

Education in Elstow – Part four – 1957 to 2009

This is the final chapter of the series of four articles and continues with quotes from the Bedfordshire school inspection reports on Elstow School.

1957 - February / March; *'This is still an all-age school with a roll of 381 children The contributory area remains unchanged except that few children are now drawn from within the Borough boundary. The rural schools account for 248 seniors, who are taught in six classes, each of which, with one exception, comprises 40 or more pupils whereas the 82 juniors and 51 infants are organised in three and two classes respectively. The large size of the senior classes makes it almost impossible to give individual attention to a number of children who appear to need special treatment and whose attainments are exceedingly low. This pattern will change, however, early in 1958, when the seniors will move to the new Secondary School and leave the two principal rooms, the Science laboratory and about three classrooms free to relieve the pressure on the Borough Schools south of the river.'*

'Many of the pleasing features noted in the last report are still in evidence and the Head Master, appointed in 1954, is fortunate in having on his staff the experienced and capable Senior Mistress, who continues to exercise a highly beneficial influence on the girls. Indeed, with one exception - the Master temporarily in charge of 3A - the members of the staff, 14 in number, are hard-working, make good use of visual aids and of class libraries, secure much real work from the children, and give freely of their time to extra-mural activities, notably to the successful May-day festivities, to games and athletics and to the activities of the flourishing Young Farmers' Club. Individually each makes a sound contribution to the education of the children over quite a wide field, including Religious Instruction, Physical Education, Art, Music and crafts; in Rural Studies, the school has won well deserved fame for the excellent work done in experimental field trials with agricultural and horticultural crops. In view of these achievements it is disappointing to find the general level of attainment in the basic subjects rather low in the senior classes. To improve it, it will be necessary for the Head master to give clear guidance about objectives and methods and to pay more attention to organisation, for example in the classification of the pupils and the avoidance of divided responsibility for the teaching of English in individual classes. The advisability of his having a definite teaching programme was discussed with him.'

'The infants continue to be well taught and their progression is sufficiently well maintained in the junior classes to enable them to work independently in Class 5 and to enjoy the use of books.'

'Throughout the school, the children are courteous, well behaved and have a feeling for humour and responsibility; from the morning assembly, too, there springs a sense of fellowship which seems to permeate their daily activities. The clear articulation of the singing at assembly is noteworthy. A spirit of co-operation is equally manifest among the 310 children during the mid-day meal, which is well prepared and quickly served.'

In 1966, a Craft Centre, to serve Bedfordshire was based at the school.

In the 1970s, Bedfordshire County Council introduced comprehensive education, doing away with the 11+ examination and grammar schools and introducing a tier of school between the old County Primary and County Secondary Schools. Thus Lower Schools now taught children aged 4 to 9, Middle Schools

from 9 to 13 and Upper Schools from 13 onwards. Elstow County Primary thus became Elstow Lower and Abbey County Secondary became Abbey Middle School.

Since 1870, Elstow school, be it Board, Council, County Primary or Lower, had been based in the old buildings in Elstow High Street, very close to the northern boundary with Bedford.

In March 2004, the school moved to new purpose built premises in the new housing development of Abbeyfields .



As Bedford and Elstow have grown, the school has accepted pupils from the Mile Road and Elstow Road areas, across the parish boundary. The old school premises, listed by the former Department of Environment, along with 3.77 acres were put up for sale in 2008.

On 1st April 2009 Bedfordshire County Council, the Local Education Authority, was abolished and Bedford Borough Council became Elstow's Local Education Authority.

In 2016, developers demolished the red brick additions at the rear of the original school building and began building houses in their place. The playing field was retained as a permanent open space. The original school building and Headmaster's house - now listed buildings - were converted into residential properties, the main building becoming four apartments, each named a 'classroom', rather than a 'flat'.

