

Lutterworth's Infants' Department, 1906 - 1918.

Lutterworth is situated in south Leicestershire, on the border of Warwickshire and adjacent to the Leicestershire parishes of Bitteswell, Gilmorton, Misterton and Cotesbach. It had a number of educational charities which were merged in 1874 to provide a public elementary school and a school for older children. One of these charities had been founded by Edward Sherrier, whose name was continued in Sherrier's infants' department, which was part of the elementary school. This essay will discuss the educational provision offered by Lutterworth's Sherrier's infants' department from 1906 to 1918, and will discuss how Sherrier's infants' department was run, what the children were taught and what impact the First World War had on the department.

Reports by His Majesty's Inspectors shed light on how the school was run. For instance on September the 30th 1909, inspectors reported that Sherrier's infant school was a 'pleasantly conducted school' and that the children were 'happy and natural in manner', the teachers being 'diligent and painstaking'.¹ The report reveals how teachers could tend 'to do too much for the little ones in matters which they might be expected to do for themselves'.² Nonetheless, this report suggests that the infant department was efficiently run, as the teachers instructed with a 'steady conscious effort'.³ To further this image of an orderly infant department the inspectors noted in 1914 that 'the children are kindly treated and well behaved'.⁴

Between 1906 and 1918, the managers of Sherrier's infants' department ran the school by paying much attention to attendance figures, which were recorded in the school log book. For example, on 23 February 1906, attendance was recorded as '101.5, the highest on record for this department'.⁵ From the minutes of the managers' meetings, school attendance cases were recorded under the caption 'SAO'. In March 1908 parent Mr Drake attended a meeting in reference to his daughter's poor attendance, and was 'recommended for prosecution'.⁶ Similarly, Mr Tidmarsh and Mr Bennett in 1908 were called to meetings regarding the irregularity of their children's attendance.⁷ On 4 December 1908, the parents of Perry Whitmore were cautioned regarding his low attendance, and promised to send their son regularly in the future.⁸ The minimal attendance of Mrs Robbins's children, Naomi and Violet, was discussed and Mrs Robbins certified their absence with a doctor's certificate.⁹

Although faced by seasonal challenges, Sherrier's infants' department kept running. On 2 November, the class was 'dismissed at 3:50 ... to enable the children who live at a distance to reach home before the dark'.¹⁰ The infants' department also ran throughout heavy snowfall. The school could accommodate 105 children in 1916,¹¹ and in spite of the very deep snow on 28 March 1916, the school still opened 'with 13 children present'.¹²

When looking at how Sherrier's infants' department was ran it is important to note that it played a significant role in the wider community of Lutterworth. On 1 February 1906, the infants'

¹ Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR), E/LB/211/6, School Log Book, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ ROLLR, E/MB/B/211/3, Minutes of managers' meetings, p. 107.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 107 and 117.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-4

¹⁰ ROLLR, E/LB/211/6, School Log Book, p. 73

¹¹ *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (London, 1916), p. 565

¹² ROLLR, E/LB/211/6, School Log Book, p. 75.

department hosted a public tea party and ball at Lutterworth's town hall in aid of the Cottage Hospital.¹³ On 21 February 1907 the children were the choir 'at the funeral of local doctor, Dr Ogle'.¹⁴ During the following year, the infants put on entertainment for the citizens of Lutterworth: they were 'Morris Dancers' and hosted 'singing games in the Town Hall'.¹⁵ This was to 'defray the expenses of framing the Scripture Pictures hung in the school'.¹⁶ Furthermore, on 5 July 1917, the infants' department took part in Lutterworth's Baby Show.¹⁷ The 'scholars sang national anthems in front of the churchyard gates as the procession passed at 2:45'.¹⁸ Thus, Sherrier's infants' department was run as part of the community, participating in various public events.

Infants at Sherrier's school were taught a variety of subjects. Feedback from an exam on 14 June 1912 illustrates that infants were taught how to read. The school log book records how 'reading appears to be the weakest subject, although some read very well indeed'.¹⁹ Examinations in 1917 also shed light on what was taught. On July the 6th, Class III were examined in 'reading, number and printing and found making satisfactory progress'.²⁰ On 22 February 1918, Class I of the infants' department were examined in 'reading and number',²¹ and Class II were examined in 'reading, number, writing, recitation'.²² From this it is evident that there was much emphasis upon teaching the infants of all classes key subjects, namely literacy and numeracy, and that writing may not have been introduced until their second year. High achievement in these subjects was celebrated, and the rector, Reverend Alderson, presented prizes to scholars who had won distinctions, for example in March 1912 and May 1913.²³ Notwithstanding the children's young age, lessons in cookery were also delivered. On 16 September 1907 the School log book declares how there were 'cookery classes held in this department every Monday afternoon commencing at 2:50pm'.²⁴ To further this, on 16 July 1909, 'extra cookery lessons' were delivered by teachers.²⁵ In contrast to Sherrier's junior departments, there are no records of an exercise drill within the infants' department. However, physical activity does appear to have been considered important to the infants' education: for instance, time was taken out in July 1906 to teach the children how to play baseball.²⁶ On 2 July 1918, Class I 'went for a walk from 3-4pm'.²⁷ Toy making was also taught to the infants. On 15 June 1915, toy making was taught 'instead of drawing first'.²⁸ Some subjects, such as toy making, were gender exclusive: the entry for September 7th 1915 records how toy making was taught every Tuesday afternoon to 'boys only'.²⁹ Poetry and nature lessons were also delivered to the infants. In November 1912 poetry was taught 'instead of nature sessions every Monday'.³⁰ Singing was also on the syllabus. On 25 June 1906, 'Miss Fosby visited and heard the singing',³¹ and on 22 May 1914, the children assembled in the school yard and

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47 and 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

sang empire songs to the rector and Mr Topham.³² In conclusion, the infants of Sherrier's school were taught a diverse range of subjects.

The outbreak of World War One in 1914 significantly impacted upon Sherrier's infants' department. On 4 March 1916, the school log book records 'there is a holiday today as the children are putting on entertainment in the Town Hall in aid of the local VAD hospital'.³³ Furthermore, in October 1915, teacher Miss Marie Coles was called up 'for military service in the Liverpool first General Hospital ... with Miss Barrows transferred from Sherrier's Boys' School to take the place of Miss Coles'.³⁴ Therefore, the First World War impacted on the department as Miss Coles had to do her military service, which altered the designation of staff. Miss Coles returned to the infants to teach the following year, 1916. His Majesty's Inspector Miss Jones conducted inspections of the infants' department that year on the 17th of April and 5th of December.³⁵ She declared how the work of the two lower classes needed 'serious consideration'.³⁶ The 'teacher of Class I Miss Coles', displayed 'very little interest or energy' in her teaching and as a result 'there was much disorder, waste of time and misuse of school material'.³⁷ The minutes of the managers' meetings record how Miss Coles's 'absence on hospital work might have unsettled her', to the detriment of the infants' department.³⁸ Later, on 15 January 1917, Miss Coles left the infant department again, to take up 'Voluntary Aid Detachment work at Richmond'.³⁹ The signing of the armistice agreement on 11 November 1918 also made an impact on the department. The School log book notes how the 'children were taken to a special thanksgiving service in the church at 4:00pm, after singing patriotic songs in school'.⁴⁰

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July 2014

³² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁶ ROLLR, E/MB/B/211/3, Minutes of the managers' meetings, p. 170.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ ROLLR, E/LB/211/6, School Log Book, p. 80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.