

Education in Elstow - Part two. 1873 to 1933

Elstow school opened in 1873 as a "Board School". It had cost £1,600 and had space for a hundred scholars. In 1874 the buildings and land were conveyed formally to the School Board by Samuel Whitbread, Lord of the Manor of Elstow.

Despite being a secular school, religious education was not ignored, as the School Board regulations insisted: 'The school shall be opened in the morning with prayer, and by the reading of some portion of the Bible. The school shall be closed in the afternoon with prayer, and the singing of a hymn.'



An Elstow class c 1900. Back (left-right): William Breed; unknown; unknown; Ethel Daisley, the teacher; Elsie Wells; unknown; unknown.

Middle: unknown; Lily Whitehouse; Leslie Pestell; Ernest Dickens; Winnie Horney; unknown.

Front: Ella Harding; Gladys Keep; Gertie James; Maude Cirket; unknown.

1902 - A second Education Act was passed and in 1903 School Boards were disbanded. Day-to-day running of education passed to newly-formed Local Education Authorities - for Elstow, this was Bedfordshire County Council. Board Schools became 'Council Schools', whilst National, British and other non-Board schools became known as 'Public Elementary Schools'.

In 1905, a loan was taken out to enlarge the school.

Bedford Record Office has a scrapbook of cuttings of School Inspectors' reports, from 1911 through the inter-war years.

1911, shows Elstow's average attendance was 149. The inspector found: '*The School is in very good order and is most carefully and capably taught, the Head Teacher [Thomas James]'s supervision is methodical and thorough, the work is carefully arranged and prepared, and the*

general level of attainment is quite satisfactory. In the Infant's Division the Teaching of Reading and Number requires some further attention, and the discipline should be firmer.'

1913: *'This school continues to be, in all respect, in a very creditable state of efficiency.' It also notes that the infants had shown improvement.*

1919: *'In its unostentatious way this School continues to do the good work that has long distinguished it. At each visit of inspection the Headmaster and his staff, whatever their difficulties may be, are found doing their duty cheerfully, and the children make adequate progress. Gardening was begun in 1917, with great success...' (Since 1917, the effects of U-boats on merchant shipping had brought the population close to starvation, so every opportunity was taken to grow food locally.) 'The school has long had a name for training intending teachers. The two monitoresses now on the staff have both done well in their examinations.'*

1923: *'.... a new Head Teacher [Robert A.J.Wadsworth] has taken charge and new methods have been introduced, with success. The aims of the master, the care and thought evident in the teaching of all 3 groups in the Upper Department, and the awakened interest of the children are deserving of praise, and the outlook for the future is promising'.*

1925's inspection was devoted the buildings and their defects before expected improvements by the Local Education Authority.

1926: *'The curriculum of this school develops many valuable interests and activities, has been very carefully considered, and is well worked out. In the last 3 years the children have won many successes in open competition in Music, Elocution, Folk dancing, and in connection with the Wireless Broadcasting Lectures. The lessons in Gardening, also, have interested the boys. The tone is excellent, and the Head Master and his capable Staff deserve great credit for their very good work and the conduct of the school.The garden is on light, hungry soil and green manuring has been adopted as a means of increasing its retentiveness.'*

In 1927 and 1930, as the school population grew, mortgages were taken out to cover the building of additional classrooms.

1933 -The final report shows that average attendance had risen to 267: *'This school, situated in a village on the proposed new boundary of Bedford Borough, receives all the children from Elstow, and those of 11+ from the contributory schools of five villages and three districts - New Harrowden, New Fenlake and Shortstown, in which there is no school. Two of these are mainly interested in market gardening, the others are agricultural. Elstow itself, on the edge of Bedford, is influenced by the proximity of the town, as many parents of scholars work in the Borough. The others are mainly farmers, smallholders, engineers, mechanics on farms, or farm labourers. The school therefore has to cater for a wide variety of interests. This it does mainly through practical work, the conditions for which are far from ideal, as the building of rooms for practical work, plans for which were submitted by the Local Education Authority and approved by the Board [of Education], has not yet been carried out. The success in the training given is very remarkable in the circumstances, and the versatility, ability, and organising powers of the Head Master call for special*

recognition.' There follows a breakdown of the numbers of children entering various walks of life:

'57 to "rural occupations and domestic service";

28 to secondary schools [almost certainly to Harpur Trust schools] - 16 fee paying, 10 to free places and 2 scholarships;

24 to trades such as carpenter, cabinet maker and printing apprentice;

15 to factories including biscuit making [Peck Frean], crayon manufacture [Cosmic Crayon] and leather working [R.B.Sanders] "includes one boy operating a new press, the only one in England";

13 to engineering [presumably mainly to W.H.Allen];

6 as clerks and shop assistants;

3 to the Army;

2 to the Royal Navy.'

The next instalment in this series will cover the period 1939 to 1956

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