

INDIVIDUAL AND LOCALITY

LOCAL STUDY PROJECT

KNYPERSLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1911-1945

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April 1995

Knypersley School came under the control of the managers of the Biddulph Council Schools. The managers were answerable to the Staffordshire Education Authority and many decisions had to be deferred to them. A meeting of the managers would normally be held every month to discuss and agree on issues concerning all the Biddulph Council schools. The minutes of their meeting on Monday 14th November 1910 record the following costs for the building of the school:

Read: A letter from the director re the proposed new school at Knypersley, stating that a tender of Mr. Thos. Goodwin, Hanley, had been accepted at £4552 for the erection and completion of the school for 350 older children, and also that of Messrs. Lownds & Co, Leek, at £159.10.0 for the installation of a low-pressure, hot-water, heating apparatus. [Managers of Biddulph Council Schools, Minute Book, 14 Nov. 1910].

It was the managers job to oversee the operation and administration of the schools in the area. Actual progress made at the managers meetings was seemingly very slow and laborious, much of it attributable to the way in which relatively minor decisions had to be debated and agreed by the managers themselves and then referred to the Staffordshire Education Committee. An example of how laborious this system was can be demonstrated by the necessity to recruit a caretaker for the school. On the 16th September 1911, the managers placed an advertisement in the Congleton Chronicle, asking for applications for the post of Caretaker at Kypersley Council School, the salary was £2, 12s, 6d. per calendar month [Congleton Chronicle, 16 Sep 1911, p8]. The minutes of the managers meeting held on 26th September 1911 state that sixteen applications for the caretakers post were received, and they unanimously decided on the appointment of Mr. Charles Lawton of Knypersely. The board then had to ask for written consent from the Staffordshire Education Committee for Mr. Lawton's appointment, and on the 10th October 1911, the minutes of the mangers meeting show that the Education Committee had returned a letter granting permission for Mr. Lawton to be appointed at the salary stated above. [Managers of Biddulph Council Schools, Minute Book, 10 Oct. 1911]. This procedure was followed for the recruitment of all staff at all the Council Schools in the Biddulph area.

When Knypersley School opened in December 1911, it became the fifth council school in the area of Biddulph, all of which came under the control of the same group of managers. Knypersley school was to draw its pupils from the existing Biddulph Schools, and this caused the managers problems. At a managers meeting of 14th November 1911, the managers agreed upon lines of demarcation between the various schools catchment areas. The meeting agreed that 'the dividing line between Brindley Ford Council School and Knypersley School be drawn immediately south of the pillar box of the Tunstall Road, near the Black Bull Works' and that the division line between Knypersely and Biddulph schools would be 'drawn

Introduction

This local study project is centred on Knypersley Elementary School, from its opening in 1911 until the end of the Second World War. After detailing where exactly the area of Knypersley is, this work will look at the special problems associated with the opening and administration of the school. This was a very turbulent period in the history of Great Britain, when the people suffered periods of national strikes, huge unemployment and two world wars. It was also a period when the beginnings of a national child welfare system were put in place. This project will consider national issues such as the aforementioned and try to determine the effects they had at a local level on Knypersley School. During my research I found that there were many books written on the general school curriculum, and therefore the section in this project covering the curriculum at Knypersley Elementary School does not cover the general school curriculum subjects but other areas which were of special interest at Knypersley School. The project ends with a study of vandalism and delinquency at the school.

Where is Knypersley?

Knypersley is a small area on the south side of Biddulph. The school is on the main road running from the Potteries to Biddulph and is situated approximately one mile from Biddulph town centre. Biddulph itself is on the north-west border of Staffordshire, in a hilly moorland district, eight miles north-west of Leek, three miles south-east of Congleton, and 159 miles from London. Biddulph valley forms the northern end of the North Staffordshire coalfield and therefore mining has played a large part in the areas development and history. [Kennedy, 1980, p15].

The Establishment and Administration of the School

The school opened on Monday 4th December 1911. The headmaster William Lowe, recorded the opening in the School Log Book. On the first day there were 236 pupils in attendance and four teachers (including the head master). When the school closed for Christmas on the 22nd December 1911 three more teachers had joined the existing staff. The understaffing at the school was only one of the many problems associated with its opening. At the end of the first week the log book entry for Friday 15th December 1911 reads: 'Fair progress made under the circumstances. Teachers and scholars seem to be arriving at an understanding. After some trouble the packing material has at last been sent away.' [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 11 Dec. 1911]. The preparations and arrangements for the school opening and staffing levels seem to have been very badly planned.

FEEDING OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

The Director submitted a return of the cost of free meals provided during the coal strike. The number of children on the school rolls in the various areas was 27,557 and the total number of children fed was 9,906...the number of meals supplied 73,972. Total expenditure £384.13.6d....average cost per meal 1s 6d. [Congleton Chronicle, 29 June 1912, p7].

Another coal strike began in April 1921 and lasted until the first week of July. [Kennedy, 1980, p221]. During the strike, Knypersley school again provided meals for necessitous children, beginning on Tuesday 10th May 1921 when 12 children were fed, on Friday 13th May, 88 children were fed. On Friday 3rd June the log book entry shows how difficult and time consuming the feeding of children was, and how it interfered with normal school life; it states that work was continuing as usual 'except that teachers have to neglect, to a certain extent, the early morning lessons in order that they may make provision for the feeding of the children. Mon 126, Tue 130, Wed 156, Thur 135, Fri 148'. The type of meals provided is not stated, but the amount of disruption caused within the school is obvious. On Friday 10th June 175 children were fed, more than fourteen times the number fed only one month earlier. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, May & June 1921].

Although the strike ended in July 1921, the depression in Biddulph continued to deepen. 1926 saw another prolonged stoppage in the coal mines, the iron workers had obtained no regular employment since 1921 and employment for women in the textile mills was spasmodic, thus the unemployment situation in Biddulph became one of the worst in the country. [Kennedy, 1980, p223-225].

An attempt was made in March, 1937, to persuade the Medical Officer of Health to declare Biddulph a distressed area. W. Bloomfield, Biddulph's M.P., in supporting the application, said that in the eight and a half years of unemployment in Biddulph it was one of the six places in the country with the highest percentage of unemployed. In 1937, Jarrow had 32% and Biddulph 35% unemployed' [Kennedy, 1980, p231].

The effects of this economic slump on the children of Knypersley school are easily noticeable in the school log book. An entry for the 2nd November 1934 refers to a heavy snow storm, and the fact that 'Quite a crowd of boys and girls with no suitable shoes for such weather as this' [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 2 Nov 1934], and on the 12th November 1934, the school 'commenced milk scheme' and 170 pupils are reported to have been considered malnourished enough to have bottles. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 12 Nov. 1934].

At the outbreak of war the situation in Biddulph had not improved. The log book entry for the 4th September 1939 reads; 'School closed due to outbreak of War. The malnutrition is terrible. 50/60 pupils having free milk. A census taken the other day showed 37% of the fathers were out of work'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 4 Sep. 1939].

Malnutrition in children can seriously affect their performance, the schools attendance records were very poor at this time, and as stated below the school was often closed due to epidemics of varying kinds, which would undoubtedly affect the school children worse if they were continually malnourished.

Child Welfare

Although today we take for granted somewhat the state system of child health checks, it was only at the beginning of this century that some simple checks and measures were put into place by the government. This section of the project shows how important some of the first basic child welfare acts were to the school children of Knypersley Elementary School.

The Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906 empowered, but did not make it mandatory, for local authorities to provide basic midday meals for children in impoverished circumstances. As shown above this was put into action at Knypersley School during the strikes of 1912 and 1921, and although it was seen to be disruptive to the school timetable, 'school meals were, and are, of great social significance; their provision recognized the nutritional deprivation suffered by many children, and they encouraged the pattern of social thinking that children, though educated near their homes, need not return to them at midday' [Rose, 1991, p30].

Local Education Authorities under the Education of Children Act of 1903, were empowered to set a minimum age for the employment of children outside of school hours, this act also allowed them to set the number of hours children were allowed to work per day and per week. The Staffordshire Education Committee agreed to set the following laws:

Under the Employment of Children act, it was resolved that the County Council should be asked to adopt bye-laws requiring that a child liable to attend full time at school should not be employed on days when school was open except between 6.30 and 8.15 in the morning, and 5 and 8 in the evening. [Congleton Chronicle, 9 Feb. 1912].

These bye-laws still allowed for a child in full time education to work for 4 hours and 45 minutes each school day. The report also stated that when schools were closed, children should not be allowed to work before 6.30 am or after 8pm, and that employment should be limited to 9 hours a day. [Congleton Chronicle, 9 Feb. 1912]. By todays standards the hours

that school children were allowed to work seem excessive, but at least this legislation was a step in the right direction.

It was the Education (Administrative Provisions) Act 1907 which had empowered Local Education Authorities to inspect the health and physical condition of children, and a medical department was established. Medical inspections of the children at Knypersley school seemed thorough and are often noted in the log book as continuing over two days or more. In addition to general health checks regular visits were made to the school by an optician and a dentist, the dentists visit of January 1935 lasted for three days. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 8-10 Jan. 1935].

The health of the Knypersley School children was generally poor; the school was often closed due to illness during the first ten years after it opened and attendance was regularly poor. The log book entry for Friday 15th November 1912 records '72 children away - whooping cough' the following Friday's entry reveals that whooping cough was still on the increase. On Monday 2nd December 1912 attendance was 123 out of 294 (41%), and school was abandoned. The School was closed under the order of the School Medical Officer, the reasons stated being outbreaks of whooping cough, mumps, measles. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 15 Nov & 2 Dec. 1912]. The school re-opened on Monday 6th January. After the midsummer vacation in 1913, the school was closed for two weeks due to diphtheria, opening again on 15th September 1913. Measles and mumps and influenza were responsible for the schools closure during July 1918, when the school was closed for four weeks. The school was again closed owing to the influenza on Tuesday 11th November 1918 when only 93 children attended school, the school remained closed until Monday 6th January 1919 [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book 1918/19]. During this time the whole of Britain was affected by an influenza epidemic. The Congleton Chronicle carries a report by Dr. Craig who was the Biddulph Council Schools Medical Officer of Health, which states that the influenza epidemic reached its peak during the last week of November 1918, and that following the first week in December there was a marked decline. [Congleton Chronicle, 4 Jan. 1919]. There are also many instances when the attendance fell below 90% with no details given other than 'sickness'.

The School Curriculum and Achievements

In 1905 the Board of Education issued a 'Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and others concerned with the Work of Public Elementary Schools'. This ended centralised control of the curriculum and placed it in the hands of the schools themselves. The handbook contained a chapter of suggestions on each of the following subjects: 'English,

arithmetic, observation lessons and nature study, geography, history, drawing, singing, physical training, needlework and housecraft, handicraft and gardening'. [Gordon, 1978, p23].

As well as the expected lessons mentioned above, the school log book makes many references to lessons in bee-keeping. On Friday March 1st 1912 the head master records that 'A practical lesson in bee keeping given in my garden to Standards 4,5,6,7'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1 Mar. 1912]. The log book also records that the school timetable was not followed on Friday 2nd August 1912, as there was 'a demonstration of extracting, ripening and potting honey'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 2 Aug. 1912]. This interest in bees is still apparent in July 1918 when the Log book records that Mr. Price, a bee expert, called at the school, and on the 18th June 1925 the school received a 'nucleus of bees, 4 frames from Education Committee' [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 5 July 1918 & 18 June 1925].

The school also seems to have taken a great interest in Cricket, winning the School Cricket Shield in July 1912, 1913, and 1914 to give but a few examples. The school is very close to Knypersley Cricket Club, which had a strong reputation and support, and this may be the reason why the game was so popular at the school. From 1938 onwards the children often performed plays for each other on a stage in the school corridor. Each class would perform a play to the rest of the school on the last day before the children left to begin their christmas holidays.

The quality of lessons and achievements of the children at Knypersley Elementary School during the period of this study, were continually affected by understaffing. This fact is regularly recorded in the reports of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools following their inspections. On the 20th May 1913 after a bad report on the school, the managers instructed that the clerk write a letter to the Director of Staffordshire Education Authority asking for a supply teacher, and to state that 'the Managers consider they have been very badly treated with regard to this school, as the staff has never been really settled since it was opened' [Managers of Biddulph Council Schools, Minute Book, 20 May 1913]. Again at a meeting in July 1915 the clerk was instructed to write to the Staffordshire Education Authority stating that 'Knypersley School is still understaffed, that it has never been properly staffed, and to ask for an additional certificated teacher' [Managers of Biddulph Council Schools, Minute Book, 27 July 1915]. The problem of understaffing is still apparent in April 1920 when, following another HMI report, the managers minutes record that 'the report appeared to point to the necessity for an assistant master at the school. The deficiency they, the managers, had been and were unable to remedy' [Managers of Biddulph Council Schools, Minute Book, 29 April 1920]. The

school appears to have been continually understaffed and despite constant pleas by the headmaster and the managers a full quota of staff never really seems to have been achieved.

The Effects of the Wars

World War 1

The first mention of the war in the school log book is on the 11th September 1914, and the entry simply says that 'Geography and history lessons have dealt with the war'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 11 Sep. 1914]. The only entry in the log book I could find which mentioned any work done by the children at the school to help the war effort was for the week ending Friday 27th November 1914; 'A little time has been spent on the making of socks and belts for soldiers when other work has been done'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 27 Nov 1914].

At the beginning of March 1914, 7 teaching staff (including the head master) are listed in the log book. Mr. William Lowe (Headmaster), Mr. Rowland James Trafford and Mr. Ernard James were the male staff members. Mr. James was away on the afternoon of 16th December 1915 to enlist in the Royal Navy Artillery, and left the school on 31st March 1916. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1914-1916]. This left the school very short of teachers, an entry for 7th April 1916, shows that the school was now operating with just 6 teachers (including the head master) and 348 pupils on the books, an average pupil/teacher ratio of 58:1. This situation had not improved when on the 12th May 1916 the entry reads 'Still working under great difficulty. Proper supervision is wanting and the Upper Standards are suffering'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, April & May 1916]. The list of staff for 1st March 1917 shows the addition of a student teacher Mr. Albert Edward Machin. Mr. Trafford passed in Grade II for the army at the end of May 1918, and left the school on the 14th June of that year, when he was presented with a leather case. The school now had only one permanent male teacher, Mr. Lowe. Mr. Trafford resumed his teaching career at the school on 3rd March 1919, and on the 28th November 1919 left to become the headmaster at another school. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1918 & 1919].

The only entry in the log book I can find that notes any disruption of the school due to an air raid is entered for the week ending Friday 1st December 1916, and seems to have caused nothing more than excitement and tiredness in the children, it states, 'A poorer weeks work done probably resulting largely from the excited condition of the children occasioned by Monday nights air raid and partially from poor attendance'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1 Dec. 1916]. The entry for Monday 11th November 1918 records how the news of the end of World War One reached the school: 'Came to school this morning, 209 present.

About 11 o'clock heard whistles blowing. At 12.40 heard from the chairman...that School must be closed for the afternoon to mark the signing of the armistice at 5 o'clock this morning'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 11 Nov. 1911].

World War II

World War Two had a more direct effect on the school than World War One. During 1940, there was a large fall in unemployment in Biddulph, the mines were fully staffed and many women were employed in the munitions factories in the surrounding area. [Kennedy, 1980, p232].

Obviously, there was a greater risk that the school may be hit during an air raid during the Second World War. Trenches for the school air raid shelter were started on Wednesday 20th September 1939, but it was not until 16th September 1940 that the air raid sirens were heard for the first time during school hours, sounding at 8.45, when some eighty children who were in school at this time, went to the shelters until the all clear sounded at 9.50am. From the 7th October 1940 the school air raid shelters were open to the public after school hours, as instructed by the County Council. From October 1940 air raid warnings were frequent causing the childrens school work to suffer. During December 1940, the log book records that 'alerts fairly frequent and at awkward times for schoolwork'. On the 18th December 1940 demonstrations and lectures were given to the children on incendiary bombs by Mr. Lancaster, the ARPO officer for the area. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1939-1940].

Biddulph became an official reception area for evacuees in 1940, but the first evacuees did not arrive until July 1944. [Kennedy, 1980, p233]. The log book states that on the 18th July 1944 the school was told to be ready for a possible 250 evacuees, however no evacuees actually came to the school until 29th August 1944 when 34 were admitted. The log book records that the last of the evacuees were returned to the London area on the weekend of 20th July 1945. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1944 & 1945].

The log book for Tuesday 30th November 1943 records an important and, I consider, a rather startling piece of information; 'Took census today after 4 years of war. No childrens parents/brothers killed in war, not yet one a prisoner of war. Of 261 on roll only 17 fathers are serving in forces'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 30 Nov. 1943]. These figures seem exceptionally low when you consider that the United Kingdom 'lost 270,000 men in the armed forces, to which had to be added the loss of 35,000 merchant seamen and approximately 60,000 civilians killed by bombing. [Stevenson, 1984, p448].

Vandalism and Delinquency

In this section of the project I would like to consider the levels and kinds of delinquency noted in the school log book during the whole of the study period from 1911 to 1945, and to consider whether there are any changes in the type or level of delinquency during war time. In my opinion, the following claim by S.J. Curtis is a good starting point:

'The absence of fathers on military service and of many mothers on munition work resulted in a relaxation of parental control and the growth of hooliganism and juvenile delinquency. [Curtis, 1965, p340].

The above quotation is made in relation to the First World War, but parental control would also have been reduced during World War Two for the same reasons.

From studying the school log book for the period 1911 to 1945 it is true that hooliganism and juvenile delinquency are recorded more often in the log book during the wars. I believe it is probable that one of the main reasons behind the increase is the higher employment figures. (It has already been noted earlier that only a relatively small number of Knypersley Elementary School children had fathers serving in World War Two). Children with both parents employed would have less parental supervision.

When my study of the school begins on its opening in December 1911, and the log book records no cases of delinquency or hooliganism during that year; this is a year in which the teacher/pupil ratio was often at its lowest, proving that the later rise in delinquency cannot be attributed to large class sizes. When any delinquency or hooliganism did occur it was taken very seriously, and when compared with today's standards it was minor. During March 1913 there is a report in the log book regarding writing that was found on the toilet walls; the headmaster records that he had 'narrowed enquiry to Standard VI boys - are unable to be sure of actual delinquent' [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 7 Mar. 1913], as you can see, this relatively minor offence by today's standards warranted a full report in the log book.

During 1918, acts of vandalism seem to increase sharply. On the night of 27th June there was a lot of damage caused to the school garden. During October 1918 windows were broken at the school during the night, and the police were informed when a large number of sun flowers were cut down in the school garden out of school hours. The breaking of windows does seem to become a common occurrence from this time onwards. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 1918].

Again during the Second World War the school log book does record more cases of delinquency. At this time the type of crimes reported are more serious. On Monday 7th October 1940 the log book records 'Audrey Smith for second time this month - absent from school and away from home, sleeping out - 12 years old'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 7 Oct. 1940]. The case of two young boys is also recorded in November 'Herbert Chapman (10) and Gerald Snape (9) before Childrens Court for robbing Gas Meters during the holidays' [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 4 Nov. 1940]. There appears to be an increase in the number of children staying away from both school and home during the war, an example of this is recorded of Friday 6th March 1942; 'At 4 o'clock - Herbert Chapman caught taking raincoat from school cloakroom, he was missing on Monday - apparently went to Blackpool, played on sands, was fetched back Wednesday 4th by PC Betts. School on Thursday morning and afternoon'. [Knypersley Elementary School Log Book, 6 Mar. 1942]. This boy went to a remand home on 13th April 1942.

During September and October 1942 there are further instances in the log book of children playing truant, and staying away from home on two occasions and two records showing separate cases of children stealing at school. The fact that there seems to have been an increase in children running or staying away from home also suggests lack of parental control rather than lack of teacher control.

Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated how effects external to the daily life at Knypersley Elementary School, nevertheless had a major impact on life at the school. Many of the children attending Knypersley Elementary School came from poor families. When families are living on or very near the poverty line, the local economy has a major effect on their lives, especially in times of unemployment or strike when such families have no savings which may carry them through such hard times. It was especially the poor families which benefited by the implementation at Knypersley School of the feeding of necessitous children, who would thereby be guaranteed at least one meal a day. The health checks detailed in the project would also be of greater benefit to poorer families who may be unable to afford to have their children checked and treated for health problems otherwise.

Because Knypersley Elementary School and the other council schools in the Biddulph area were all under the control of the same small group of managers, the school was often badly managed. The headmaster of Knypersley School had to refer most things to the managers, who in turn had to obtain written permission from the Staffordshire Education Committee

before many decisions could be made. Changes and improvements at the school were often achieved at a snails pace, repeated requests for additional staff often had to be made before the school actually obtained an extra teacher, and because of this standards and achievements at the school suffered.

The effects of the world wars on a relatively small school in the country could easily be forgotten or considered unimportant. It is for this reason that I have concentrated on the wars as a large part of my project. The wars caused a higher rate of employment locally, and so in the short term caused many families to become more wealthy. Because of increased employment during the war, many of the children at Knypersley Elementary School received less direct supervision from their parents which in some cases, resulted in an increase in juvenile delinquency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Mr. Scragg, the headmaster of Knypersley First School, who made the school log books available to me.

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Map of Biddulph Area
Showing location of
Knypersley Elementary
School.

marks proposed
demarcation lines.

