



Westbury Church of England Junior School

Education in Westbury

Before the mid-1800's the majority of children would not have attended school. There were a few great public schools such as Eton and Harrow for the elite and many of the rich would have had private tutors and governesses. Some of the merchants and well-to-do citizens able to pay high fees, might have sent their sons to grammar school, but for the village boy there was only the occasional Dame's school. These were generally taught by an elderly lady in her own cottage, for which the locals would pay a small fee.

The children working in the mills and factories would not have had time to attend school, and no-one really thought that literacy was important.

After Lord Shaftesbury's Factory Act, children had time for school, and in 1870 parliament insisted that all children from 5-13 years attend, for which parents had to pay between 6d. and 9d. per week. There was considerable opposition to schools from parents who objected to loss of income from their children as well as having to pay for their education.

Many schools were built. Board schools were managed by a board of managers. National schools by the Church of England and British Schools by the non-conformists. Attendance at school always seems to have been a problem. In the church council minutes of 1872 it was stated that no practical solution was forthcoming to deal with considerable numbers of children found loitering in the streets during school hours. Later the School Attendance Officer was to become a very busy person.

Westbury seems to have been family forward looking with regard to education and provided schools long before it was compulsory. The first was opened in 1814, and was the Westbury Laverton Institute School, built from a bequest of £1,000 left by Mr J. Matravers for the education of poor children - both girls and boys. This school was originally in Bratton Road and then moved to a school room in the Laverton Institute.

In 1833 the Church of England school at Westbury Leigh was opened for eighty children. In 1893 it became a National School and was granted controlled status. Eleven years later the church also provided a school for Westbury. This was largely built by the efforts of the vicar who established it in a hired room, before moving into the school at the bottom of Newtown.

In 1873 the school in the churchyard was used for the infants and girls. The junior boys moved onto the Newtown School.

In 1844 a single room was built in Lower Road (now Leigh Road) onto a Girl's School, and then in the big re-organisation of 1925 new rooms were added, boys were admitted and it became Westbury County Secondary Modern School. In 1974, when the school leaving age raised to 16, it became a Comprehensive.

The Lower Road school progressed steadily and in 1936 a new wing was added - designed for home economics, handicraft and science. The latter was spoken of highly; the pupils interest captivated by the practical apparatus ranging from optical lanterns, an episcopo, electric motors to transformers and meters. The handicraft rooms were fitted for woodwork and a little metalwork, so that the old National Boys School in Bratton Road no longer had to be used. Home Economics was studied as a complete three year course by the girls and the more senior produced dinners at 4d. each every week. The housecraft room doubled as a dining room for the 60-80 who normally remained for school dinners. Gardening remained a popular pastime for many of the pupils. There were flowers and a well-constructed pool, although fruit cultivation proved difficult.

Making their reports the inspectors noted the involvement and use of local history, as well as the improvement in art and physical training. The school presented a link with industry and local affairs - preparing the children for life beyond the age of 14 when their time at school came to an end.

In 1936 buses were introduced to transport children to from school. It also gave opportunity to go on to Trowbridge Commercial School and Trowbridge High School.

In 1945 the school was known as the Westbury County Secondary Modern School with accommodation for 348 pupils. By now an 11+ examination had been introduced which enabled the more academic children to transfer to grammar schools. In 1959 external `Royal Society of Arts examinations were introduced. By 1960 the school leaving age was 15 and the option to study `O` Level exams began. The subjects were limited to Mathematics, English Language, English Literature, History and Geography.

In 1958 a very successful scheme in Rural Science was begun, the first in the county. Children came from as far afield as Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge and Warminster to study the two goats, cow, breeding sow and poultry. The farmstead consisted of goat sheds, pig sties, a weighing machine and a calf shed. All constructed by the boys themselves.

Westbury Girls British School

There is little documented history of the Westbury Girls British School. However, it is apparent that the school was constructed in 1844 primarily for girls and a small number of infants. It was associated with the British society, although Joseph Tucker, a Westbury Leigh miller, was a well-meaning support. He left a charity giving the school an annual sum of £2.10s. The school had accommodation for 91 pupils, although the averages were 70 in 1844 and 60 from 1893-1910. The establishment was extended in 1985 to form the Westbury Senior Council School.

The British School is situated on Leigh Road. When originally built it consisted of a single room, although this was partitioned off to form separate rooms for the girls and infants. There was a small gallery, used for some kind of religious service. The exterior is built in Gothic style. By the 1840's it had been decided that this period of architecture was more suitable for schools and ecclesiastical buildings. On looking at the school one is reminded of the dramatic outline of a church combined with

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the cruder texture of a castle. The roof originally consisted of average tiles and is fairly high-pitched.

During the buildings history much alteration has been made to the windows. On the oldest accessible plans there are seven windows - the number has now been increased to nine. Most of the original windows have small panes although three have larger panes. This is due to the fact that the lower parts of the windows have been blocked in. The original lines can be seen on the main facade - they were probably filled in when the veranda was built in 1925.

Above the rounded heads of the windows are three canopies which are completed by small motifs similar to those on the roof. Also there are stylised features similar to arrow slits but they are blocked in. The building which was originally the porch is now used for toilets.

An old plaque above the door has now eroded away and is illegible. The original lavatory and cloakroom has been demolished.

he interior now consists of four rooms plus a cloakroom and toilet. The `School Room` has been sectioned off into the sick bay with three rooms - the majority of the infants half of the school room is still used as a schoolroom. The gallery has been completely removed although a single beam still remains - presumably the structural line of the partition.

The limestone was obtained locally but the designer is unknown.

Westbury Senior County School

A record 96% attendance was achieved in the earlier years of the school's history. The log books reported that there were regular medical inspections by a local nurse and a dentist also attended the school on occasions. The school even possessed certain scientific equipment and knowledge was tested by periodical examinations especially in religious instruction taught by the local vicar. After its opening the establishment received a variety of gifts from well-meaning benefactors.

Pupils were not lacking in physical education for regular swimming sessions were reported and sports competitions in Trowbridge.

The first inspectors reports were very pleasing and appreciated by the teachers, so much that quotations were place in the log book. Mr Hill, on 26th February 1925, described the school as `proceeding smoothly` regardless that there were large classes and at that time no system for moving up from the junior schools.

Later reports in July 1926, G. Purdic explained that the school was very business-like with excellent discipline. The children, it seems, talked well and were good at maths and composition and above average in history and geography. Although there were only `satisfactory` exam. results the report concluded that the school was well equipped and `This is especially shown in the Senior School - a standard which is much in advance of what has been found in this town in the past.`

In 1929 the school was closed for a short while for new additions to be made. Plans were also made for acquiring the adjoining field. When the school re-opened in 1930 the attendance was much lower than expected, but the school progressed with new facilities for canteen purposes and scientific study.

The school itself was fairly successful in the Annual Schools Examinations with one year 18 passes in Arithmetic, English and Composition. Many of the children were awarded special places at the local High School and in 1928 the system of moving up from Junior School was established similar to the system today.

In the school log book there are references to the much enjoyed Annual Sports Day held in the grounds. Not only did the include sports events but there were exhibitions for inspections by parents and the Annual Prize Giving. There are also many pages devoted to diseases such as Diphtheria keeping

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children away from school, although most cases were treated immediately by school nurses.

The teachers were entitled to refresher courses and there were frequent holidays for national celebrations. Important speeches by the King or Prime Minister were listened to on the radio made by the boys.

The final reports before 1935 came during September 1934. Described in detail were the eight classrooms and housecraft room serving for canteen purposes.

Although there was no hall or laboratory, science was taught in the ordinary classes. There was a good use of reading and recitation in English. Neat and accurate work was reported in arithmetic. A particular note was made of the efficient mapwork in Humanities and Current Affairs.

There was original practical work accomplished in Art such as raffia. Music lessons consisted of community singing, sight-reading and appreciation. Being a county town the children were very close to nature and produced a well-tilled garden with a wide range of vegetables, flowers and shrubs as well as a water garden. Good use of the playground and field was made in physical education.

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Between 1950-1960 the number of pupils was 475 and temporary accommodation was required. it was not until 1962 that the programme was proposed to bring the building up to Ministry of Education standards. This consisted of a main block with dinner and assembly halls, gymnasium, general classrooms and a library. In 1974 the school turned Comprehensive. A new design block was built after the leaving age was raised to 16. The science and maths. block was constructed in 1977.