

The Creation of Desford's Board School.

The Elementary Education Reform Act of 1870 incorporated the liberal ideal of universal education, which believed that children regardless of their circumstance had the right to be educated.¹ This meant that a school place had to be made available for every child between the ages of five and twelve, regardless of whether the child would actually attend school, as education was neither compulsory nor free at this time. This meant that many urban and rural districts from 1870 had to look at expanding their school facilities and address the burdening costs of expanding current or creating new schools to address the shortfall. In many areas this created the need for a school board to be imposed on the region, in order to ensure that every child could receive a school place. The board school, with its design to be without religious denomination and its costs to be met through rate payments could have easily been granted the title most contentious educational issue of the nineteenth century. The historical unpopularity of the school boards can be seen in the nearby villages of Bagworth, Barlestone and Ratby.² The story for Desford, interestingly, seems to have been different. Education within Desford is a tricky topic as information is fragmented, nevertheless there does seem to be an emerging story of the creation of a board school, which unusually for the local area did not seem to cause major tension.

The first notification of a school board forming in Desford comes from *The Morning Post*, which states that a board was to be made compulsory within the village.³ Desford's response was seemingly very matter of fact, they were to have a new school board because 'The Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council have issued orders for the formation of a school Board', and on the same day notice is duly given for the forthcoming election.⁴ In a quite unusual response within the newspaper (as generally within the newspaper educational matters within Desford do not usually call for letters to be sent to the editor, William Davis said the recent enforced school board had caused 'no little excitement', which seems to be the only evidence that a potential stir was caused within the village. Davis goes on to say that previously education had been neglected in Desford and as a result this past neglect would call for future expense.⁵ There were nine candidates who stood for election and five were duly elected.⁶ Davis writes again after the election of the school board stating that he hoped Desford will soon 'enjoy an efficient School through Liberal management', a clue to the political orientation of the board members and Davis himself.⁷ Davis' prophecy of future costs was soon realised. The board's first meeting was on the 22nd October, and

¹ A particularly powerful resonation of this ideal can be found in the parliamentary papers, in which William Edward Forster stated that the act aimed to 'bring education within the reach of every English home, aye, and within the reach of those children who have no homes'; W.E. Forster, House of Commons, 17 Feb. 1870: *Parl. Deb.* Vol. 199, cc. 463-4.

² S. Ragdale, 'Educational provision in Bagworth, from 1600-1981', *Victoria County History* [hereafter *VCH*], <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/> [last accessed 20 September 2013]; E. Round, 'Educational in Barlestone, 1870=1901', *VCH*, [last accessed 20 September 2013]. For Ratby the dispute can be followed in the *Leicester Chronicle* [here after *Leic. Chron.*]: *Leic. Chron.*, 20 May 1871, p. 5, *Leic. Chron.*, 27 May 1871, p. 5, *Leic. Chron.*, 7 Aug. 1871, p. 8.

³ *The Morning Post* (London), 16 Sep. 1874, p. 6.

⁴ *Leic. Chron.*, 19 Sep. 1874, pp. 7, 9.

⁵ *Leic. Chron.*, 26 Sep. 1874, p. 10.

⁶ *Leic. Chron.*, 10 Oct. 1874, p. 8.

⁷ *Leic. Chron.*, 31 Oct. 1874, pp. 12.

they subsequently held regular meetings.⁸ They board had originally planned to buy the existing school buildings within the village, but when the figure of £500 (approximately £24,000 in 2013 terms) for each building was deemed too much, the decision was made to 'unanimously decline' to purchase the village's current school buildings and instead create a new school, which would be able to educate 160 children.⁹ Builders were sought via the local papers between May and August 1875.¹⁰ However it seemed there were problems with the bureaucratic 'red tape' rearing its ugly head back then, much as it still does today, and building work was halted in July 1876.¹¹ White's trade directory of 1877 described the as yet uncompleted board school as 'commodious' and with its completion the school was 'intended to supersede the old National School' which was still present within the village.¹²

The newspapers remained silent on when the school was completed, but it was scheduled in the school log book to be opened by the 9th of April 1877.¹³ The total cost of the school and master's house had been met with a public works loan of £2,665 10s. (approximately £130,000 in 2013).¹⁴ It also seems that shortly after the school had been built measures were taken to enact by-laws for the compulsory education of all children within the village, three years before it was made compulsory nationally.¹⁵ When the school board's term expired on the 29th of September 1877, it stated that the school and the headmaster's house had been built and the school was almost self-supporting.¹⁶ The cost of the running of the school was met by the weekly school fees of 4d. per child for farmers and tradesmen, other children were charged 3d.¹⁷ As a result, the village inhabitants were generally satisfied with the board. Therefore to save the cost of an election, the board was re-elected without contest.¹⁸

The board school remained in the village until 1902, when all board schools were abolished under Balfour's education act of that year. The school remained but was rebranded as a council school.¹⁹ Today the former board school still stands and is still a functional building but it is now used as the local Doctor's surgery. However evidence of the former educational background of the school is still visible, as can be seen in the window (figure 2).

Emma Roberts, October 2013

⁸ ROLLR E/MB/89/1, Board School Log Book, p.1

⁹ Ibid., p.3; *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland* (1895) p.64.

¹⁰ *Leic. Chron.*, 22 May 1875, p. 9; *Leic. Chron.*, 05 Jun. 1875, p. 8; *Leic. Chron.*, 14 Aug. 1875, p. 8.

¹¹ *Leic. Chron.*, 15 Jul. 1876, p. 12.

¹² W. White, *History, Gazetteer & Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland* (1877), p.202.

¹³ ROLLR E/MB/89/1, p.47.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.19

¹⁵ *Leic. Chron.*, 08 Sep. 1877, p. 10.

¹⁶ *Leic. Chron.*, 29 Sep. 1877, p. 10.

¹⁷ ROLLR E/MB/89/1, p.43.

¹⁸ *Leic. Chron.*, 29 Sep. 1877, p. 10.

¹⁹ C. Wessel, *Schools in Desford* (Desford, Unknown Date), p. 2.

Figure 1: The Board School today.



Source: Taken by the author.

Figure 2: The Board School's window.



Source: Taken by Pam Fisher.