

Charing School: Beginnings



Charing School (CDLHS archive)

The new school opened in January 1873. It's thought with 87 children present, 24 in the infants and the rest divided into 4 classes.

John Williams was the head. He took the two older classes: a student for 'pupil teachership' is described as taking the other 2. In 1887 the classes combined.

One year after the school opened, in 1874, 12 lime trees were planted outside the school, (all but one are still standing).

A short background to Education during the period of our 'Charing School Log' series

The National Society had been set up in **1811** to establish elementary schools based on the teachings of the Church of England. Its ambition was to establish a National school in every parish of England and Wales. To achieve this, they needed to be economical, so to this end relied on one teacher being responsible for teaching many children at once (see picture). The whole school of 7 to 12 year olds was often in one room but divided into standards, (groups of similar attainment) and often taught by older or proficient children. Pupil teachers were trained, as Margaret Ruglys described her 12 year old brother's experience at Charing School. He went to school for instruction at 7.30 before breakfast, then teaching in school, after school he also did a lot of homework at night too.

Education was through 'rote learning' and the school received funding through a 'payment by results' system of established in the 1862 Revised Code proposed by Robert Lowe who famously told the House of Commons that he could not promise;

"that this system will be an economical one, and I cannot promise that it will be an efficient one, but I can promise that ... if it is not cheap it shall be efficient; if it is not efficient it shall be cheap" (quoted in Lawson and Silver 1973:290).

"Each child over the age of six was to earn the school an annual grant of 4s, on the basis of attendance; and 8s. 'subject to examination'.

Of the latter 2s. 8d. was forfeited for failure to satisfy the inspector in reading, 2s. 8d. in writing and 2s. 8d. in arithmetic. Children were to be presented in six 'standards', and not a second time in the same or a lower standard. Children under six were exempted from examination only under last-minute pressure (and these earned a grant of 6s. 6d. subject to a general report by the inspector as to the suitability of their education)" (Lawson and Silver 1973:290).

This system, and the pupil teacher ratio meant that lessons consisted of 'the 3 Rs', taught by rote, with needlework often the only practical subject taught. The rooms were cold, the benches uncomfortable, and the windows were either high, or behind the children. All, so there were no distractions.

A short background to Education during the period of our 'Charing School Log' series

'Home lessons' were set which proved particularly difficult in winter months when candlelight, and later paraffin lamps, were the norm; gas was too expensive for the many. Staying after school and canings were the punishments given if homework was incorrect, or not done. The punishments were often given ...

The **Education Act of 1870** required all children aged between 5 and 13 years to attend school, and the Act of 1876 imposed a legal duty on parents to ensure that their children were educated. But education was not free; in Charing each child of any age, had to pay 2d every Monday for the week. This was quite a strain for many families, it was particularly difficult for poorer families, as often the family income was reliant on their children working. It was doubly difficult for the many large families of the time (six was considered small and some were of sixteen). In 1872, Harry Ward describes being employed from age 8 for 2 and ½ days a week. He was rope making with his brother, which he continued to do for 2 years until he left school age 10.

In 1880, to improve the truancy problem, an act requiring school boards to enforce compulsory attendance from 5 to 10 years was passed. Attendance officers often visited the homes of children who failed to attend school, which as the school log shows, often proved to be ineffective. The act also set a necessary standard for children to reach before they could be employed. Employers of any children who were unable to show their certificate of educational standard were penalised.

It wasn't until 1891 that The Elementary Education Act effectively made primary education free, as it provided for government payment of school fees (up to ten shillings per head).

It was often the norm for Headmasters with their wives assistance, to be in charge of schools, and in Charing those mentioned have been; Mr and Mrs Leonard in 1873, in 1879 Mr Cousins, (no mention of a wife?), in 1884 Mr and Mrs Rous, and in 1886 Mr and Mrs Darlington. The difficulty of the task is reflected I think, in the number of changes of headmaster in a short time.

Incidentally, the term "being in the black book" is believed to have its origin in National Schools. It was a method of discipline which shamed the individual. It also gave the opportunity for reinforcing honourable / Christian principles, as the entries were often read to the entire school, and the faults then explained in moral terms.

Sources

'Harry Ward' and 'About Charing'

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter06.html>

<https://www.raggeduniversity.co.uk/2012/10/31/andrew-bell-1753-1832/>

Wikipedia

Valerie Yeeles