

ASSET

The former site of the sheep fair on high ground in the south of the town was given by the Corporation in 1885 for the Board Schools to accommodate 1,310 pupils.¹ Six designs were received and architect Charles Bell of Dashwood House, 9 New Broad Street, London was appointed. Thirty tenders were received in July 1886 from Birmingham, London and Reading for the construction work but the contract was awarded to H.J. Goodall of Basingstoke at a cost of £10,350 subject to sureties. For the total build an application of £12,250 was made to the Public Works Loan Commissioners.² Messrs Rosser and Russell of 22 Charing Cross, London was appointed to install the ventilation and heating systems and Duffy and Cox of Bermondsey for the supply of wood block flooring.³

Work on site commenced in 1886 and in spite of severe frosts and a wet winter Bell predicted completion by the end of 1887. However, insufficient carpenters were employed and the standard of work was sub-standard. Goodall stopped work as he went bankrupt in December 1887. A further delay was prevented when the shipping of gas pipes from Scotland by sea during the winter was switched to faster rail transport. The contractor J.A. Sims was taken on to complete the build.⁴

Both schools were described at the time as being of 'Queen Anne style modified to suit their special purpose'. They are of red brick with filling-in of split flint work. The rooves are tiled (from the Broomhall Tile Company, Blackfriars, London) and the moulded brick bands and string courses were supplied from Messrs Painton of Reading.



Front elevation detail showing flint work, brick band and string courses.

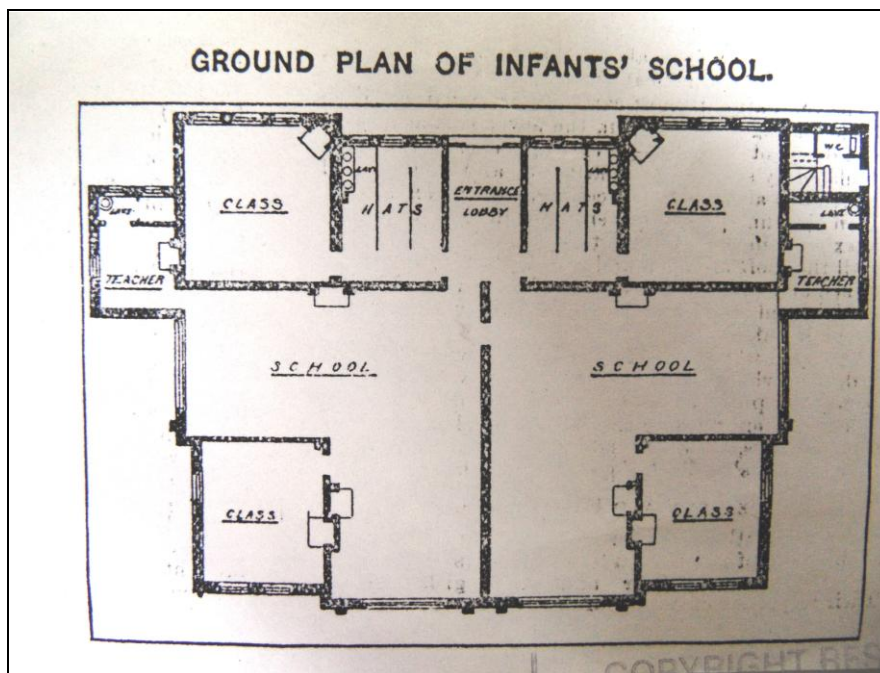
¹ Hants RO (HRO), 22M88/1.

² HRO 22M88/1.

³ Text based on Hants & Berks Gazette, 18 Feb 1888 unless otherwise stated.

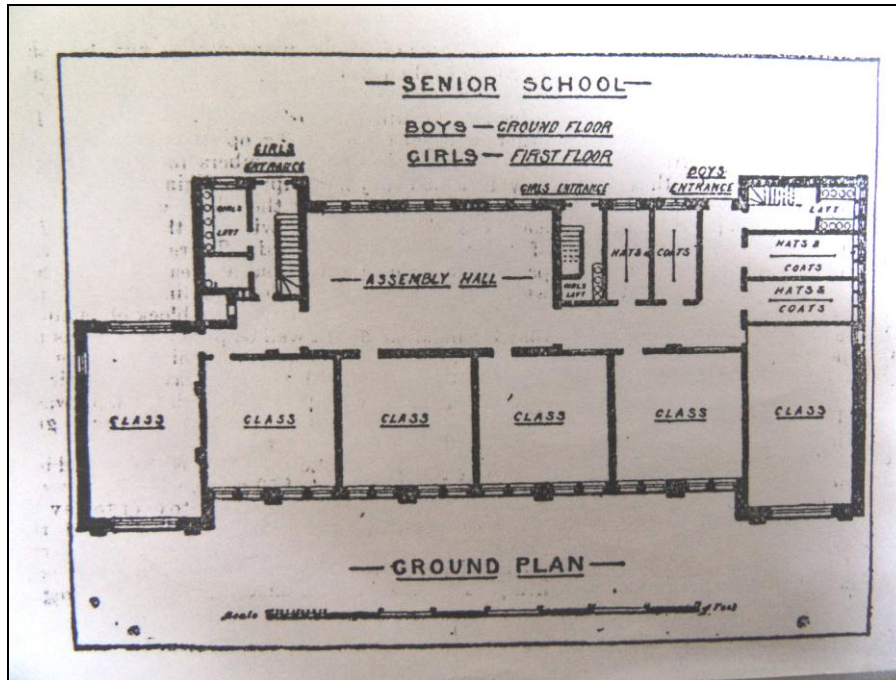
⁴ HRO 22M88/1.

The Infant School is one storey and in 2014 is used as an arts and drama centre. The entrance on the east side led into a wide lobby on either side of which were spacious cloakrooms. There was a main L-shaped room for 160 pupils with windows on three sides and two classrooms for 50 and 40 children. This arrangement was repeated to give the required space for 500 infants. Heating was provided by open fires. The windows were unusually tall with opening sashes at the bottom and fanlights at the top operated by special iron gearings. Rising stale air was expelled by a powerful exhaust in the roof turret. The ceilings were open and timbered; walls were wood lined to 4ft with pink painted distemper above. A covered walkway connected the school to the playshed and toilets which were fitted with self-acting, siphon flushing cisterns. The playground was separated from the Seniors' School by a brick wall. A small room for teachers was provided to each department and a caretaker's residence of three rooms was built over the south east classroom.



The Senior School, still in use as Fairfields Primary School, lies to the south of the site and originally consisted of a long block of two storeys - the boys on the ground floor and girls above with their respective entrances on the east side. A number of classrooms opened out from a large central hall used for assembly, drill and recreation. The boys had four rooms for 60 and two for 70. The cloakrooms, lavatories and classrooms all opened off a short corridor which was considered to be the most effective way of teaching as staff could have the undivided control of their children. Classes were fitted with dual desks, the three back rows being tiered.

The girls' school was approached by two stone staircases and had an identical layout to the ground floor but with the addition of an extra classroom for 50 at the southern end where a gas stove and washing up facilities were installed for the teaching of cookery. This was separated from the adjacent room by a sliding, glazed partition enabling the two rooms to be made into one if necessary. The cloakrooms were contained in a mezzanine storey and rooms for the teachers were also provided. As in the Infants' School there were covered walkways for the boys and girls to playsheds.



The heating and ventilation systems were considered to be very economical and state of the art. There were no open fireplaces except in the teachers' rooms. Pipes led to each classroom from a hot water boiler to radiating coils placed in recesses in the window backs. Warm air passed through grates to the rooms producing a general temperature of 60 degrees F. Stale air passed by gratings at the top and bottom of the quoins and downwards to a large, brick channel 5ft square below ground floor level. This connected to a shaft rising 80ft above the ground.

The internal walls were similar to the infants' department. The external roof has gables above each classroom, the ends being marked with stone copings and pedimented beads. The central gables have coloured plaster scraffite and red terra cotta copings.



Gable showing the plaster scraffite and red terra cotta copings