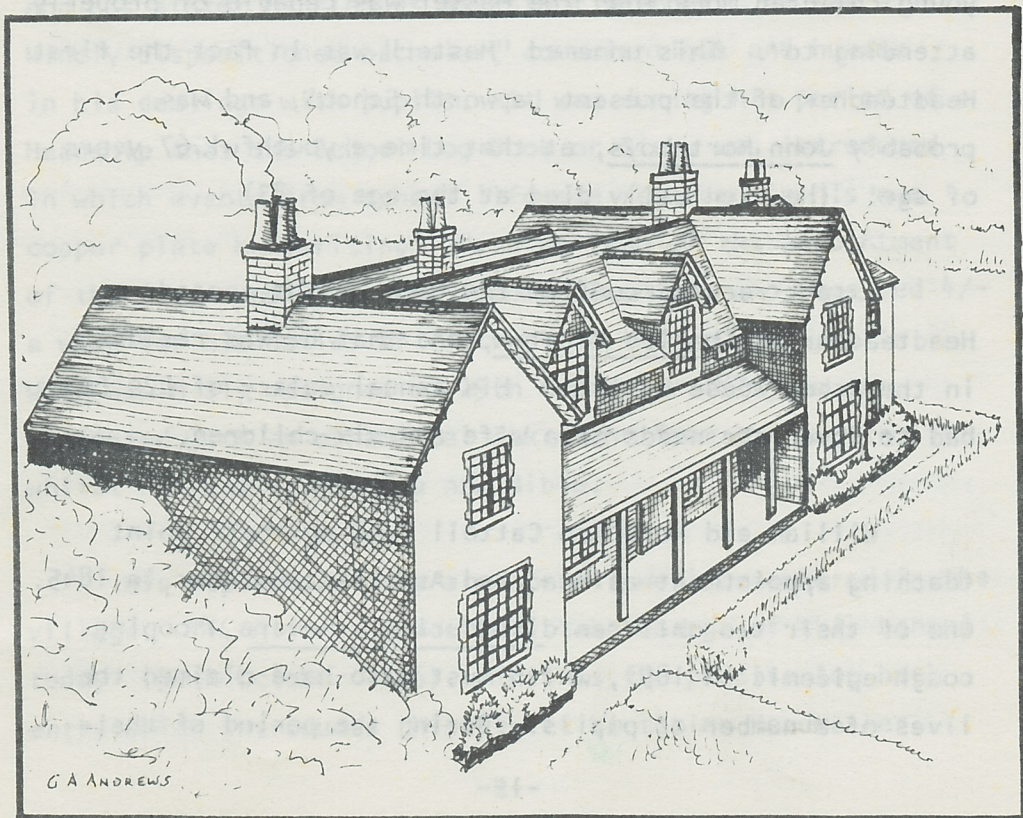


150 Years in the Life
of
Lapworth School
1828 - 1978



HEADTEACHERS OF LAPWORTH SCHOOL: 1828 - 1978

The distinctive and basically unaltered school building now called simply Lapworth School was originally approved in plan form by the Feoffees of Lapworth Charities on 27th July 1824. It was conceived as a necessary replacement for the existing school held in a dilapidated cottage which then stood near the present school drive and had over sixty pupils on roll.

Building commenced soon after the Feoffees' meeting, and the first reference to the School being fully in use is dated 29th April 1828, when there was "an influx of young children more than the Master was capable of properly attending to". This unnamed "Master" was in fact the first Headteacher of the present Lapworth School, and was probably John Morteboys, at that time a youthful 67 years of age! (He eventually died at the age of 83).

Extant records confirm the name of the second Headteacher as Charles Marston, and that he was resident in the Schoolhouse by 1841. His annual salary of £20.00 had to cover the needs of a wife and six children.

William and Mary Ann Cattell took up their joint teaching appointment as Head and Assistant teacher in 1845. One of their two children died during a severe whooping cough epidemic in 1851, which must also have claimed the lives of a number of pupils. During the period of their

stay boys and girls were taught separately and instructed mainly in the 4 R's : Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Religious Knowledge. William Cattell, described on his tombstone as "the loved and devoted Master" died on 20th July 1860 aged 46 years. His epitaph can still be read clearly in the Old Churchyard.

The Cattells were succeeded by Mr & Mrs Isaac Yeoman from Warwick who stayed for eight years until March 1868. They were replaced by Mr & Mrs George Chamberlain who stayed only a few months at the School.

On 15th February 1869 Edwin Sly was appointed Master and his sister Harriet as assistant teacher. He was a kindly dispositioned bachelor, conscientious and humane in his dealings with pupils. It was during his period of Headship that the School Log Book or Diary was introduced in which events from school life are recorded in his own copper plate handwriting. Here we read of the appointment of the first pupil teacher, Thomas Cranmer, who received 4/- a week for his duties of instructing the younger pupils. When Edwin Sly resigned on 29th September 1876, he was presented with an ornamental ink stand from the pupils, whilst Harriet received a new Bible.

His replacement was a man still well remembered in the village. "I, Alfred Horace Davy take charge of this school today" (30th October 1876). This is the precise log book entry which introduces this strict Victorian Headmaster.

He was a firm believer in the value of corporal punishment and caned without compunction both boys and girls. Mrs Davey was assistant teacher and their daughter Blanche passed through the school as pupil (1889), pupil teacher (1900) and finally as assistant teacher (1904). Mr Davey's long period of Headship was marred in its closing years by probably the saddest single tragedy to affect the school. Four pupils, all boys, fell through the ice covering Spring Pit, and were drowned. One of the four lost his life in trying to rescue his companions, who included his own brother. A memorial to this event, which happened on Ash Wednesday 1907, still stands in the lower part of the Old Churchyard. The Daveys, affected by this disaster and by deteriorating personal health, left Lapworth, and teaching, on 31st December 1911. It is believed they retired to Sussex.

The new Headteacher must have been one of the youngest to serve Lapworth School, since he was just 24 years of age when appointed. Oscar Alfred Summers was a local man having himself been a pupil at Tanworth-in-Arden School. His two assistant teachers were Miss Ellen Hobday (a former pupil of the school) and Miss Edith Robinson, who later became Mr Summers' sister in law. During Oscar Summers' headship, the sliding wooden screen was installed in the main schoolroom and the loose ash playground replaced by an asphalted one. Due to call-up for military service (May 1916) the first woman headteacher was appointed on a temporary basis, until Mr Summers' return. Miss Emma A.

Greening from Stratford-on-Avon looked after the school during the later war years.

Mr Summers resumed his duties on 28th April 1919. Eleven old boys of the school are known to have lost their lives as a result of military service including a former Head boy, Oliver Cranmer. During his period of Headship, Oscar Summers introduced curriculum changes in the form of Environmental Studies, Gardening and the development of the musical tradition. In 1929, Mr A.D.Melson, School Manager and Benefactor died. He had distributed blue serge capes to the boys and red, hooded ones to the girls, since 1894. In December 1930, Mr Summers successfully obtained the Headship of Kineton School. (He has recently died, in his 89th year, late 1977)

John Jessie Belton B.Sc.M.Sc. (Econ) who succeeded Mr Summers as Headteacher, was noted as a schoolmaster, layreader and local historian. His first local history topic appears to have been "A guide to the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Lapworth", published Easter 1934 price 1/-. One member of his staff was Miss Ethel Wimlett who had herself been a pupil of Lapworth School. Mr Belton stayed five years before moving at the end of the Summer term 1936 to become Headmaster of the nearby Hockley Heath School. Mr Belton died in his 53rd year on 30th April 1955 and is buried in the new part of Lapworth Church cemetery overlooking the Tapster Valley.

Robert James Knight commenced his duties as Headteacher on the 1st November 1936 and stayed until 30th August 1939. Much of his stay was influenced by the threat of war and early in 1938 Mr Knight became a Warden for the area, no doubt influenced by concern for the safety of 'his' pupils. His final log book entry recorded: "I have found Lapworth School a happy School".

For the second time in the history of Lapworth a period of war saw the appointment of a woman Headteacher, although Mrs Doris Howells can justly claim to be the first permanent woman Headteacher. Evacuated pupils from Wattville Road School, Birmingham and from Ilford, added considerably to the problems of this small school. Overcrowding, temporary billeting of pupils and shift systems of teaching were the pattern of the early war years. In spite of rationing, hot midday meals were introduced in June 1942 replacing margarine sandwiches which had formed the staple diet of so many pupils. As a result of the 1944 Education Act "all age" schools like Lapworth were being considered for re-organisation as Primary Schools (5 - 11 years). Mrs Howells advised the Managers not to deprive Lapworth of its older pupils until the new Secondary School at Henley-in-Arden was built, and this advice was accepted. Mrs Howells tendered her resignation on the same day as Mrs Allen who had been a member of staff for almost twenty years. Doris Howells summed up her decade at Lapworth as "very happy" and clearly regretted having to move because of her husband's appointment to a teaching post in Bilston.

The Managers now revived an earlier tradition, by appointing a husband and wife team. Claud Noel Bamford took up his duties as Headteacher on 3rd May 1949, whilst at the same time his wife Muriel accepted the vacant position of assistant teacher. Mr Bamford quickly re-emphasised the importance of the school garden as an important part of the total school curriculum. Allied to this were studies of the rich natural environment. Animals found their way into the classroom, including an owl, a crow and the Bamfords own pets. These visitors formed the subject of educational studies undertaken by the pupils in the stable "family atmosphere" which the Bamfords created.

In their early years at school, water was still laboriously drawn from the playground pump, but later this was replaced by another supply which meant that permanent wash-basins could be installed for the first time (1951).

After twenty-three years of settled teaching, the security was broken by the premature death of Noel Bamford (15th January 1973). A fitting memorial in the form of a library of books was presented to the School by grateful pupils and parents. This library plays a prominent part in the work of the school today. Mrs Bamford remained in post at the school until her retirement in December 1974. She lives now in her own home not far from the school and is able to keep in active touch with both pupils and staff.

The present Headteacher, Miss Kathleen M. Smallman was

appointed in September 1973 after serving as Deputy Head of a Wolverhampton Primary School. Miss Smallman quickly blended a full personal teaching programme with the responsibilities of running an efficient and happy school. To a balanced curriculum of basic and creative skills, she has introduced educational visits to France (1974) and Belgium (1977). Not long after assuming the Headship of Lapworth she agreed to the making of a television film comparing the school in 1974/5 to the turn of the century. The film has been seen by parents, pupils and student teachers of the Education Department of City of Birmingham Polytechnic. In 1975 the continuing integration of the school with the local community was formalised by the creation of "Friends of Lapworth School", a band of parents and village residents interested in the continuing welfare of the School.

Detailed research into the records associated with Lapworth School by the present writer over the last four years, has highlighted a unique school. It has a distinguished history full of human interest, constantly characterised by caring teachers and responsive pupils. Today's children are surrounded by the significant social history of the last one hundred and fifty years, they are undoubtedly richer because of it!

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