

OCCASIONAL  
PAPER  
No 4

**KING'S HEATH LOCAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY**



**Colmore Road Infant School  
King's Heath  
1909 - 1925**

**By  
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**1989**

COLMORE ROAD INFANT SCHOOL

KINGS HEATH

BIRMINGHAM

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September 1988

inspection in June, a register check the same month, with a half-day attendance holiday a week later. On July 6th. the last lesson in each class was taken as conversational on the Royal visit of Edward VII to Birmingham and school closed all the next day for the visit. A fortnight later school closed for the summer. It reopened on August 30th. having extended the holiday by one week as the Colmore Road building was not finished. 128 children were transferred, leaving infants only in the park.

The infants remained there until April 1911. In February 1910, a visit was paid by Mr. Cartwright, one of His Majesty's inspectors. He reported that: "King's Heath House has been well adapted. The children are bright, happy and intelligent and good use has been made of the favourable conditions for nature study."

The children were assembled on May 9th. 1910 at 11.30 a.m. for a talk on the late King and school then closed for the rest of the day.

The coronation of King George V and Queen Mary was celebrated the following year with a talk, medals and a holiday on June 22nd.

94 children from Class 1 were taken on June 30th. to visit a picture house in Birmingham to see the coronation film. They received their attendance marks but the attendance inspector cancelled them as he refused to accept the visit coming within the scope of article 44 of the code, i.e. that the visit was not educational. This would not affect the children but the teachers would have lost pay.

Attendance was affected by other things: November 15th. 1909, only 73% attendance because of deep snow; January 28th. 1910, attendance 82% - influenza; December 9th. 1910, closed early for Christmas and because of mumps; closed again 22nd. February to March 27th. 1911 because of measles and diphtheria.

There were regular medical examinations and reports were made to the education committee by the school doctor. In 1909, he examined 339 children (not all at Kings Heath) and found 85 with verminous heads, 242 with bad teeth, 106 with enlarged tonsils, 109 with adenoids, 38 with external eye disease and 43 with defective eye-sight; 8 were deaf, 18 had some form of heart disease and 19 had diseased lungs.

As these numbers of defects added up to twice the number of children examined, obviously very few were completely fit and most had one or more complaints. Two years later, in 1911, the following were found: 25 with poor nutrition, 51 with verminous heads, 95 with four or more bad teeth, 58 with enlarged tonsils, 51 with adenoids, 6 with weak hearts, 12 with anaemia, 24 with bronchitis, 18 with rickets, 83 with ringworm, and 23 children were sent immediately to Uffculme Open Air School.



In October 1909, the Urban District Council agreed to provide meals for "underfed scholars" and eight centres were set up. One was in All Saints' church room in the High Street, Kings Heath, to cater for 64 pupils. The caretaker was made responsible for the preparation of the meals with "such assistance as may be obtained from ladies and gentlemen who may volunteer to help in the work." The caretaker received between 5 shillings and 10 shillings (25p and 50p) per week according to numbers. The Kings Heath man received 10 shillings. The average cost to the pupil was 1/3d (6p) and the menu was as follows:

Monday and Thursday: One slice of bread and butter and half a pint of milk.  
Tuesday and Friday: Porridge with sugar and milk, half a pint of cocoa and a slice of bread and butter.  
Wednesday: Two slices of bread and dripping and half a pint of cocoa.

Meals served during the Christmas holidays were paid for by Messrs Cadbury Bros.

Meanwhile, the building of Grove Road School (later termed Colmore Road School) was going ahead. The plans were drawn up by Ewan Harper and Bros., architects, of Corporation Street, and John Bowen and Son of Balsall Heath were given the contract to build. Mr Cross, the Kings Norton and Northfield Council surveyor, of Valentine Road, Kings Heath, kept a watching brief over the building work and some correspondence still remains between Mr Bowen and Mr Cross for the latter to inspect some of the installations. For instance, a postcard dated May 13th. 1910, bearing a halfpenny stamp and postmarked 9.15 p.m., asked Mr Cross to inspect the damp course. Ten days later, he was asked to inspect the deep drain. In August, he was inspecting the foundation of the caretaker's house and in September was asked to test the drains and to bring a smoke-box.

The three departments of the school were all built on the same pattern: a central hall with three classrooms leading off, a corridor one end with a cloakroom, teachers' room and two classrooms, and a corridor the other end with another cloakroom, teachers' room and three classrooms. Each classroom was the same size: 20 ft. 6 in. by 24 ft. 8 in. and was to accommodate fifty children. The cloakrooms had a space specifically marked out for umbrellas. Each building had a bell tower, although no one spoken to by the writer ever remembers a bell being rung. The teachers' rooms, both being the same size, 16 ft. 8 in. by 10 ft. 6 in., had a lock up sink, lavatories and gas-ring burners. Gas lamps were placed at each end of the entrances and in the playground were the cycle-sheds, a play shed, W.C. and urinals. Walls divided each playground, with a communicating door, although the original plan suggested omitting the wall between the infants and girls departments. A wall was built on the N.W. side of the school site to screen the playground from the backs of cottages. An iron railing was built on the retaining wall but this was taken down to help the war effort in 1940. It has recently been replaced.

The caretaker's house in Grove Road had a parlour, kitchen, scullery and hallway, three bedrooms and a bathroom. Mr Pepper, caretaker at the White House School, was appointed at an annual salary of £22.10.0d (£22.50), less than before but presumably recompensed by having his own house.

The Midland Educational Co. Ltd. provided desks at a cost of £828.16.6d (£828.82), cloak room fittings cost £191, gas fittings £199.6.0d (£199.30), and lavatories £246.17.0d (£246.85).

The boys and girls departments opened in August 1909 with 128 children transferred from the park plus the overflow from Kings Heath and Moseley. The infants transferred in April 1911. Miss Ward remained as headmistress and the rest of the staff moved with her, except for Miss Cotterell who was appointed head of Fashoda Road Infants School.

In November 1911, Kings Heath became part of Birmingham and the school came under the city's education authority. The only obvious change seemed to be that half holidays for good attendance ceased, as did the holiday on Shrove Tuesday. Three occasional days were substituted.

Epidemics still caused problems, and in November 1911 only 73% attended because of whooping cough. Folk memory of past bad winters have some credence in that the school attendance was reduced to 13% in January 1912 and again in March 1913, both because of deep snow. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the log-book to prove that the summers were hotter than now.

For the lessons, new reading books were introduced in 1911 - Robinson Crusoe - and new handicrafts - toy making and shape forming. In March 1915 the school was visited by one of His Majesty's inspectors who reported that "-- the reading was well advanced; drawing and hand work satisfactory; recitation good; sweet singing; arithmetic has improved in method."

A month later, the Lord Mayor asked that additional accommodation be found for 3,000 wounded soldiers. Eight Birmingham schools were offered and two were used. These two were Colmore Road and Selly Park in Raddlebarn Road. The War Office paid for the necessary alterations. So, on April 19th. 1915, all children from the three departments were transferred to Kings Heath School and remained there until 1919. During that period part-time schooling was introduced - four weeks of mornings, 8.45 to 12.45, and four weeks of afternoons, 1.15 to 4.45 p.m.

1916 began disastrously. In January, there was 72% attendance because of whooping cough; February 24th. to 28th. school was abandoned altogether because of deep snow; February 29th., another deep fall and many were sent home with wet feet; March 3rd., 63% attendance because of a combination of whooping cough and snow; March 7th. and 8th., closed again because of snow; March 28th. and 29th., three children struggled in through the snow, and March 30th.



school closed as there was no heat. It must have been a great relief to all to close for Easter on April 20th.

There is little mention of the war in the log-book. Miss Beddows was given permission on June 21st. 1917 to spend the day at Stratford with her fiance who had been ordered to France and, on April 17th. 1918, Miss Kay was given permission to visit her wounded brother in London. There was a happy ending for Miss Beddows who married in January 1919 and returned to the school for two terms as Mrs. Smith.

In November 1917, the time table was adjusted to allow children with no older brothers or sisters, and who lived over a mile away, to leave at 4.15 p.m. and not at 4.45 p.m. The Timetable then read:

3.25-3.45	Reading
3.45-4.15	Drawing/handwork
4.15-4.25	Tables
4.25-4.45	Singing

In November 1918, attendance was affected by the serious epidemic of influenza which affected not only the rest of the country but was also world-wide. The school closed for a general holiday on November 11th. and 12th. for the Armistice celebrations and then closed early in December for Christmas because of the 'flu. Peace was celebrated in July 1919 with an extra week for the summer holiday and the school returned to Colmore Road in October 1919. Working part-time must have affected standards, although a visit from an inspector in January 1918 produced a good report: "A good level of attainment; reading in Standard 1a is fluent and expressive. Variety in treatment of number has helped to make this interesting with good results. The more wonder awakening aspects of nature teaching might have more attention in Standard 1b (N.B. There was deep snow at the time). The games and stories are a pleasing feature and the system of interchanging classes during one session each month has advantages. Because of the half sessions, secular work has been reduced to a minimum, although the children have been encouraged to work at home."

There were regular inspections of classes and registers by the inspectors and it was they who recommended salary increases. In October 1910, for instance, Miss Ward's salary went up from £125 per year to £130. Miss Kershaw, as a certificated teacher, received £77.18.0d (£77.90), but Miss Ray and Miss Cooper, both uncertificated, received £55.13.0d (£55.65) and £54.3.0d (£54.15) respectively. Another member of the staff complained that she had received no increase but was told by the authority that this was the result of the poor report on her work during that year.

When the City took over, Miss Kershaw was appointed chief assistant and her salary went up to £82.18.0d (£82.90).

There are some glimpses in the log-book of the lessons taught and they probably didn't change much from the opening of the school to the fifties when wholesale changes were made to the timetable and methods of teaching. The day always

began with assembly for the whole school, the singing of a hymn and "hands together and eyes closed" for prayer. A short scripture lesson began the day's teaching followed by the three R's, with emphasis on learning tables and spellings by rote. Even now, when it is of no use, I can recite the money table:

12 pence makes one shilling  
20 pence makes one and eightpence  
24 pence makes two shillings  
30 pence makes two and sixpence  
36 pence makes three shillings  
and so on to  
100 pence makes eight and fourpence

In the afternoon came more leisurely activities for the children, if not for the teacher coping with fifty children drawing, painting or doing handwork with thick paste and blunt scissors. There was also singing, mainly folk songs of the British Isles, accompanied on the piano provided by the Authority in 1911 at a cost of £20. Physical training was introduced in Colmore Road in 1921 when the head attended a P.T. demonstration. Miss Warden then attended a weekly P.T. class and demonstrated to the rest of the staff on her return. The lesson would have been in the hall with the class in four lines - reds, blues, greens and yellows - and consisted of "knees bend, arms stretch" and games with bean-bags and balls.

During the twenties, a school fund was started and jumble sales were held. One, in 1922, raised £43.1.7d (£43.8). There were also open days for parents and carols, parties and nativity plays at Christmas. There was an extra day's holiday on the 28th. February 1922 for Princess Mary's wedding, and again on April 26th. 1923 for the wedding of the Duke of York (later King George VI).

In May 1923, the school was visited by Miss Biggs, one of His Majesty's inspectors, who said that "-- satisfactory progress was being maintained in happy conditions" and this seems to be the impression retained by ex-pupils.