

## Education in Elstow – Part three – 1939 to 1956

The Elstow School logbooks give a clear snapshot of children's school life during the Second World War.

1st September 1939: *'London children arrived at the school. Several members of the staff came back from their holidays to assist the headmaster in the billeting of the children and teachers.'* [The 64 children came from a junior school in Cricklewood.] 11<sup>th</sup> September 1939: *'three senior classrooms have been allotted to the London school children and they are working quite separate from the Elstow school proper.'*

21st December 1939: *'Elstow parents have subscribed very handsomely towards the Christmas party we are giving to the London school children evacuees.'*

13th September 1939: *'war time syllabuses have been prepared by the handicrafts and domestic subject teachers.'*

9th March 1940: *'War time gardening. Boys borrowed a seed drill and set the onions and carrots.'*

A 3rd Education Act, in 1944, established the principle of County Primary Schools for children up to the age of 11. At 11, they took an examination to determine the type of secondary school they would attend until they were 15, the most academically able going to grammar schools, the rest to secondary or secondary modern schools. Elstow thus became a County Primary School.

School inspector's report of February 1950: *'This school, situated on the fringe of the Bedford Borough boundary, now caters for 389 children aged 5 to 15 years as against 267 in 1947. Only 65 children are drawn from the village; of the remainder, 81 juniors and infants come from Bedford - having been transferred from Pearcey Road schools in 1948/9 - 66 from Wilshamstead (including 18 juniors and 6 infants who attend voluntarily), 66 from Shortstown where there is no school, 15 from Eastcotts, 10 from Cardington, 20 from Cople, 14 from Willington, 30 from Haynes and 13 from Harrowden. The total comprises 199 seniors, 123 juniors and 67 infants. These are arranged in 11 classes. Teaching accommodation consists of nine class-rooms, four in the original block built in 1874, and five in a separate block erected in 1929. A third unit contains a laboratory, a housecraft room, a workshop and a staff room. A kitchen and dining room is of recent erection.'*

*'The school has enjoyed a high reputation for many years, which, coupled with rapidly increasing numbers and staffing instability, provided a challenge to the new Head master [Mr Goodwin] ... appointed in 1947. He has met this challenge. His inspiring manner, personal industry, clarity of purpose, high ideals and leadership already have a beneficial influence on the school as a whole. He has created a flexible organisation and welded into a team the more experienced colleagues and no less than eight masters and mistresses appointed within the past two years. In all his efforts he has been fully supported by the Senior Mistress [Miss Pestell] who, besides being a skilled teacher, especially of Needlecraft, sets a high personal example of unstinting effort.'*

*'There is much evidence of a close relationship between the school and parents; the renowned May Day Festival, Sports days, Craft Exhibitions, the pupils' terminal reports, the school uniform and the Head Master's visits to the villages are but few examples of this.'*

*'A friendly spirit permeates the whole school and the children strive to attain the high ideals of comradeship and behaviour set before them; the confident and self reliant attitude of the children is the result. Indicative also is the responsibility carried by the Prefects who, among any routine jobs,*

*conduct the business of the School National Savings Group and care for the library of 400 books from the County Library. The ability of the members of the recently formed Young Farmers' Club to conduct their business with confidence in the absence of adults also reflects valuable training, as indeed does the performance of the School Choir which practises out-of-school hours. Here, too, should be mentioned the faithful and loyal service given to the school by the caretaker [Mr Martin, husband of the cook] for the past 20 years.'*

*'A well defined curriculum has been formulated and its interpretation has been notably successful with the younger children. The lively and purposeful work of the two Mistresses in charge of the Infants' classes is creditable. Of special note is the quiet concentration of the children that arises from a wide variety of experiences prepared for them and from opportunities to express their own ideas in pictorial or written form. No doubt greater reality in Number work will emerge in the near future.'*

*'In the two upper junior classes it is evident that every effort is being made to provide opportunities for learning from first-hand experience. Natural ways of encouraging speech and helping language development are being explored and much of the written work is both purposeful and satisfactory.'*

*'Of the six senior classes, two contain the slower children, and it is significant that the teaching of practical subjects, Handicraft (wood and metal), Housecraft and Needlecraft [taught from age 14 to the boys by Mr Naylor] has met with undoubted success [whilst cookery was taught by Miss Evans and needlework by Miss Pestell, to the girls]. Gardening too arouses interest which should be intensified now that fruit cultivation on an additional half-acre of ground is being developed. [Taught by Mr Cooper, then by Mr Jones, then Mr Tyler.] It is unfortunate that the teaching of Science is less satisfactory; the children have few opportunities for experimentation and they waste valuable time in copying notes that contain uncorrected errors. ' [Science teaching had suffered when the science teacher, Mr Edliegh, moved to Luton Tech and was not replaced.]*

*'Attainments in the scholastic studies are uneven and the present degree of specialisation in English and Mathematics calls for reconsideration if fluent use of the mother tongue and ability to apply mathematical rules to everyday life are to be secured. The Headmaster is aware of these weaknesses and of those applying to Art teaching and he is planning a concerted effort to remedy them.'*

*'Commendable attention is given to Health education; the children are trained in habits of cleanliness and to enjoy their games, exercises and dancing. The midday meal is well prepared and served to 300 children daily in two sittings; all concerned merit commendation.'*

*'The spiritual side of school life made a deep impression on H. M. Inspectors who deemed it a pleasure to share in the dignified morning assembly in which the musical repertoire of the school showed to advantage. Religious Instruction finds its rightful place in the body of the time-table; in all the lessons seen good use was made of the Bible by the children and many passages were interpreted by the teachers with skill and sincerity.'*

© Clive Arnold. Curator, Moot Hall 2017

The final part of this series of articles will cover the period 1957 to 2009