

HERITAGE SHEET 9

EDUCATION CONTINUED

In addition to parental conflict the school had to contend with underfunding, lack of equipment, restricted space, frequent changes and illnesses of staff and over zealous use of physical punishment by certain assistant teachers.

As an example of the penny pinching attitude of the local authority the school's request to purchase a dictionary was refused.

Children were, as often as not, poorly clad and fed and had in some cases to travel long distances from overcrowded and unhealthy homes. In winter the schoolroom was heated by an open fire which provided scant warmth. Diseases such as mumps, measles, influenza, diphtheria, chicken pox and even typhoid and smallpox made their presence felt in the village. Other excuses for absence were the Kiplingcotes Derby, Martinmas Hirings, Feast Days in Middleton and other villages, visiting menageries, sales and activities of other religious groups. The schoolroom itself was often used for other activities such as concerts and the village clothing club.

In 1906 a new classroom was provided and the existing one enlarged.

From the opening until the first World War the school had eight headmasters. The first, Mr Hill resigned with his wife in April 1876 following a surprise inspection which revealed irregularities regarding pupil attendance. The report of this inspection sent from the central government Department of Education was signed by a famous Victorian, F T Palgrave, noted for compiling a favourite anthology of verse entitled "Golden Treasury".

John P Gush, headmaster from 1881-92 received 3 months notice to leave on account of unfavourable reports. He asked the Managers to consider whether they provided the school with sufficient staff and if they had done their best to achieve regular attendance. Mr Gush stayed in the village for a while after his successor had taken over and claimed that his dismissal had been because of his political views.

Two events which were to have far reaching consequences for education in the long term stem from this period, the first was the setting up of the East Riding County Council in April 1889 and the other the passing of the Balfour Education Act 1902 which dealt with secondary education. During the passing of the Act the MP for the area Luke White while attending the opening of the Methodist Chapel looked forward to the day when there would be a natural progression of children from primary school to university. This day would be a long time coming.

By 1914 however changes were apparent. The school had 3 certificated teachers. Gardening had been introduced into the curriculum to provide experience of manual work. The school had a new piano bought as a result of fund raising activities. Patriotism was in vogue with celebrations on Empire Day. The boys did military and the girls Swedish drill. Cricket was played in the Hall grounds. The school had medical inspections and household management for girls was on the way. The number on the roll at this time was well over 100.

The following extract from the school log for 1914 shows the introduction of a modern feature of school life:

“July 24th Parents’ Day. The School was thrown open today from 2 pm to 4 pm for visits of the scholars’ parents. Many availed themselves of the opportunity and the ordinary school lessons were taken till toward the close when country folksongs and dancing were enjoyed. The innovation was a success. Average attendance for week 107.3 being 89.4%.”

Another progressive feature of that week was the attendance of Mrs Purchon on a one week course at the Summer School of the Education Handwork Association.

The school had a generally favourable report that year. It stated the “the present strong staff of loyal industrious teachers directing their efforts to securing increased and steadier mental effort from the children should increase the general efficiency of the school”.

So the school broke up for the summer vacation in 1914 with a spirit of optimism. International events would mean that it would not last.

When the school resumed after the summer holiday the Great War had started and typhoid was raging in the village. The war (declared on 4th August) dealt a blow to the progress of the school in that the children’s education was to a certain extent subservient to the needs of agriculture which had itself gone into decline before the war. There was a constant fear that imports could not be maintained and home production therefore had to be increased if starvation were to be avoided. More pupils were released under the Conditional Leaving Certificate scheme which already existed for children who demonstrated that they had achieved certain grades and could therefore leave school prematurely to work in agriculture.

The intense patriotic atmosphere generated by the war meant that the teaching staff were hardly likely to emerge unscathed. One assistant teacher Ernest Parkinson enlisted and the head master himself Arthur Jordan volunteered but because of medical problems only served as a special constable. In 1917 however a former teacher Frank Loftus was killed in action.

Money collections were made for the war effort and on the 14th July 1915 (Bastille Day) three shillings and threepence was collected for the French Relief Fund.

In 1915 a Roll of Honour Board was purchased and in May 1916 the tercentenary of Shakespeare’s death was marked with songs, poems, stories and models. No doubt the heroic nature of the bard’s writings resonated with the spirit of the times.

On the 29th July 1916 it was announced by the County Council that open scholarships had been awarded to Edwin Horace Jordan (son of the headmaster) and Marion Baxter – the first for the school. On the 4th August 1916 the Honours Board was unveiled.

There was a taste of things to come on 16th March 1917 when an aeroplane came down in Nicholson’s seed fields and remained there for two days. The headmaster closed the school early so that the children could visit it.

About this time over 5000 flies were killed in one week as a “crusade” against them. A growing awareness of their disease carrying potential was becoming apparent.

The school suffered from staff shortages and illness during the war and on 26th July 1918 the headmaster reported that “Spanish Influenza” had sadly affected attendance (1918 was the year in which the leaving age was raised from 13 to 14).

The news of the signing of the Armistice on 11th November 1918 was heard by the school at ten past one in the afternoon and was followed by a half day holiday.

The ravages of influenza meant however that the school had to be ordered by telegram from the Education Authority to close until 2nd December and at the end of January 1919 the headmaster was reporting that the influenza epidemic had adversely affected the mental as well as the physical health of many scholars.

The whole First World War experience had had a profound effect on the school, village and the country at large.

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