

A HISTORY OF ST JOHN'S SCHOOL, ROUNDHAY.

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'By indentures of lease and release, dated 20th and 21st November, 1837, Stephen Nicholson, of Roundhay conveyed to the Rev J A Rhodes and three others, to the use of them and himself and their heirs, a site with six almshouses and a master's and mistress's house and a schoolroom erected thereon etc' So begins the account of St John's School and Almshouses, in 'A History of St John's Church Roundhay', and it is to the authors J Dickinson and G D Webster that I acknowledge my indebtedness for much of the material about the early history of the school.

Whilst the building itself is believed to date from 1834, the school was probably founded before this; Charles Milner, died aged 30 in October 1835, was described as 'clerk and schoolmaster'. 1837 is the date of the first documentary record of the school, although on the occasion of the laying of the first stone of the church in 1824, 'the workmen and children repaired after the ceremony to the schoolroom, near the premises of the hospitable patron of the church', Stephen Nicholson's house at North Hill. The poor children who could attend were those living in the parishes of Chapel Allerton, Shadwell, Potternewton and Seacroft as well as Roundhay. Attendance at Sunday School was compulsory.

'School pence' were paid, right up to 1904 when the school was taken into the management of the West Riding County Council, though the fees were modified from November 1891, being 1d. instead of the previous 3d. or 4d. in classes 1 and 2. The Yorkshire Penny Savings Bank saw the revision of the school payment system as an opportunity to encourage saving, for parents could deposit the money they had previously sent to

school with their children in the existing branch of the savings bank which had been opened in December 1871, in the schoolroom, each Monday from 7.30-8.00.

Isaac Wilkinson's logbook, quoted by Dickinson and Webster, was started in February 1868 when he became Headteacher, and it records that on 29 November 1871, some of the children were away 'pulling turnips'. The following June, on the 27th there was Thin attendance. A great many children away in the hay fields.' The school was closed on some occasions, as on 22 November 1877, when there was 'No school in the afternoon-preparing the room for a Missionary Meeting and Sacred Concert in the evening.' At this time the schoolroom was the only meeting room and public building in the parish that could be used for concerts. Absences were also due to local 'feasts' and, on 20 June 1898, to the visit to Leeds of the famous Barnum's procession!¹ There was a half holiday to celebrate the Peace proclaimed after the Relief of Mafeking (1 June 1902). 2 February 1904 saw a holiday 'to enable the County Council Architect to make measurements and plan of school and out-buildings'. At different times extensions were made to the premises, an infants' room in 1885 and an extension to the playground in 1908. It was not until 1934 that the main room was divided, though this had been suggested as early as 1908 but not carried out as it would have meant the room could no longer have been used for concerts. The playground had been enlarged in 1908 but was not asphalted for another 33 years.

Discipline was important, and the logbook records an episode in May 1894 concerning one John Thackray, son of William Thackray, farm bailiff for Mrs Frances Lupton at Beechwood.

John Thackray was sent out this afternoon for talking. He

refused to hold out his hand, I gave him two or three strokes on the shoulders. He then shouted out 'stop it!' so I then gave him a good thrashing, and although he tried to kick me, I got the better of him and told him to take his cap and go home. He is over 15 years and in st.7² (i.e. 7 stone in weight).

Two days later the offender was back in school, bearing a letter from his father and with a suitable apology, promising not to be disobedient again. However not all parents responded in like manner; Margaret and Walter, the children of Charles Smith of Mansion Cottages were pupils of the school, but Walter's last attendance was on 18 January 1899 (aged 11), with the reason for his leaving noted as 'Parents objected to punishment.'

Details from the old attendance records for the 1880s can be related to the 1891 Census for Roundhay and show that some children did not have far to come to school, like Lucy and Ruth, the daughters of Marmaduke Yates, joiner and wheelwright, of 4 The Almshouses. But Mary Dove had a long walk from Lowther Street, Harehills, and a child from the Wellington Inn stopped coming to the school because of the distance involved. Pupils Esther and Phoebe Ellen Blackwell were the daughters of the Sergeant at the nearby Police Station. The families of the servants from the big houses in Elmete Lane attended the school -Arthur, Marg, Walter and Herbert Dixon were the children of the Elmete Hall coachman. Arthur, the eldest, had previously attended Headingley Town School, and Marg, Gledhow Infants. Both Walter and Herbert started school when aged only three.

The children of Thomas Lofthouse, farmer, of Cobble Hall, (a household containing a general servant and two farm servants as well as family members) attended St John's School alongside Mary Watson, daughter of an agricultural labourer on the Cobble

Hall farm. However the Lofthouse children left to go to Leeds Middle Class School, it being unnecessary for them to contribute to the family economy from a young age. From Ladywood Villas came Rose Lund, granddaughter of Maria Pearson, described as 'living on own means'; perhaps Rose walked to school with the Bairstow children of Chapel House in Ladywood Road, whose father was a boot and shoemaker. The children of Arthur Lupton's gardener at Springwood, Elsie, Harry and Beata Judson were also pupils at the school in the 1890s. The Goodall and Umpleby families were amongst those with successive generations attending St John's; however there were many children in families which did not remain in Roundhay for a long period of time. Analysis of the leaving details on the first three pages of the surviving admission book shows that of 119 children listed, seven left the school to attend other schools, one was too ill to attend, and three were 'teaching'. Of the rest, 62 were 'working' or 'of age', and the other 46 had 'left the district'. While there was residential stability among some farming families, it was not uncommon for servants and their families to move around the country.

School inspection is not new; 29 March 1870 saw the 'examination of the school by the Misses Nicholson' (daughters of William Nicholson Nicholson, heir to his Uncles Thomas and Stephen) who also helped with the teaching of Catechism, Reading, Arithmetic and Scripture. In December 1871 those children who were examined by the inspectors in all subjects passed 'very fairly', but there were others whose poor attendance record disqualified them from inspection. In 1874 an inspector found the school closed, due to the fact that the schoolmaster's child was suffering from measles!

Several headteachers stayed for long periods at the school, notably Mr Crossland for 37 years, retiring in 1928, and his

successor for the next 20 years, Mr Baynes-Smith, who was said in 1939 to have taught full-time with three assistants, the number of pupils being 143.³ He walked to school each day, 'complete with bowler hat' and a former pupil recalls his 'rough tweed suit' and waistcoat, worn whatever the weather. John Garrett described him as 'a fine Christian gentleman and an excellent teacher.' He also remembered the way that, standing by his desk each lunchtime, Mr Baynes-Smith methodically peeled an apple 'which he ate slowly and with great pleasure.'⁴ Mrs Baynes-Smith came into school one afternoon a week to play the piano so that the children could practice the music they had been taught earlier. Cherie Clayton (nee Briggs) remembers the headmaster as 'a wonderful man, full of knowledge and encouragement' who was kind enough to provide her with a swimsuit outgrown by his own daughter for use in the open air pool below the waterfall in the park.⁵ Other former pupils recall the swimming lessons in the unheated pool, which was sometimes covered with 'green algae'.⁶ Eileen Baynes-Smith joined the school as an eleven year old on 8 January 1929 from Kirkstall Road Church School, but did not stay long at St John's; she is recorded as leaving the following July to go to Roundhay High School.

Former pupils remember that in the 1930s everyone had to go home at lunchtime, except in thick snow, save those living too far away, perhaps at the Mansion or in the Park, who were allowed to stay. John Garrett, a pupil in the early 1930s, remembers eating sandwiches at lunchtime in front of a blazing fire, before going out with the other boys and playing Cowboys and Indians just below the waterfall, until recalled by Mr Baynes-Smith's whistle for afternoon school. Cherie Clayton (nee Briggs) recalls the way that the gas lights were lit by 'someone standing on a desk-top' and that it was felt to be a privilege to be chosen for this job. Ann Bond noted that it was 1947 before electric lighting was installed. The outside toilets were often frozen in winter, and

the playground was out-of- bounds every Monday, washday for the residents of the Almshouses. The war brought the conversion of the Vicarage cellars for use as an air-raid shelter, and gas-masks were carried, with the school windows criss-crossed with sticky tape.⁷ After the introduction of the 11 + exam St John's no longer catered for older pupils.

In 1947 St John's school became a Junior Mixed and Infants' School, consequent upon the provisions of the 1944 Education Act, and by 1953 there were 110 children on the roll. When Leeds adopted the system of primary, middle and high schools, children between the ages of 4-9 were educated at St John's, and the older ones went to Braim Wood Middle School (next door to St John's, and formerly a girls' secondary school) or another middle school in the area.

Although efforts were made to enlarge the buildings and update the facilities, it became increasingly clear that the premises were not adequate and plans were made to build a new school, for when the middle school system was abandoned, St John's again had to have space for pupils aged 10 and 11 in years 5 and 6. The new school, opened in September 1992, is sited in North Lane on Foxglove Field, the gift of Mrs Penrose-Green. In the final term at the 'old school', pupils and staff dressed up and spent a day as their Victorian forebears would have done, sitting at desks arranged in rows, using slates for handwriting, and taking part in 'drill' exercises.

After the cramped conditions and lack of space for the whole school to come together, both staff and pupils enjoyed the facilities of the new building. There was provision for a Nursery, and plenty of room in the 'shared areas' for activities outside the classrooms. Everything was of course brand new, with plenty of space for displaying the children's work, much more adequate toilets and

cloakrooms, and a hall that accommodated the whole school and visitors. From the old school children and staff had gone weekly to Church, but this now became a termly visit; however there are still visits from the Vicar and Methodist minister as well as others in the community who take the children's assembly from time to time. The tradition of contributing to good causes started in the early days still continues, with recent charities supported being St George's Crypt and the Yorkshire Air Ambulance. In November 1921 two parcels of clothing and the sum of £2-0-1 was sent to the 'Boots for Bairns' fund, and in August 1929 165 eggs were collected in one week for the Leeds Hospitals. Today there are some 250 children on role at St John's School, taught in the nursery and 7 year groups. With its long history and tradition, 'the school understands itself to be an integral part of the local community and parish and seeks to work in partnership with both.'⁸

Thanks are due to those who have helped with the compilation of this article in a variety of ways; especially to Mrs. Marion Davies, Headteacher at the time of writing, to past and present members of staff and to former pupils, including those whose reminiscences were part of the material collected some time ago by Ann Bond.

As always, we welcome feedback from readers of 'Oak Leaves', and would be pleased to hear of your own memories of St John's School.

¹ Barnum and Bailey's American circus toured the country by rail and the parade advertising their arrival in town included a military band, a large number of horses and a menagerie of animals.

² Dickinson and Webster, p.35.

³ Ann Bond, thesis notes, 1969.

⁴ John Garrett, pupil in the early 1930s, quoted by Ann Bond.

⁵ Cherie Clayton (nee Briggs), pupil around 1939, quoted by Ann Bond.

⁶ John Garrett, as above.

⁷ This was recalled by Joan Kemp, a pupil between 1940-46. Five generations of her mother's side of the family (the Nettletons) attended the school between the 1830s and 1951.

⁸ Mission Statement, Roundhay St John's School Prospectus, 2003.



The Almshouses and old St. John's School. Pictures of the teacher and pupils are a modern enactment of the period.