

Lutterworth Boys' Department, 1906-1918

The Sherrier School is situated in south Leicestershire in the market town of Lutterworth. In the period discussed, the school was separated into three different departments, for infants, girls and boys. This essay concentrates on the boys' department, examining the boys' education and how it was affected by the First World War.

The school had 77 pupils in January 1906,¹ and increased in size to 96 pupils by October 1918.² It admitted pupils from the Infants' Department each August, for example 11 boys were admitted on 28th of August 1906,³ and it also worked closely with Lutterworth's secondary school, sending 18 boys there for scripture lessons from the 11th of March 1909.⁴ The school's education programme aimed to teach the boys well and widely. The Boys' Department taught a number of different subjects for examinations, including mathematics, history, geography, science and scripture, whilst singing and drill were not examined but still taught.⁵ Three boys were exempt from scripture lessons and the examination;⁶ they were Roman Catholics, who received separate teaching from Father Hazeland at the Presbytery.⁷ The older children also received an annual talk from the school nurse, described as a 'health talk'.⁸ The report by His Majesty's Inspector issued in September 1909 praises the teaching as 'vigorous and thoughtful',⁹ and the school's work as efficient. Clearly the school strove for academic excellence, which is reflected in the reports. The August 1911 inspection report comments on the science lessons, which were 'good',¹⁰ and in 1915 the inspector passed favourable comment on letting the boys practice their reading at home using books from the school library.¹¹ The school clearly aimed to deliver the best education it could whilst challenging the boys academically. Scholarships were available for progression to the secondary school, and a number of boys sat the examination each year, for example five boys in 1909 and nine in 1910.¹²

Town life was incorporated into the life of the school, for example in January 1907 when the school closed for the afternoon for an entertainment put on by the school in the Town Hall,¹³ and on 18th February 1908 when the school opened at 1 pm and closed at 10 past 3 to enable the boys to attend a party in aid of the local cottage hospital.¹⁴ Although the timetable was seen as important, on occasions it had to be abandoned out of necessity, therefore teaching and staff had to be flexible. The log book notes that on 8th November 1909 an absent teacher meant the time table was not stringently followed.¹⁵ The log book also records the school having to be closed for a short time in

¹ The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR), Lutterworth boys' school log book, E/LB/211/5, p. 18.

² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 75-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60, 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 53, 68.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57

February 1913, due to a diphtheria outbreak, to prevent the spread of infection.¹⁶ Indeed school closures due to illnesses such as measles, chicken pox, scarlet fever and whooping cough were not uncommon,¹⁷ meaning illness affected the boys' education, even when they were not infected themselves. There were also times when the school closed for celebrating events such as Empire Day (May 24th), for example in 1906.¹⁸ However in 1912, the school remained open on Empire Day and celebrated the event, by singing patriotic hymns and integrating the boys and the girls for one day only.¹⁹

The First World War had a disruptive effect upon the students' education, and many changes occurred in the school which affected the learning of the pupils. The greatest impact upon the boys' education was arguably the enlistment of some of their teachers into the army. The log book records that a teacher, Mr Claude Taylor, was called up and joined the army on April 13th 1915.²⁰ He was replaced by one of the staff from the Infants' Department. Just over a year later, on 18th May 1916, Mr Cooke was also called up for military service.²¹ Sadly, on 25th August 1915 the log book records that Mr Taylor was killed in action in France.²² The emotional and psychological impact of losing their teacher is not hinted at in the book, or how or what the boys were told, yet it is likely the boys were affected by the loss. Moreover, the school had to be closed for the day when the head master was called for a medical re-examination in 1918, as Mr Place wished to return home on the same day as he was expecting the same notice.²³ Mr Place was called for military service on 18th July 1918, and was replaced by Mrs Askew.²⁴ Although not the first female teacher in the school, Mrs Askew was clearly able, as she was placed in charge of the upper school in the absence of the head in 1918,²⁵ and was probably the first woman to be given this responsibility. Mr Cooke and Mr Place returned from the war and continued with their careers, although at different schools.²⁶

Changes to the boys' education are also evident in August, September and October 1917 and 1918, as lessons were frequently suspended for the boys to go blackberry picking for the Food Production Department of the Army and Navy.²⁷ For example, in 1918 this occurred on August 30th and 6th, 9th, 11th, 18th and 25th of September,²⁸ when a total of 687 lbs of fruit was collected.²⁹ The log book notes the objections of some 29 pupils' parents to the berry picking³⁰, yet does not note the reason why. Those pupils stayed at school and were supervised by the head teacher.³¹ The log book notes

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, for example, pp. 139-40, 144

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁴ ROLLR, Lutterworth school managers' minute book, E/MB/B/211/3, p. 176.

²⁵ ROLLR, Lutterworth boys' school log book, E/LB/211/5, p. 152.

²⁶ ROLLR, Lutterworth school managers' minute book, E/MB/B/211/3, p. 180.

²⁷ ROLLR, Lutterworth boys' school log book, E/LB/211/5, p. 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

that 11th November 1918 was Peace Day, but there is no mention of the Armistice being marked in any way, although the boys were given the afternoon off, as there were few present.³²

It is therefore apparent that the boys' education was significantly affected by the war. Although the records do not indicate much change in teaching style, the enlistment of several of their teachers and the disruption that caused, as well as the death of Mr Taylor, were amongst the most significant changes during the war years.

Katie Ricketts

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³² *Ibid.*, p. 152.