## **Lutterworth Girls' Department, 1906-1918**

Lutterworth is a small historic market town, situated south of Leicester and close to the M1. Neighbouring parishes in Leicestershire include Bitteswell and Misterton; it is also on the border of Warwickshire. Lutterworth was home to John Wycliffe and Frank Whittle, as well as Edward Sherrier who by his will of 1730 left money and land to provide a free education to as many children as his trustees saw fit. His gift is still remembered today in the name of one of Lutterworth's schools, the Sherrier Church of England Primary School. Under a scheme of 1874 prepared by the Endowed Schools Commissioners, Lutterworth's educational charities were combined to provide one elementary school, divided into boys' girls' and infants' departments, and a school providing more advanced lessons for older children. This essay will examine the girls' department: how it was run, what the girls were taught, and the impact of the First World War on the department.

A committee of managers ran the school and dealt with maintenance, discipline and administration. They coordinated formalities, such as buying new desks or deciding where to buy stationery; in September 1903 the managers persuaded the Local Education Authority that the local stationers should remain the provider to the school, as they had been 'for very many years'. The managers were also tasked with appointing staff and agreeing their salaries; the log book mentions the mistress and the pupil teachers as well as staff from the other departments when called in to cover illnesses. For example, in October 1906 the mistress of the infants' department was requested to run the girls' department whilst both the mistress and pupil teacher Miss Blunt were ill. However, the managers' duties extended further than organisation: periodically disciplinary situations would arise within the school that required intervention. In 1905 the teachers at the girls' department sent a complaint to the committee about an allegedly abusive pupil. Her parents, Mr and Mrs Oram, were summoned to the next meeting, when their side was heard, and the managers felt enough evidence was provided that nothing more needed to be done.

The girls' department was designed to accommodate just over one hundred students, and figures from the log book indicate that around a hundred pupils were enrolled. However, like any school, attendance varied and when bad weather ensued or there was a disease epidemic, numbers dropped below the usual average. The log book records an example of low attendance in 1908 following an outbreak of mumps: in the week prior to 31 January, average attendance was 86.7, out of 102 enrolled pupils. The intake of new students would take place at the start of the school year. Unlike schools today, the year finished at the end of April and began again at the start of May, with no holiday in between the two school years,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Minute Book of the Lutterworth Voluntary Schools; Commencing 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1903 Ending 1926, Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3614/3 – E/MB/B/211/3, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1903, p. 4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Girls' School Log Book, Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3614/7 – E/LB/211/4, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1906, p. 77

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Minute Book of the Lutterworth Voluntary Schools; Commencing 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1903 Ending 1926, Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3614/3 – E/MB/B/211/3, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1905, pp. 73-4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> *Ibid.,* 28<sup>th</sup> April 1905, p. 77

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Girls' School Log Book, Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3614/7 – E/LB/211/4, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1908, p. 88

but they did take a summer holiday later in the year. During May, girls from the infants' department would be admitted to the girls' department, similar to the modern school system of moving from infants to juniors. Each year there would be between ten and twenty girls who moved from the infants to the juniors. At the other end of the scale, His Majesty's Inspector reported on 29 March 1915 that 'it is to be regretted that so many girls leave the school before reaching Standard VII'.<sup>6</sup> A small group of girls sat scholarship examinations for free places at the Grammar School: in 1910 only three of the six girls who participated gained places.<sup>7</sup> The inspector also noted that generally the department was good with a 'bright and healthy tone' in which the children 'evidently enjoy their school life', despite the teaching of arithmetic being 'too cumbersome and mechanical'.<sup>8</sup>

School life does not seem as regimented as today regarding holidays: throughout the Log Book there are countless examples of the children being given impromptu holidays or half-holidays for a variety of causes. Weather and disease were the most common obstacles to the smooth running of school. For example, on 21 July 1906, the Medical Officer of Health closed the school for the summer holidays because of an outbreak of chicken pox and blisters pox. In the winter, register times were altered to enable the children who lived further away to get home before dark, this was usually implemented by the managers. Regularly, the girls were allowed time off in order to go to the circus, or the 'meet of the hounds', or because of a local Sunday School event. Periodically, the building would be needed for 'election purposes' and the school would close.

The girls' department functioned as an important part of the community, raising money and ensuring the attendance of its pupils at important events such as weddings. The girls were often allowed time away from school to prepare for the entertainments they put on in the town hall, or tea parties, as on 2 December 1908, usually raising money for the cottage hospital. Additionally, they attended the funeral of the local doctor, Dr Ogle, on 21 February 1907, and later that year the children were allowed absence from afternoon education to attend the memorial of the influential Canon Alderson in the church. Furthermore, the children from all three departments met at the boys' school to 'bid farewell to Rev W. G. C. Bettison and to present him with a parting gift'. Although there is only limited information, Reverend Bettison was clearly a significant figure within the community, and his departure from Lutterworth was marked by the children of the elementary school.

The girls were taught and examined in reading, writing and arithmetic, and the inspectors would observe singing, scripture and drill on their visits. Since this was a girls' department, the children were also taught needlework and cookery. Timetables were

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1908, p. 95

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 $<sup>^6</sup>$  *Girls' School Log Book,* Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3614/7 – E/LB/211/4,  $29^{th}$  March 1915, p. 154  $^7$  *Ibid.,* 10-11  $^{th}$  November 1910, p. 115

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1909, p. 105

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1905, p. 76

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1907 and 6<sup>th</sup> December 1907, pp. 80-1 and p. 87

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1908, p. 89

formulated and generally adhered to, but an element of flexibility was exercised when necessary: in July 1907, some of the girls were allowed to finish their garments which had been 'delayed during the epidemic of measles'. 13 Traditional subjects such as physical education, history and geography were studied and there was an emphasis on drawing. Classes were taken to the churchyard for a nature lesson so they could draw a tree; other times they would walk much further for this lesson: in 1911 a class went as far as Misterton Spinney. 14 Interestingly, it is recorded that science lessons according to the syllabus of the Band of Hope were permitted in this school. On 20 December 1904, the request was granted and the first half an hour lecture took place on 27 January 1905 given by Mr Palmer. 15 These lessons covered topics such as hygiene and temperance and cleanliness was discussed in a lecture given by the county council's health visitor. 16

The First World War did not initially have much impact on the girls' department; celebrations of Empire Day remained almost the same, apart from saluting the flag. The earliest recorded change was not until 1916, when the cause for the entertainment on 4 March was the VAD hospital. The children managed to raise £10 8s. 3d. for the hospital. 17 Following the death of Lord Kitchener on 5 June 1916, the girls were dismissed from school at 11.30am on 13 June to attend a memorial service for him. The biggest impact of World War One on the girls' department was on food. At the end of 1917 the mistress visited Vaughan College in Leicester to attend a 'Food Economy and Cooking Demonstration' arranged by the Ministry of Food. 18 It is likely that this could have pertained to rationing and teaching the students how to conserve food. Moreover, the girls spent much time 'blackberrying'; in October 1917 the girls picked blackberries for the Food Production Department. 19 The following September, the only entries in the log book relay information regarding blackberry picking, demonstrating the importance and frequency with which the girls picked. The girls' department was closed on Armistice Day on account of influenza, thus there is no record of this momentous day. However, on the one year anniversary, the girls observed the two minutes silence 'in accordance with the King's wish'. <sup>20</sup> Furthermore, on this day in 1921, the children processed to the war memorial and heard the head master give a speech. A wreath of poppies was laid, the two minutes silence was again observed and a hymn was sung.

**Emily Danaher** 

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Girls' School Log Book, Leicestershire Record Office, DE 3614/7 – E/LB/211/4, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1907, p. 84

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1912 and 18<sup>th</sup> September 1911, p. 146 and p. 123 <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1904 and 27<sup>th</sup> January 1905, both p. 64 <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1910 and 6<sup>th</sup> October 1910, p. 113 and p. 114

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> March 1916, p. 160

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1917, p. 170
<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October 1917, p. 169
<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1919, p. 179