

Radcliffe on Trent Local History Society

Education in Radcliffe on Trent

We know very little about the early provision of education in the village; there was a form of education by the Church - St Mary's, and the Methodists with a Sunday school. Schools known as 'Dame' schools in the early 19thc would have been the only opportunity for learning for many of the village children. They were usually run by one woman who was more of a child minder than a trained teacher. One such known was run by 'Old Sally' in the area we know as Walkers Yard. By the 1820s a regular form of education was provided by a combination of church and estate, the latter represented by the **Dowager Countess Manvers**, who founded and subsequently supported a school in Radcliffe in 1825 for the education of 21 poor boys and girls of the village. This successful school was gradually absorbed into a national system. The original schoolroom and schoolmaster's house provided by the Manvers Estate are now a private residence, 46 Main Road. The 3rd Earl provided the new school building in 1870 and extended it in 1876. This building was known as the Church Hall and is now a design studio.

Day and boarding schools

As early as 1811 a day school run by **John and Elizabeth Stevenson** offering the 3 'R's' as well as surveying and building for the boys. Girls would be taught reading and sewing, but by the 1840s and 1860s a school run by **Misses Sarah and Harriet Allesbrook** offered a more varied education which included writing, arithmetic, English Grammar, history and geography. This was at a cost of 16 guineas a year if you were boarding. A boarding school run by the **Rev William Bury** at the vicarage in the 1840s was only for boys. Another private school was held on **Lorne Grove** run by **Miss Worth and Miss Harrison** from 1883, probably a forerunner of the **Lynton House** school. **Radcliffe Lodge** became a boys school from 1923 – 1930. One other school run by **Samuel Hemsley** is well documented. A former pupil **John Riley** attended the school in the 1840s. John was the son of a Master Slater and he recalls the time he ran away after seeing his parents pass by on a pony and trap, he spent the day at Bottesford wakes. His father gave him a note for Mr Hemsley hoping that his son would not be punished for this boyish escapade. It unfortunately didn't work as Mr Hemsley laid him across a double desk and beat him until he was black and blue all over. This was not the last time he escaped. The school was located on the corner of Walnut Grove and Main Road and by 1864 Samuel's son, also called Samuel was in charge and it was now called a **Commercial Academy** and assisted by **Samuel Cave Tomlinson**. At the time of the 1871 census it is listed as **Vernon House School** and only had 3 boarders. By July 1878 an advertisement in the Nottingham Journal showed that Mr Tomlinson was extending the school to take in young ladies. In 1899 the school moved to **Beaconsfield House** on Bingham Road where it continued under Mr Tomlinson until at least 1908. By 1915 **Miss Ethel Spencer** was in charge, Mr Tomlinson died in 1917.

Teachers

Advertisements for teachers in the 1850s show that the usual salary for a village schoolmaster was from £40-£60 per year, with a rent free house. A single schoolmaster would earn about half that amount. The first recorded schoolmaster and mistress in the 1851 census were **Thomas and Mary Ann Foulds**. By 1864 **Thomas and Sarah Parr** (brother and sister) are recorded in Whites Directory, with a **Miss Rebecca Richmond** looking after the infants.

In 1866 a new schoolmaster, **John Demment** appears. He was a Londoner and a certified teacher. He started with 25 pupils whose capabilities in 'catholicism, notation and numeration' which left a lot to be desired. By Christmas the roll was up to 66 and 87 the following March. A visit by Her Majesty's Inspectorate recorded 'a very creditable work considering the short time the Master has been in charge'. Lack of order and discipline seem to be prevalent at the time of Mr Demment's headship, not surprising as pupils ranged from 4 to 14 years of age and he taught single-handed. Insolence, lateness, truancy, fighting in school and tampering with the harmonium are all mentioned as offences for which punishment was meted out. In 1871 John Demment left. The next schoolmaster of any note is **James Browne**. He was appointed in 1875, born in Cotgrave about 1845 and he stayed on assisting with the move to Bingham Road in 1909. His wife Sophie, a trained teacher and was in charge of the infants, which had been organised as a separate department since 1874. James was 6ft 3ins tall and Sophie 4ft 6ins, they had 2 children when they arrived in the village, Mary and James and Christine was born in 1882. They were good teachers as the HMI reports speak well of the school. In August 1876 it is reported- "*The National Schools of Radcliffe on Trent are in a state of high efficiency. The mixed department is remarkably well taught throughout. Even the dull children have been made to pass a satisfactory examination, while the brighter scholars display much intelligence and accuracy in their answering.*"

By 1884 there were 350 pupils on the books and Mr Browne took on extra staff, one **Hester Snodin** and 3 pupil teachers.

Attendance

Poor attendance was a persistent problem, some caused by childhood ailments. Children fell ill more frequently than today due to a poor diet and home conditions. It was not until 1908 that a routine examination of all pupils was made by the County Council's medical officer. From 1909 regular visits by a nurse were made, although she concentrated on weight, eyesight and inspections for lice. Also attendance was effected by children working. In a rural parish children worked in the fields in Spring and Autumn and the school often closed due to the majority of the children helping out at harvest time. It wasn't until 1880 that schooling became compulsory, but even in the early 20thc boys were taking time off school working as butchers boys, milk boys, paper boys and potato picking. In 1901 the law now stated that no scholar may leave school until he or she has passed the 5th standard.

Up until 1892 parents had to pay a fee to the school (a few pennies a week) and these were collected every Monday morning. In the 1860s a farmer might pay 6d a week for each child but a labourer only 2d per child but even that would have been a huge part of a family's expenses. Comparatively few children stayed on after the age of 10 years. After 1892 with free education attendance still did not improve but it did bring more children onto the registers.

School buildings

The old school building in the early 20thc was no longer adequate for the needs of the village. Progress in finding a site for the new school was slow. Eventually agreement was entered into with the Trustees of the Perkins School at Barrow on Soar for the purchase of land on Bingham Road. The total cost of this build plus fixtures and fittings was £3,450.3s.0d. This new building was formally opened in the evening of Friday January 1 1909. A speech given by **James Haslam**, chairman of the school managers emphasised his belief in education but also highlighted issues relating to the attitudes of parents and children in the village. He said, amongst other things - *'that Radcliffe youths are the most incorrigible of the whole county. I don't think they are worse than other places but the reputation is bad enough and we must try with the assistance of parents to make the youth of the village more amenable to the rules of sobriety and good behaviour'*.

On January 11 1909 **Mr Browne** and his pupils left the old overcrowded buildings for the last time. The new building would have made a great impression on the children, the floors were of polished wood blocks, the tall windows let in light and fresh air. Gas lights lit up the darker days. There were washbasins with cold water taps in each cloakroom and outside flushing toilets. Also there was space to play, together with back to back plays sheds for rainy days. Best of all it was warm, each classroom had a large radiator in it, which is remembered for thawing the bottles of milk in the winter.

George Norton took over the headship from James Browne and **Eliza Frear** the infant headmistress in 1910.

Life at school

Even into the 20th c children took time off school to help with the household income. The Bates family who lived on Bingham Road had 13 children and one of them Gertie would help doing lace work.

Taking this time off meant that she did not always move up a standard each year. She recalls that the school board man, a Mr Crookes, would make his rounds of persistent absentees by bicycle. One day she spotted him coming down the entry of the terrace houses and she shot into the house to warn her Mum. When Mr Crookes tackled her Mum about Gertie's absences she said Gertie is helping to do some lacework so that the family could have a meal. Mr Crookes was sympathetic to the family but he had to report it.

At this school the boys were encouraged to keep a garden, where they would grow vegetables and fruit.

George Norton was a well-respected teacher, having served in the first world war. His nick name was 'winkie Norton' probably because of his odd mannerisms, perhaps caused by his war experiences. He was a disciplinarian but also had a soft side. Old pupils remember him sending a boy out of school to collect his daily newspaper and each Monday a tin of Capstan cigarettes. He retired in 1939. During the second world war Radcliffe welcomed a number of evacuees some from Sheffield and others from the East coast. Teachers came as well.

Mr Claridge commenced his duties as headmaster on 1 April 1940.

After the war the winter of 1947 was severe, the school had new curtains installed to keep out the draughts, fog and ice held up public transport making some of the teachers journey's to school rather hazardous. Snowdrifts blocked roads in January and February and childrens attendance was low with many having fluey colds. Floods then followed the thaw.

Boys and girls were still separated at playtime but this time by railings. The school housed all children from infants up to seniors. One of the problems at school was school dinners. In March 1948 some

members of staff and pupils complained of feeling ill (this was recorded in the school log books) after the previous days hot-pot dinner. The matter was duly reported to the canteen cook supervisor in Bingham where the meals came from. A piece of solder was found in the pastry. The school was visited by various inspectors and it was agreed that the meals should be delivered later in the morning to avoid them sitting around before being served.

It was in the first half of the 1950s that the numbers of children in school rose due to the nationwide post-war increase in the birth rate. In April 1951 County Hall representatives and school managers recommended that 2 new classrooms be built in place of the play shed, next to the lavatories. In 1953 the Church Hall, formerly the school, was bought back into use as a classroom, and was in continuous use until the new infant school was opened in January 1958.

Not all went well at the school in the 50s as a critical report from the HMI in November 1955 said ...*"they hoped for greater variety of individual writing from the children, increased speed in written work, more imaginative needlework and improvement in the quality of leisure reading material for the children."*

Mr Claridge retired in 1954. **Mr Harry Hopewell** took over the headship on 1 September 1955.

A new Secondary school

In 1956 all classes for children aged 11 or over were transferred to the new secondary modern school which had been built off Cropwell Road at a cost of £126,000. **Gordon Herbert Ford** was the headmaster, he had taught previously at the village school. One comment on Mr Ford was ' He was good with a piece of chalk- never missed- and was straight and fair'.

The senior school was to change completely just 2 months after the opening by the arrival of the children of the Royal Canadian Air Force personnel who had settled on a large estate of houses in the village. There were Canadian teachers as well and for the majority of children the integration was successful. Games were shared, the Brits learning about soft ball and baseball and the Canadians about football, cricket and netball.

In September 1972 the school became the **Dayncourt Comprehensive** with Mr Ford becoming deputy to **David Butterworth** the first headmaster. This school attracted pupils from Cotgrave and surrounding villages. The number of pupils increased from 200 at the previous secondary modern to 1500 in 1979.

Junior School

The junior school children continued to be taught at the old Bingham Road school under the headship of **Harry Hopewell**. Even though the Canadians had left by 1963, the sale of the houses on the estate and further developments of private housing estates brought in more children. A number of improvements were made to the school but in 1964 the new junior school opened on Cropwell Road. Unfortunately it was not big enough so a number of classes returned to the old school. Mr Hopewell was the last of the old style teachers, untroubled by regulations etc. One example was that he rewarded a class for the best attendance of the week by letting them leave half an hour early the next Friday afternoon. He took on staff without reference to county authorities. He retired in 1973.

The old school was sold by the County Council to a developer. A school reunion was organised for 15 July 1995 and a great number of ex pupils and teachers attended. It was a sad occasion but great to meet up with old friends and adversaries and also to look on in amazement that some of the teachers were still alive and holding court in the main hall. Only the railings from the 1908 school still remain. What was once a place of learning for the youth of the village has now become a retirement home for the not so young of the village.