



KING'S HEATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Colmore Road Infants' School 1930 - 1957

By

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Colmore Road Infants' School in the late 20th century.

Colmore Road infant school opened first in February 1909 in the White House in Kings Heath park and moved to the end block on the Colmore Road site in April 1911. There they stayed until 1915 when all three departments, infant, senior girls and senior boys moved to Kings Heath school so that the building could be used as a military hospital. They returned in 1919 and the next big change was in 1930 when the boys' school became a mixed junior school taking children aged 8 to 11; the senior girls' took girls aged 11 to 14 and the infant school took children aged 5 to 8.

In August 1930 the school opened after the four week summer break with Miss Ward, who had opened the school in 1909, as headmistress and eight members of staff each with classes of about fifty. Miss Mills was absent having had a week's extension as she was in Canada.

During the Autumn term there were staff meetings or conferences as Miss Ward called them to discuss school music, musical appreciation, word building and the Christmas party. Eight students from Birmingham University spent two weeks in the school on teaching practice and there were visitors from Aston Lane and West Heath schools. School closed for Christmas following a carol concert for parents and a party for the children.

In January 1931 the attendance was reduced to about 70% with a measles epidemic but the normal school routine continued. The doctor inspected the new intake and the nurse came to examine heads. There were visits from Miss Marks H.M.I and eight teachers from the junior school + four more students on teaching practice. There was also a demonstration of Eurhythmics to the staff but Miss Ward did not say who gave the demonstration or whether it became part of the time table. (According to the dictionary eurhythmics is the harmony of bodily movement especially as developed with music and dance into a system of education. At teacher training college we called them 'Greek hops')

Miss Ward was taken ill in April 1931 and did not return to school again. Her death was announced in October at the age of 58. Miss Tetley was appointed headmistress and took up her duties in January 1932 although she missed the first two days.

of term owing to a death in the family. The spring term of 1932 was a difficult one as attendance was poor with bad weather and epidemics of whooping cough and chicken pox.

Notice was sent from the Education Office concerning the incubation and exclusion periods of the commoner infectious diseases:

| | | |
|----------------|------------------------|---|
| Scarlet Fever | 2 - 5 day incubation | Exclusion until seven days after discharge from hospital. |
| Diphtheria | 2 - 5 day incubation | Exclusion until pronounced fit by doctor. |
| Measles | 10 - 15 day incubation | Exclusion until 10 days after appearance of rash. |
| German measles | 14 - 21 day incubation | Exclusion until 7 days after appearance of rash. |
| Whooping cough | 7 - 10 day incubation | Exclusion until 28 days after beginning of 'whoop'. |
| Mumps | 12 - 28 day incubation | Exclusion until 7 days from subsidence of swelling. |
| Chicken pox | 11 - 21 day incubation | Exclusion until 14 days from appearance of rash. |

School reopened in August 1932 following the summer holiday and the log book lists the classes and teachers:

| | | |
|---------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Class 1 | Miss Harriet Deakin | Appointed 1911 |
| Class 2 | Miss Annie Brazier | Appointed 1922 |
| Class 3 | Miss Rose Kershaw | Appointed 1910 |
| Class 4 | Miss Marjorie Whitehouse | Appointed 1911 |
| Class 5 | Miss Annie Johnson | Appointed 1931 |
| Class 6 | Miss Elsie Mills | Appointed 1914 |
| Class 7 | Miss Rose Burrow | Appointed 1928 |
| Class 8 | Miss Kathleen Wheeler | Appointed 1928 |
| Class 9 | Miss Sarah Day | Appointed 1931 |

The extra class with Miss Day was in the hall in an effort to keep the numbers under fifty. However, Miss Day left in September to be married and was not replaced so class 9 was disbanded and permission given for the classes to number 55. One of the reasons for the problem was overcrowding in the junior school so that some children were not able to move up. The District Inspector commented in his report on the difficulties but said that the children were 'ready of speech and eager to

'learn' so they were apparently not affected by being so many to a class.

Using the admission registers it can be seen that 236 children were admitted between August 1931 and July 1932 and 193 of these were aged five. The biggest intake was in August when 73 five year olds were admitted but the policy seemed to be that a child could start immediately and not wait for the next term so that 15 were admitted in September 1931; 4 in October; 14 in November; 2 in December; 29 in January; 15 in February; 2 in March; 6 in April; 5 in May; 6 in June and 24 in July just before the summer holidays. The rest of the intake was of older children from other schools having moved into the district. Life must have been very difficult coping with 50+ five year olds all entering school at different times in the year. The movement to the junior school was in either February or July and of the 236 who came by July 1932 only 91 moved to the juniors. The rest either moved to other Birmingham schools or to other parts of the country. There were two deaths when a little girl died in 1931 only a month after being admitted and another girl admitted in 1931 died 15 months later.

In February 1939 twenty children of all ages moved to the newly opened Wheelers Lane school but many of those who came in 1939 were evacuated with the school in 1940. The last intake in 1939 was August 28th just before the school closed on the outbreak of war and no more were registered until March 1940 when attendance became compulsory. 46 aged 5 were admitted and 24 aged 6 to 8.

In January 1933 most of class 6 went down with measles and efforts were made to isolate the remainder but to no avail and by March all four of the lower classes were affected. In February a heavy snow storm closed the school altogether as only 49 children came and they were sent home again with wet feet. The measles epidemic had obviously been severe as many children were absent in April suffering from 'debility following measles.'

The now standard medical examinations continued but in March two doctors from the Health Department came and gave the first of three inoculations against diphtheria. Miss Tetley gave no details of who were inoculated or how they were chosen but



Colmore Road Infants' School and playground in the late 20th century.

this became a regular part of school routine during the next thirty years.

Parents were invited at the end of May 1933 to look at school work and watch P.T. and dancing.

After the problems of accommodation reported by Miss Tetley in November 1932 by September 1933 she said that the school was not full owing to the 'bar made regarding district' in other words the lines defining statutory distance had changed yet again.

1934 passed with little incident. The epidemic this year was chicken pox - the diseases seemed to take turns; 58 scholars were inoculated against diphtheria; Miss Whitehouse had a long absence suffering from heart problems and open days for parents were held. There were three visits from Miss Thorpe, the P.T. organiser, to watch various classes doing P.T. with a view to using them for demonstration purposes at Severn St where P.T. courses for teachers were held.

In May 1935 Councillors Fryer and Miss Sant visited to give out medals to commemorate the Jubilee of King George and Queen Mary and to preside over the planting of a Jubilee tree in the playground. Unfortunately there is no mention of where or what was planted. Later in November the school closed on the occasion of the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester.

Miss Tetley makes no mention in the log book of the death of George V in January 1936 but I expect special prayers were said in Assembly.

Miss March inspected the school in March 1936 and gave an excellent report. She mentioned the well planned language course saying that the children's speech was 'ready, clear and expressive.' In handwork she found the teaching of technique was varied with floor building, free paper cutting and illustrative drawing. There was first hand experience in number where the children had practical lessons in measuring and weighing and a generous supply of play material to stimulate curiosity and interest. The classrooms were gay with growing plants, models and artistic illustrations.

Two overseas visitors came to observe: Miss Westlake from Canada in August and Miss Shannon from Australia in October.

On 8th December 1936 Miss Kershaw, chief assistant, retired. She had come to the school in August 1910 aged 34 and retired

on her 60th birthday. Two weeks later Miss Tetley retired. She had been headmistress since 1932 following Miss Ward's death.

In January 1937 Miss Bott was appointed headmistress. The first couple of months were difficult as there was deep snow coupled with a flu epidemic. Miss Burrows left at the end of January to go as chief assistant at Yardley Wood school having been at Colmore Road for nine years. She was not replaced until May so Miss Bott had to have a series of supply teachers.

This was Coronation year and the time table was upset on April 26th so that the children could rehearse their procession. The school closed for the two week Whitsun and Coronation holiday and returned on May 20th. In the afternoon the children processed round the school and into the hall to witness the crowning of a king and queen chosen by themselves. After some community singing they went home. Next day there was a concert in the hall given by various classes and then they returned to school at 3.00 for a tea provided by the city.

In September a harvest festival was held. The children brought fruit and vegetables and, following a short service, the produce was sent to poor children in town - no details are given of how this was done.

Another incomplete entry in the log book tells of a small boy being reported to the education office for 'maliciously injuring another boy in the playground.'

Miss Whitehouse was absent from July to November 1937 having had an operation in the Queen's hospital - this became the Accident hospital.

On November 11th there was a short service for the whole school at 11.00 when the two minutes silence was kept.

In early December there were three 'open' days when parents were invited to see an exhibition of handwork and art in the hall and work in the classrooms. Miss Marley H.M.I visited as did 40 students from Selly Park Training College.

In 1938 both Miss Wheeler and Miss Brazier had their tonsils removed.

At the end of September 1938 there was a meeting of parents to discuss evacuation plans. At the same time two classrooms were emptied and the children worked in the hall while gas masks were distributed. Miss Arnold, a member of the A.R.P

(Air Raid Precautions) was absent for a further two days helping in the distribution of gas masks elsewhere. The crisis passed and the end of term was celebrated with a Christmas party.

1939 opened as usual with deep snow and an epidemic of measles and chicken pox. The numbers in school had gone down as Wheelers Lane school opened in February so the classes were reduced to seven although by June numbers were up again and the classes were again eight.

Poor Miss Brazier was in the wars again - this time suffering from mumps.

In June the school was disrupted with the painters and two classes had to work in the hall. The summer holiday in July must have been a welcome relief but the return on August 28th found only three teachers present as the rest were tied up organising first an evacuation rehearsal and then on September 3rd organising the real thing. The school, like all schools in Birmingham closed and did not open again until October 30th when children could come on a voluntary basis. The government was slow in providing shelters despite the crisis of 1938 partly because it was believed that the bombing would be concentrated on London and secondly that dispersal of the population would be the best option. Thus more planning was put into evacuation plans. Birmingham was divided into three zones with the central wards and those containing munition works being evacuation areas; residential districts were neutral and the suburbs were reception areas. By 1941, however, when the bombing was at its height the whole of the city was regarded as an evacuation area and this was when many from Colmore Road went. There were, of course, many evacuated privately. The first day of evacuation was for children and teachers and the second day for mothers and young children and the disabled. Official evacuation was carried out in Bournbrook, Selly Park, Stirchley, Ten Acres and Selly Oak and the teachers from Colmore Road and other schools in Kings Heath were sent to help.

When the school reopened on October 30th there were only two shelters taking 50 children each so the 150 who came were organised into two shifts, morning and afternoon. Rehearsals for air raids were held twice a day but Miss Bott reported that the children were not happy having to wear their gas masks and

needed a lot of help in adjusting them. There must have been real fear amongst the adults as to what would happen if gas bombs were dropped shelter or no shelter.

During November the numbers crept up and the building of more shelters continued. Despite the difficulties there was some normality with medicals and visits from the dentist. Christmas came but there is no mention of any celebration.

January 1940 brought snow and very low temperatures and the school was closed when the pipes burst on the 23rd. More heavy snow made repairs difficult so the school didn't open again until February 7th. Attendance was still voluntary and was low because of the weather. School closed again on 16th February as there was no fuel; reopened on the 19th but another burst pipe and lack of fuel closed it again until the 23rd. There were also staffing difficulties as one of the staff went down with German measles but there was no supply teacher to replace her.

On March 11th the school opened on a compulsory basis but still part time as the shelters had not been completed.

June 10th was the beginning of National Savings Week and an all out effort was made to sell stamps. £18 was collected and 11 children had complete books of certificates.

School closed for a two week summer break and returned on August 12th to nine months of air raids. The night raids, many lasting 12 hours or more, reduced the morning attendance when often only 20 were in at 9.00 and 70 by 10.00. As the afternoons were better the timetable was altered and the three Rs were taught in the afternoon instead of art and handwork.

On the 27th August the sirens sounded at 1.40pm with the all clear an hour later. The police advised sending the children home so no registers were marked. A week later the siren sounded at 9.20 but so few children had arrived they could be accommodated in the two shelters. On the 1st October there were two day warnings and three on October 3rd. Miss Bott mentions that the shelters were cold and damp and not well lit and how difficult it was to provide any occupation for any length of time. She could also have mentioned how unsettled young children become when out of normal routine and in a scary situation.

After two weeks holiday in October they returned to the same pattern of both day and night raids. On November 4th there



Colmore Road Infants' School late 20th century.

was a warning at 1.20. A few children were in the play ground so moved to the shelters but others continued their journey to school (there were no school dinners at that time). A letter was sent to parents pointing out the folly of letting the children come during a raid especially as, in that instance, the plane had passed low over the school and dropped bombs no little distance away. On the 11th November there was a warning at 11.50 so many parents came to collect the children from the shelters. There was a second warning at 3.20 lasting nearly an hour so the children would have had to go home in the dark as normal school finished at four o'clock. Miss Bott said that that had been a very distressing day as the weather had been bitterly cold and very wet. The shelters were in a deplorable state and she contacted the Education Office to complain.

On November 28th there was a meeting of parents re evacuation. The next day Misses Hull, Deakin, Mills and Wheeler left with 31 children to Sutton in Ashfield. A further 15 left on December 6th following another week of day and night raids.

In January even though the raids continued some children returned from private evacuation and three from the school party. Miss Bott reported on January 20th that, after a weekend of snow, there were drifts several feet deep in the playground. Only 25 children came and, as there was a shortage of coke, school closed in the afternoon. Further snow followed by a thaw made travelling difficult so only 32 came the next day. Two days later dense fog and shocking conditions underfoot meant that only 30 came in the three youngest classes and only marginally more higher up.

The day raids continued although not so frequently but the shelters had not improved. A further 8 children went to Sutton in Ashfield and Miss Bott took the opportunity of visiting the rest of the evacuees who, she said, 'seemed content and had settled in well.' By May the raids had virtually ceased and life became more normal with visits from the doctor, the nurse, the dentist and four students on teaching practice.

In October 1941 Miss Wheeler returned from the evacuation area and so the staff was complete for the first time in twelve months.

In 1942 there were staffing problems. One teacher was absent from January to September and no supply teachers meant that the

time table suffered. There was also an extra inspection this year when the local A.R.P. warden came in to examine all the gas masks of both children and staff.

The log book reported two accidents in 1942. A little girl fell in the playground and broke her leg and a boy from the reception class ran behind the air raid shelter so out of sight of the teacher on playground duty. He fell over and bumped his knee but instead of going to the teacher he ran home. His mother took him to the doctor but there was no serious damage.

During the two week summer break the education authority arranged for the school to be open during the day for those children who wanted to come. It was thought that this would help working mothers. The staff took it in turns to be on duty. Twenty came on the first day but the numbers steadily declined and only six came on the last day.

The harvest festival in September raised £5 with the sale of the produce and this was sent to the Merchant Navy Comforts' League.

This year there was a Christmas party before school broke up on December 23rd.

In July 1944 school was closed as the three departments were used as rest centres for evacuees from London escaping the doodlebugs. 92 children + teachers came and 25 of those came into the infant school. One of the Colmore Road classes was moved into the hall and the London children and their teacher used the vacant classroom. More evacuees came after the summer holiday so accommodation was very tight.

Rev. Michael Parker from All Saints church took the harvest service and £15 was sent to the Red Cross Prisoners' of War Fund. Open days for parents were held in December - the first since 1938 and school closed for Christmas on December 22nd.

In January 1945 several visitors including Miss Thorpe, the P.T organiser, came to see demonstrations of experimental modern movement.

School closed on the 8th and 9th of May for V.E. day but there was a different cause of celebration in July when the school closed for a six week summer holiday thanks to the education act of 1944 putting all schools on a par with grammar schools.

In 1946 there was another first when a police sergeant came to talk about road safety. This became an annual event and in 1955 a whole day was devoted to safety first when a team of policemen marked out the playground into roads, pavements, islands etc and fitted up road signs and electronically operated traffic lights to make it more realistic. Every child had a chance to drive or be a passenger in the cars provided so giving everyone practical experience of the rules of the road.

In December 1946 Miss Brazier left to become chief assistant at Hope Street school. She had been at Colmore Road for 24 years having started in May 1922 at the age of 22.

The first three months of 1947 were very difficult with deep snow up to the first floor windows and icy conditions + lack of fuel + a measles epidemic. After Easter things got back to normal and in November there was a day's holiday to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth.

Although the log book does not record the fact as a new book was started I believe that Miss Whitehouse retired in March 1948. She came to the school in April 1911 and so retired aged 61 having been at the school for 37 years.

In November 1948 reporters from the Post and Mail came to interview one of the staff going to Australia for a year's exchange although they didn't return in January to interview her Australian 'exchange.' A pupil remembers her returning from Australia with a koala bear.

During 1949 students from Bristol Road Emergency Training College came on teaching practice. These emergency colleges were set up to take mature students returning from the forces and gave a one year training rather than the normal two.

In 1950 climbing ropes and a scrambling net were erected under the shed in the playground and Miss Thorpe came to see the children using the apparatus. This equipment, known as the Bristol equipment had been made by the firm Wrights Ropes Ltd and a representative from the firm and organisers of P.T from Liverpool came to watch. The following year a German professor came to see it.

Miss Bott retired in July 1950 having been at the school since January 1937 and Miss Burrows became head.

April 1951 school meals were served for the first time and 76 children stayed in the first instance. In June of the same year 36 children took part in a P.T display at Vill Park. They had regular rehearsals beforehand at Metchley Park playing fields going there by special bus. In July 24 of them took part in the International Festival of Gymnastics, dance and games at Central Hall.

In November 1951 the hall and two classrooms were wired for wireless reception and a new wireless was installed.

There was a two minutes silence following the death of King George VI in February 1952 and a special service on the day of his funeral.

In December 1952 Miss Deakin retired having been at the school since July 1911 when she came as a twenty two year old teacher so had spent her entire working life at Colmore Road.

The Coronation was celebrated in June 1953 with souvenir mugs and chocolates. On June 17th all three departments went to Stirchley Pavilion picture house to see the Coronation film in colour.

A school uniform was introduced this year consisting of a blazer, cap or beret in royal blue with a crest with lettering in yellow.

In September the harvest festival service was taken by the Reverend Seaman, husband of one of the staff. During the time she was in school there were frequent visits from students at Westhill College.

In January 1955 another long serving member of the staff, Miss Mills, retired. She had come as a pupil teacher aged 19 in March 1914 so had been at the school for 40 years. She left just a month before immersion heaters and a copper water tank were installed in the cloakrooms and for the first time ever there was hot water on tap. It was only another ten years in 1965 that indoor lavatories were installed for the children. No more frozen pipes or a quick dash through the snow!

In May 1956 a doctor and a team of nurses came from the Public Health Department to carry out the first of three inoculations against polio. A group of children from special age groups were inoculated although no indication is given of who or what age. Inoculation against diphtheria had been in existence

since 1933 but this new one has now become standard practice.

In 1957 the senior girls vacated the central block to move to a new site at Swanshurst on Billesley Common. This block was divided between the infant and junior schools giving much needed breathing space.

My class teacher all through the infant school was Miss Brazier. I thought she was very old but have now discovered her to have been in her mid thirties and born the same year as my mother. One clear memory of Miss Brazier that I have is of being taken with the rest of the class to Kings Heath park and told to stand round the big tree in the main path and being asked to guess how far the roots came underground and discovering they came as far as the branches.

I was interested to see that Miss Brazier left to go as chief assistant at Hope St school - the school which my grand mother, mother and two aunts also attended.