

Girls' Teacher Training in Victorian Times

When a girl left elementary school in Emsworth at the age of 12 in early Victorian times she was faced with few choices – she could work in a family business, she could work on a local farm or go into service, and this last option was what most of them did. All demanded hard work and were lowly paid jobs. But then, as now, it was the wish of many working-class parents to improve their children's lot in life and they seized upon one chance which they thought might help them to do so. This was what the pupil-teacher system offered whereby children were apprentice teachers for five years until about the age of 18. If they were deemed to have performed well they were then given the title of assistant teachers. Initially there was only a small payment of £10 during the first year of this apprenticeship and there were more girls who entered the system rather than boys. Boys could not afford, even at the tender age of 12, not to earn the best money available straight away in order to help support their families. The girls had to be really fit to cope with the demands of the long hours of study, up to 30 hours per week teaching, at least one hour's tuition per day from the headteacher and preparation, but at least it held out improved prospects for them in the long term.

It was vital that the educational system in Great Britain be improved in the nineteenth century. This was the time when its manufacturing industries were pouring goods out upon the world – then often stymied because British children were so badly taught and barely literate or numerate enough to develop trade with the old and new worlds. Traditionally the churches had basically seen elementary education as a tool whereby it delivered a subservient, God-fearing, respectful workforce which could satisfy the demands of the gentry, industrialists and farmers. This was simply not now good enough. With government backing Dr (later Sir) James Kay-Shuttleworth was the prime mover who took advantage of the already existing educational provisions of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and non-conformist churches to improve the educational system. Sir James had to confront two problems – the schools needed better teaching staff, so he needed to improve existing church teacher-training colleges and establish some new ones, and at the same time justify the government's investment in education, whilst pacifying churches who saw their control dwindling.

Up to this time elementary school education had consisted of the three 'r's' and a great deal of rote learning which was taught by monitors and dunned into uncomprehending little heads; older children helped younger ones. Charity and Schools of Industry helped boys to learn their letters and some trades; Sunday Schools enlisted the aid of 'ladies' of an evangelical bent to teach children the Bible and know their catechism. In Emsworth several private and 'dame' schools taught both day children and boarders and some, such as Mrs. Jewell's school in King Street, were very successful. But generally speaking education of this time was uncoordinated and haphazard with a lot of humanitarian-based provision. Even so, despite this need for a structured educational provision, before the would-be pupil was admitted to apprenticeship ... s/he had to satisfy certain medical, educational and moral requirements. No candidate was to be accepted who was "subject to any bodily infirmity ... or had an hereditary tendency to insanity" for these were "to be regarded as positive disqualifications". One candidate in 1849 who was 'resident in a public house' was thought to have 'a very serious, if not surmountable, objection to apprenticeship. Illegitimate children were not admitted, except

in cases of outstanding merit and they also were required to move to some other place where they were not known'.

Despite all this, Kay-Shuttleworth not only set up government support for such training, he organised a bridge to support bright, able children and keep them committed to teacher-training between leaving school and until they reached the end of their apprenticeship. His scheme was so designed as to appeal particularly to children of the working classes as in it they would be able to see the possibilities of later independence, with the security of a government-sponsored position and pension rights later on, as an alternative to the few choices of job mentioned earlier. The collective feet of these children appeared to have been firmly placed upon the ground; an upbringing based on pragmatism and self-reliance and upon an acceptance of the need for hard work which led to what they perceived as a worthwhile goal was to be seized, tired as they were after such demanding training. As a result of Kay-Shuttleworth's initiative bright children who had done well during their apprenticeship could then take what was known as the Queen's scholarship examination, begun in 1852. If successful, and a place available, they could then progress up to a place at an elementary teaching training college supported by a government bursary.

Between 1846 and 1870 the Anglican churches founded several teacher training colleges for elementary school teachers; they were separate for men and women, accepting both paying and sponsored students. Despite resentment at government control mechanisms such as annual audits by HMIs, the colleges benefited at the influx of government monetary support. Locally, one was established at Brighton, one for men at Chichester (Bishop Otter's) and another at Winchester and one for women at Salisbury (to which two of Thomas Hardy's sisters went). Numbers accepted, admission dates and duration of courses varied considerably from three months to three years between the colleges and it was often the case, given the crying needs for teachers, that as soon as a student was deemed fit for a post s/he was placed. The training period was kept as short as possible given that the student's family or parents had to bear the cost up to the middle of the nineteenth century, unless they were Queen's scholars. The original paying applicants to at least two of these colleges had to know the Bible and catechism, produce a certificate of baptism, state whether they had been confirmed and present a signed certificate of moral and religious character and health. Nothing in their entry requirements indicated what level of academic achievement was expected before acceptance – again – unless they were Queen's scholars.

Although there appeared to be no college uniforms, there were strict rules for dress at most women's colleges and they were required to wear neat, plain clothes, and out of doors walk in crocodile formation under the escort of a governess. Great stress was placed on humility, essential that they did not 'get above themselves and give themselves airs'. In order to accustom the students to the life of a village schoolmistress when they would need to be largely self-sufficient, all the women's colleges required their students to do some housework, regarded as part of their training. The students had to 'wait upon themselves, make their own beds, sweep and dust their own dormitories and do a certain portion of the domestic work of the establishment'. To newcomers at Salisbury training college the amount of household work seemed appalling. One student bemoaned:

'I am fond of domestic work and do not think it beneath a teacher, but there was a great deal of drudgery – three hours' washing and six hours with a heavy mangle or ironing in a hot laundry in one week was too much, and keep on with our lessons as well.'

For similar reasons most women's colleges also ran cookery classes and students were assigned 'pantry duty', alongside normal lessons' preparation and attendance. This involved getting up early enough to get the fires lighted and breakfast prepared before the first lesson, cooking, clearing away and washing up for all meals, with plenty of sweeping and scrubbing afterwards. All these household duties and kitchen work had twofold benefits in that not only did they prepare teachers for lives as independent, possibly rural isolated schoolmistresses, such duties helped to keep down the cost of maintaining and running the college itself. In the men's colleges such training seemed to be considered unnecessary; it was assumed that upon becoming a teacher they would either marry or have help in the house. So it followed that women students needed to be fitter than men to cope with added domestic chores, that they had less time available for academic study and women's colleges must have been cheaper to run.

If the period between 1830 and 1860 had seen many educational changes, more were to come. Elementary education was now taught from five to the age of thirteen; government educational funding was pared to the bone, and several colleges closed, among them Bishop Otter's college for men, but eventually between 1871 and 1874 teacher-training numbers rose again. Unsurprisingly, the government's insistence upon inspections by an HMI and their recommendations was still bitterly resented, instanced by the Venerable Archdeacon of Bristol's irritation:

'He has ordered complete sets of baths for all the students. Now these girls will never see a bath when they leave their training colleges in their future life. It is accustoming them to luxuries and creating a taste which they will not be able to gratify afterwards'.

But in the last quarter of the century things were again looking up for teacher-training colleges; it saw Bishop Otter re-emerging as a successful one for ladies, begun by a forceful lady called Louisa Hubbard and her equally forceful friends, among them Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. Her choice of headmistress was a Miss Frances Trevor, who turned the wheel full circle by sending her pupil-teachers in pairs to the Emsworth School for their teacher-training practice. And Emsworth Museum this year continued to preserve its links with Chichester by accepting University students on work experience.

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