees appointed by the NUAW. In the early 1980s, the NUAW merged with the Transport and General Workers Union, now Unite the Union. This brought a new impetus to the story with the Strike School then being turned into a museum. A rally to commemorate the strike held under the auspices of Unite and the Southern & Eastern Regional Council of the TUC (SERTUC) and with the participation of other unions such as RMT (formed from a merger of the National Union of Seamen and the National Union of Railwaymen who played such a large part in the early days of the strike) takes place every year on the first Sunday in September. Leading politicians and union leaders speak at what has become a well attended event.

The story of the strike has also caught the imagination of writers,

television and film makers. Books have been written, Tom's own story of the strike has been reprinted and collected memories of the Potter family published. A documentary on the strike was shown on BBC television on 23 February 1985, to be followed a day later by a TV film in the Screen Two series. *The Burston Rebellion* starred Dame Eileen Atkins as Kitty Higdon, Bernard Hill as Tom, and John Shrapnel as the Reverend Eland. Nicola Cowper played Violet. The children from Burston Primary School have also made a puppet film *The Burston Rebellion* which tells the story of the strike school.

A new film of the strike is in progress due to be released in cinemas in 2018. Its director George Moore was raised in Norfolk. The Strike School Museum has been working closely with the production to ensure the authenticity of the story, and much of the crew and cast are Norfolk based.

The story of the longest strike in British trade union history and the action taken by 66 young pupils in support of their teachers has become part of the cultural history of this country.

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Published in September 2016 by SERTUC
Congress House, Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS
020 7467 1220 sertuc@tuc.org.uk

SERTUC
the TUC in London, the South East and Eastern Region

Additional sponsorship from

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Printed by Upstream
020 7358 1344 cooperative@upstream.coop

£2