

KING'S HEATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



COLMORE ROAD GIRLS' SCHOOL
KING'S HEATH
BIRMINGHAM

1911 - 1930

BY

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1991

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COLMORE ROAD GIRLS' SCHOOL, KINGS HEATH

Colmore Road Girls' school was officially opened in April 1911 in the newly built centre building on the Colmore Road site having shared temporary accomodation with the boys since September 1909.

The first headmistress was Miss Annie Smith, previously head of Kings Heath Girls' school. She had a staff of four: Miss Dorothy Pritchett aged 34; she left in September having been appointed head of Sturchley Girls' school. Miss Nellie Bayliss aged 28; she came from Kings Heath with Miss Smith and was appointed assistant head in October. Miss Mabel Freeman aged 22 and Miss Helen Mitchell aged 23. All were certificated teachers except Miss Freeman who was college trained.

Miss Smith formed five standards of girls aged between 8 and 13, so either taught one class herself or relied upon temporary assistance. In June coronation medals were distributed for King George and Queen Mary and there were two days holiday. On June 30th 231 girls were taken to see the coronation pictures - a free private view. Presumably there would have been some absentees so the five classes averaged 47 or 48 girls each. As with the infants and the boys the education office did not regard going to the pictures as educational

so attendance was cancelled and the teachers lost a half day's pay.

School closed for the summer in July and reopened on August 22nd. The staff was augmented by the Misses Stilwell and Watkins, both uncertificated, and in October Miss Dorothy Millar came as a pupil teacher. In the following January Miss Annie Roberts was appointed: she was a B.A. and so left in 1918 to take up a post in a grammar school.

The pupil teacher scheme had first been introduced in 1846 and followed on from the old monitorial system whereby the master taught a group of the older pupils who then passed the teaching to a group of younger ones. Selected boys and girls were offered a five year apprenticeship as pupil teachers from the age of 13 to 18. A grant was given to the head training them and they sat an annual examination. Seven and a half hours instruction was received in the evenings and at weekends and they taught daily for five and a half hours. At 18 they could sit for a Queen's scholarship for a two year course at teacher training college, but many did not go and stayed as uncertificated. In 1870 pupil teacher training centres were set up.

In 1902 with the introduction of secondary education pupils went to secondary school until 18 as a 'bursar', receiving half time teaching and doing half time teaching in a local elementary school. The last mention of a pupil teacher at Colmore Road is 1927. Pay was affected:

in 1914 the average for certified elementary teachers was £129 per annum for men and £96 per annum for women; the average for uncertified was £76 for men and £69 for women.

There is some mention in the log book of lessons other than the three 'R's. A Mr Hill, drawing instructor from the office, asked that the time table be altered so that drawing could be taken from 9.30 to 10.20 and 10.35 to 11.20 every third Tuesday. Also on Tuesdays nature study lessons were taken in Kings Heath park from 11.20 to 12.00. The park was also used for conversation lessons. Mr Bott, drill instructor, came to take a two hour drill lesson but Miss Smith omits to say whether staff or girls took part.

In December 1912 cookery lessons commenced in All Saints parish rooms - 18 girls from Standard VI and VII in the morning and 18 from Standard V in the afternoon. By 1916 this figure had trebled. Needlework was begun in 1913 and there is one report of garments being taken to the children's hospital.

Drill would have been taken in the hall and games in the playground. Swimming lessons commenced in 1920 possibly at Moseley Road baths as Kings Heath baths were not built until 1925. By 1924 the girls were competing in city wide competitions and winning cups and medals.

Other glimpses into the time table are shown in the HMI. reports. In

1915 just prior to the move to Kings Heath the report commented on the good behaviour and neat appearance of the girls; the necessity for the upper classes to have more opportunity for free conversation on what had been read and the need to improve the poverty of the vocabulary. Recitation was apparently quite good.

In 1918 a nine day inspection produced the following:

" Time devoted to secular work has of necessity been reduced to a minimum as the school has had only part time teaching for three years.

No subject has been dropped and the girls have been encouraged to work at home. Arithmetic is not a strong subject and the children need training to analyse numbers and quantities and apply principles." Does the last statement refer to working out that irritating problem of how long it would take to fill a bath if the plug is left out?

In 1924 Miss Higgs visited and said, " The head is capable and enthusiastic and takes an active part in teaching. A strong point is made of games, rhythmic and folk dancing, singing, musical appreciation and dramatics. Contributions to the school magazine show progressive quality. Some pleasing work in drawing; flower painting is sensitive in treatment."

Miss Higgs was correct in mentioning the interest in dance and music. In 1925 the entries to the Midland Music Festival were:

Standard II Dramatics - Pied Piper

Standard IV Part Songs First
Class Cert.

Standard V Country Dancing First
Class Cert.

Standard VIa & b Part Songs First
Class Cert.

Standard VIa International Dance
Honours

Standard VII & VIII Cantata
Edgbaston Banner

The following year every class took part with country dancing, rhythmic dancing, junior and senior choir all gaining first class certificates; international dance gaining honours and a shield for the dramatic production of 'Quality Street'. A soloist also gained first class for singing.

In 1927 the banner was gained for 'Midsummer Night's Dream': honours for national dancing and first class certificates for part songs and 'Alice In Wonderland'.

In 1928: honours and the banner for 'King Midas'; honours and a shield for 'Merchant of Venice'; honours for 'The Willow Pattern Plate'; honours for rhythmic dancing and a first class certificate for national dancing.

The school did well academically, too. In 1913 two girls left to go to the Art school and three to Kings Norton Grammar school, having won scholarships; three others went as fee paying pupils. In August 1915 eleven girls moved to grammar schools - four by scholarship and the rest fee paying. The following year, despite having only part time schooling

, seven scholarships were won.

Concerts were given to parents and friends either in the Kings Heath Institute or in school on a specially prepared platform. The concert given in 1928 consisted of an original historical pageant - the history of Kings Norton in rhythmic and folk dance, songs and recitations and in the second half a Cantata, 'The Hours'.

Parents were also invited to see the girls at work. In 1923 about 150 parents visited. The headmistress said " Everyone expressed great

interest and pleasure in the work shown." A year later 300 visited and also saw a pageant in the form of tableaux embracing history, geography and literature linked by a chorus.

Science was not taught in school apart from nature study, although some girls went to the science centre on Wednesdays. In July 1929 Dr. Smith HMI. gave a lesson on an unknown subject - electricity !

In 1928 the old names for the classes were changed from standards to, 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b etc. The following year a request came from the education office that all classes of 51+ be reduced to 50 immediately.

This needed some reorganisation as there were eight classes with 403 on the books. Form 3 previously kept to 45 was made up to 50, but what happened to the odd three ? By August of the same year there were 441 on roll so an extra class had to be accommodated in the hall using portable chairs and tables. They would have had to move out when the hall was required for P.E. or games causing endless problems.

The numbers were high because of the building of new property in the neighbourhood.

During the period 1911 - 1930 health remained an important factor in the life of the school both for pupils and staff. In December 1913 thirty pupils were examined by the dentist - the worst sufferers perhaps. In January 1918 a medical examination was held and this became a termly occurrence. The same term a doctor from Fashoda Road

school examined three girls: one was certified mentally defective and removed to Fashoda Road school. The following month the girls' heads were examined and two girls excluded. The head reported that the parents objected to the 'method' but did not specify which parents or what method.

Attendance of pupils and staff was greatly reduced in 1918 when the world wide 'flu epidemic was at it height and school closed for Christmas that year on December 6th.

By the 1920s dental, hair and medical examinations were a regular feature of school life. The staff were not immune, of course, and in 1924 one teacher was absent for three months with typhoid and another for three months with TB. In 1925 the class teacher caught measles four days before the summer holidays after her class had been reduced to 60% attendance with the disease.

At the end of the summer term 1926 Dr. Auden, Chief Medical Officer, was notified by a local doctor that jaundice, prevalent amongst the girls, could be caused by exposure to the pipes from the old heating apparatus. He investigated and asked for a list of absentees of two weeks and over. He must have drawn a blank because the heating apparatus was not renewed for another ten years.

February 1928 began the supply of milk to the girls. Pasteurised milk

in sealed bottles with drinking straws could be purchased at 1d per third pint and an average of 120 girls bought it. I wonder whether they put them on the pipes in winter to take the chill off as we used to do ?

Accidents were reported in the log book to both staff and pupils. One of the staff fell while supervising her class at games in the playground, hurt her arm, so went to the local doctor. Another had a serious injury while cycling to school. A girl from the top standard slipped while doing needlework and a needle embedded itself in her arm. Her mother and form teacher took her to the General (by tram?) where a surgeon removed it. Two days later a girl fell in the playground and broke her arm. First aid was rendered and a local doctor set the bone and then motored her home. Driving in the car probably made up for the pain ! On another occasion a picture fell on a girl cutting her arm and eyelid. I hope that noone laughed on the day when a teacher, taking singing with standards II and III, fell from the stool and injured her right arm. She was taken home by another member of staff and returned with her arm in a sling.

No accident was as bad as early March 1923, however, when a girl in Standard V, so aged about 12, was suddenly taken ill and died within half an hour. The doctor, mother and the police were sent for but the head gave no further details so we are left wondering how and why. Fancy, though, having to face a mother with such news.

Out of school visits were a feature of the school from the beginning. In October 1911 the Misses Bayliss and Bennett took 34 girls to see Henry V performed by Mr Benson's company. Shakespeare was studied by the top standards so they were taken to the Theatre Royal to see 'Julius Caesar' and 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and to the Prince of Wales to see 'Macbeth'. In March 1913 a party of 48 girls and the headmistress visited the art gallery to see an exhibition of students' work. This was the first of many visits either to the gallery or to the Royal Society of Arts in New Street.

In June 1914 a party of 79 girls and two teachers went to a lecture on 'Captain Scott in the Antarctic'. This was the last visit until after the war but once back at Colmore Road they began again. In July 1920 77 girls and three staff went to see 'The Merchant of Venice' and the following year 20 girls visited an exhibition of paintings and woodcuts produced by the children in the Municipal School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna. The rest of the school had a half day holiday, chosen because the Australians were playing at Edgbaston. As each school on the site could choose the date of an occasional holiday one wonders whose choice it was.

The Art Gallery or the Botanical Gardens were often the venue for classes achieving 100% attendance. In 1923 came the first of many visits to Aston Hall. The head made sure that anyone reading the log

book would realise that the visits were educational as 'all were supplied with cyclostyled sheets of questions for notes to be written up on return.' There is no mention of transport for these local visits. The city centre was easy using the trams running through Kings Heath, but the Botanical gardens and Aston Hall would be more difficult. School buses did not become a part of school life until the thirties.

A charabanc was used, however, for the trip to the British Empire exhibition at Wembley in June 1924 when 86 girls, 15 parents and 10 teachers went. In September of the same year the head, 4 teachers and 17 girls from Standard VIII visited Lichfield to see the cathedral and the Roman excavations at Wall. Even though it was a Saturday visit the girls still had the cyclostyled sheets. A year later 61 of the upper classes plus the whole staff went to Stratford via Kenilworth, Warwick and Charlecote. They were given a guided tour of the birthplace, Shottery, New Place and the church.

In April 1927 30 girls, the head and two staff went by train to London. They had a charabanc drive round to the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and the Tower; with the zoo in the afternoon. Another visit was made in 1929 to Liverpool to look over the Cunard Liner Laconia and the docks. The head commented on the value of such visits and regretted that regulations forbade them during school time unless the whole class joined in. The leaving standards did sometimes

go as a whole to such places as Cadbury's or the Templar Printing Works.

During the year both Royal and National events affected the life of the school. A two day holiday was given for the coronation of King George and Queen Mary in June 1911; a day in April 1913 when Princess Louise laid the foundation stone of the new children's hospital; a day and a half for the Armistice in 1918 and an extra week on the summer holiday in 1919; a day in May 1919 for the visit to Birmingham of the King and Queen and a day in February 1922 for the wedding of Princess Mary. The Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, paid a three day visit to Birmingham in June 1923, staying with the Bishop of Birmingham in Harborne. The school was given a day off in honour of this visit - two days later the whole school went to Moor Green to see him. On the first day the Prince laid the foundation stone of the Hall of Memory; visited Fort Dunlop and the B.S.A. factories in Witton and Garrison Lane and opened Nechells power station.

It was on the third day of his visit that he was in the Kings Heath area when he went across to the Coventry Road and returned to Harborne via Robin Hood Lane, Brook Lane, Addison Road, Vicarage Road, Fordhouse Lane, Cotteridge and Watford Road.

In November 1925 a short service was held between 11.30 and 12.00 during the funeral service of Queen Alexandra. The hymns sung were:

'Blesses are the pure in heart': 'For all the saints' and 'O God, our help in ages past'.

On May 9th 1926 some teachers were having difficulty in getting to school on time because of the General Strike, but on May 18th the head recorded the end of the strike: " The trams will be running tomorrow." February 1927 caused an alteration in the timing of the school afternoon when the session began at 1.35pm and ended at 3.45 so that any girl who wanted could go to see the Prince of Wales who was in the vicinity.*

Regulation holidays altered little during the period. The school year began in August following a four week break with two weeks at Christmas; one week at Easter and one week at Whitsun. Before 1914 holidays were given for good attendance plus Shrove Tuesday but these ceased during the war and after 1919 a week for half term was given in October plus three half days during the other two terms. Sometimes there were unexpected closures e.g. January 1912, a severe snowstorm closed the school for two and a half days. In April 1917 the log book reported snow so that the attendance was poor but the head continued rather tartly, 'snow was really not sufficient to justify the absence of 100 girls.' The following January school had to be abandoned because of the snow and when the girls did get back many were sent home again with instructions to change boots and stockings immediately. The weather was bitterly cold in February 1919 so the

girls were sent home as the boilers had failed.

There were regular red letter days when special services or celebrations took place. Empire Day was May 24th - Queen Victoria's birthday and the pattern of celebration was the same for most years: the singing of the National Anthem; Land of our birth; the Recessional and Jerusalem followed by the Lord's Prayer and 'Three cheers for the Empire'. Each class had lessons on the Empire and in 1924 there was a short play written by the headmistress with Brittania holding court and receiving visits from members of each country. One of the staff sang 'Land of Hope and Glory' and national dances were performed. Sometimes the music varied and 'The Children's Song' or 'I Vow to thee my Country' were used, but the format did not vary.

Specific Christmas celebrations are not mentioned until 1919 when school closed following a concert and carol service. In 1920 Standard VI gave a concert, and £2. the proceedings of a collection, was given to the Cripples' Union. Concerts were given every year following, using either the school hall or Kings Heath Institute.

The first Armistice Day in 1918 found those members of the school present and unaffected by the 'flu meeting to sing the National Anthem and be dismissed to reassemble on November 13th. Later years saw the whole school assembling at 11.00am for the two minutes silence followed by the singing of the 'Children's Song'; the 'Recessional'

and the National Anthem. The headmistress would then give a talk on some subject like, 'Why England went to war; causes and results and lessons to be learned from it.' Teachers then continued the subject with their own class. Another year the subject was the land and sea battles. If the 11th was at the weekend the service was held on Friday, but the two minute silence was omitted.

If the girls went out on visits, they also received visitors. Some were official: His Majesty's Inspectors came to see the head on some problem or see a particular member of staff. Registers were checked once a term and woe betide anyone making a mistake. They had to be accurate as salaries depended upon them, and they could be used in a court of law. Other inspectors visited to see specific subjects - drill, or drawing, or music: students came from Hereford Training College and their lecturers, or 'method mistresses', came to supervise them. In September 1922 five students from Birmingham University came on teaching practice so the staff took the opportunity to visit other schools: St. Peters Harborne; Fentham Road; Bordesley Green; Dennis Road and St. Benedicts.

Once a year the top standards had a talk on 'Alcohol' from a member of the Band of Hope. In July 1924 the Birmingham Police Band came to give a concert and the conductor gave 'a delightful and instructive talk on music and the musical instruments.' In June 1928 there is the first mention of someone coming from the After Care Department to

speak to the leavers about employment. This became an important part of school life.

In 1920 an 'Old Girls' Club' was formed when all girls who had left in the three previous years were invited back for tea. 130 out of a possible 150 came. Regular meetings of the club were held with refreshments and 'dancing and song'.

There was an occasional brush with the law. In June 1917 while the school was at Kings Heath a girl was seen taking a cloak across the playground during school hours and was arrested. Presumably there had been a hue and cry about a stolen cloak but nothing further was told. In October 1924 while the headmistress was in a needlework lesson her handbag was stolen from her room. She lost £6 needlework money, a gold chain, diamond ring and other things. A man had been seen in the corridors and thought to be a workman. The police were informed and a month later one of the staff and a pupil went to the Victoria law courts to identify a suspect. Evidence, however, was inconclusive so the case was dismissed. Two years later the headmistress was back at the law courts as a witness to an assault by a boy on a girl. He was convicted and sent to a remand home.

In December 1929, Mr Goose H.M.I. visited with a questionnaire about ages, classes and special qualifications of the staff with regard to the proposed alterations. The boys' school was to become a junior

school taking boys and girls aged eight to eleven; the infant school to take five to eight year olds and the girls' school to take eleven to fourteen. The following June the staff were asked their desires regarding the re-organisation, i.e. stay in the senior school or move to the junior school. The parents' meeting in July was so crowded that it had to be moved to the playground. Councillor Miss Sant chaired the meeting and Mr Flavell D.I. explained how the re-organisation would affect the school. Most parents approved. School broke up for the summer on July 18th but the staff came in next day to move books etc. August 25th the school reopened as Colemore Road Senior Girls' School, with Miss Plant as headmistress; Miss Bayliss as deputy and nine teachers. The girls were classified according to age into forms and subdivided according to ability. The curriculum allowed for specialisation and a new domestic centre was in use with Miss Cake as specialist in domestic subjects and laundry.

Many of the staff appointed and teaching before 1930 would be known to girls attending later. Miss Smith, the first headmistress, left in March 1922 and was replaced by Miss Perkins. She left in August 1923 and Miss Annie Plant became head and stayed until her retirement in 1936. Miss Nellie Bayliss came when the school opened, was made chief assistant in November 1911, and remained until her retirement in 1941. She had taught in Birmingham for 41 years. Her death was announced in 1950, aged 68. Miss Gladys Briscoe was appointed in June 1916 and resigned in December 1927. The Misses Millar and Greenfield came in

October 1911 and November 1921 respectively, and moved to the newly formed junior school in 1930. Miss Evelyn Dogget came in August 1922, spent one term in the junior school in 1930 and finally left in July 1955 to go to Colmers' Farm school. Miss Ekins, who began at the same time retired in January 1950.

*In February 1927 the Prince of Wales came again, to visit the British Industries Fair at Castle Bromwich. Originally he was expected to come by train, but surprised everyone by not only driving up by car, but also by driving himself. He visited the B.I.F. in the morning and lunched at Castle Bromwich Hall, home of the Dowager Countess of Bradford. In the afternoon he came to Highbury and Uffculme. He toured the wards at Highbury and displayed great interest in the bedridden cases, shaking each man by the hand and enquiring about the injuries and where they were obtained. In the canteen the walking wounded whiled away the time waiting with community singing. They all sang as he left, 'The more we are together'. He walked in drizzling rain to Uffculme and toured four wards and the men sang, 'For he's a jolly good fellow'. He left to drive back to London at six o' clock having intended to visit the wounded soldiers at Sorrento hospital in Wake Green Road, but did not have time.



COLMORE ROAD SCHOOL, 1986