

The Schools of Dover

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WHILE CANTERBURY has the King's School, founded in the eighth century and Folkestone has the Harvey Grammar School, founded in 1674, Dover has no school of similar antiquity.

However, Dover did have schools as early as the seventh century but they were hidden inside other institutions. The Dover Priory had a choir master responsible for teaching six local boys how to sing, read and write. There was also a monk responsible for teaching six probationers. There was an excellent library of some 500 books which were, unusually, both classified and catalogued by John of Whitfield. The majority of the books were religious in content, but there were romans and books on mathematics, philosophy and other secular subjects. Remnants of this library can be found in some of Britain's famous libraries today.

So at least a dozen local boys were being educated, which is comparable with the number of boys educated in Tudor grammar schools. Although there is no record, I suspect that the 22 secular canons of St. Martin le Grande performed a similar function as educationalists or teachers in the seventh century.

Mediaeval papal directives required parish priests to educate the children of the parish and post-reformation churches continued the tradition but we have no record of the extent of this in Dover.

The first public education, as far as I can determine, was offered in an upstairs room of the Old Court Hall in 1616 for six poor children. The teacher, Robert Udney, a local curate, was paid £8 a year. It did not last long, as the Reverend Udney sublet the room when he was offered the living of Hawkinge. The Dover burghers were aghast at this perfidy and threatened legal action unless the room was returned to them. The school continued for another four years when the hall was sold.

The next school, opened by Henry Furnesse M.P. in 1721, was free for the sons of freemen. It was located in the Market Square area, probably in Queen Street. In 1736 the other M.P. for Dover, John Trevanion, not to be outdone, financed a free school for 50 boys in the Pier District, where most people lived.

By 1789 these schools were too small and a Dover Charity School for 400 children was built in Queen Street. This school became a National School, and therefore a Church of England School, in 1870, and is now St. Mary's.

Dover's population grew from 1432 in 1080 to 7084 in 1801, then, in only 50 years, to 20,929 by 1851. In 1833 government grants were made available for voluntary education. Elementary education for 7 to 14 year-olds did not become compulsory until 1870.

The churches, once more, began to show an interest in education. There was a boys' "Ragged School" in Ladywell from 1850-1870, a non sectarian institution. In 1833 the densely populated Pier District had neither churches nor schools. Here the Non-Conformist, Baptist and Methodist were the first to establish schools. The Dover British School for 500 pupils at Finnis Hall, built in 1833 and financed by the Finnis family, lasted until 1884, when it was sold having become redundant. St. Mary's opened a sister church, Holy Trinity, on Strond Street in 1835 and a school on the adjoining site in 1846. This school moved to a new site in 1847, to create room for railway lines and finally closed in 1935.

The first school in the village of Buckland was built by Wesleyan Methodists in 1839 but it closed in 1842 when the new Church of England Parish School opened. This was rebuilt in 1858 and survived as a school until 1955.

Charlton's first school was built in the churchyard in 1841 and in 1875 expanded to the Boy's Granville Street School and an infants and girls school in Barton Road.

Christ Church, built in 1844 to accommodate sectarian differences, started its first school in 1847 and then in 1865 the boys' school on Military Hill, which closed in 1947. Also in 1865 it opened an infants' school in Belgrave Road. That building is still in existence and is now a community centre. St. James's Church opened its school in 1848 and then a new church was built in 1860, both church and school being destroyed by enemy action during World War II, but neither closed officially until 1947.

So the needs of most of Dover's children were being met by the church schools, but for non-

believers there was a boy's "Ragged School" in Ladywell from 1850 to 1870 and a similar school for girls was located to the south of the Market Square. These schools were free, whereas the church schools charged about a penny a week.

The growing town needed new houses and when many were built, from 1850 onwards, on the Tower Hamlets brick works and farms, missions were built in the area. St. Bartholomew's provided a boys school in Widred Road and a girls' school in Tower Street, which later became an extension for the Astor Secondary Modern School in 1945.

The first train from Folkestone arrived in Dover on 7 February 1844 and the first from Temple Ewell on 22 July 1861. Stations and marshalling yards were needed as close to the harbour as possible and as the people in these areas moved out to the Winchelsea and Clarendon estates from 1860 onwards, the schools were provided by Christ Church.

Other schools built at this time were Temple Ewell, 1871, and St. Paul's RC School, 1872. The latter was continually enlarged until it closed in 1967, its pupils transferring to St. Richard's Primary and St. Edmund's Secondary Schools.

After the 1870 Education Act a Schools Managers' Association was formed in Dover, its members satisfied that private schools provided adequate secondary education. There were some 20 private schools at the time, but of these, only Dover College, founded in 1871, survives. The others, it seems, could not compete with state schools such as the Dover Grammar schools, founded in 1905 in the basement of the technical school built in 1884.

A successful private Girls' High school existed in Maison Dieu Road from 1888 until 1910, when it was taken over by the Girls' Grammar School, when it separated from the boys' school. The boys' Grammar School remained in the technical school basement, moved to Frith Road in 1916 and eventually to its present building in 1931, with the girls taking over the vacated Frith Road site. The former Girls' High School became the Art School.

The Dover Church of England Company built the Barton Road schools in 1902. Then St. Martin's School in Elms Vale opened to cater for the growing population in Maxton and Elms Vale. In 1912, a new player on the scene, the Dover Corporation, opened the Pier infants' school.

The next civic venture was the building of Astor School, in 1923, first an infants' school, then a girls' school and, later, in 1948, a secondary school, which grew and grew along the road, up the hill, taking in farms and allotments, jumping the road, gobbling up a brewer's playing fields and more allotments with a voracious appetite.

Robert Chignell had opened his private school at Westmount in 1870. Then, in 1874, he built a new red brick Gothic pile just below the castle, Castlemount. In pre-war years Castlemount was a seminary. In 1945 the buildings were taken over by the KCC and became Castlemount Secondary Modern School, which closed in 1991, victim of a declining birthrate and a population move from town centre to suburbia.

Archers Court Secondary School, built in 1956, took children from the Powell School (1949) and Melbourne Primary (1954). Whitfield, enlarged in the 1950s with more council development, had its own primary school in 1967, also a feeder school for Archers Court.

The girls' school in Park Avenue, opened by the Ursuline nuns in 1962, became St. Richard's RC Primary School, when the girls moved to St. Edmund's.

The Christ Church schools closed as a result of the reorganisation after the 1944 Education Act and Christ Church itself was eventually demolished. Later, in 1976 Vale View opened to fill the gap.

Post war planning advocated the closure of 16 schools altogether, assuming that as the new secondary schools opened they would absorb the children from the elementary schools over 11 years of age, leaving schools half empty. Population moves and slum clearance would have closed some of the schools anyway and wartime devastation, damaging many schools and churches, had completed what the council had started.

Schools were, and are, people. Buildings come later. Both reflect the society in which they exist. School buildings in old Dover acknowledged this fact. The Dover Charity School was a simple rectangular building, opening straight out on to the street, but it had enough Georgian features to justify a second glance. All the schools constructed between 1833 and 1870 reflected their patronage and were built in Victorian Gothic, in materials which were inexpensive and

34 did not weather well. They looked like churches, only the asphalt surround of the playgrounds revealing their function. Survivors of this era are St. Bartholomew's Girls' school in Tower Street, St. Paul's and Christ Church Infants' School. Modern embellishments have added nothing, but the structures are sound.

Post-1870 school construction moved away from the Gothic. Architectural embellishments created interest, ornamental gates were attractive, construction solid, and schools were recognisable as buildings for children. Interesting survivors are St. Martin's, Astor Primary and the two grammar schools. A Gothic survivor, River School, has recently added another wing. The Gothic motive is continued and the new red brick harmonises with the original. Time will complete the joining of old and new and is a worthy example of taste combined with functionalism.

Local schools were originally built of local materials, brick and flint, and, even though unique in structure, schools like Dover Technical College, Dover Art School and the new parts of Dover College harmonised with the surrounding neighbourhood.

Post-1944 schools reflected a radical change in philosophy. It seemed that the focus had moved from the original purpose of schools, which was to promote learning, to a new function, of educating workers for the future. Many new schools were merely concrete blocks, interchangeable with factories, barracks or prisons, where the occupants were to stay until they had been trained for the job market and where they were governed by certificates, School Certificate, GCE and then GCSE. Do the new "concrete" schools betray their alien influence?

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REVIEWby Merril Lilley

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A DOVORIAN **The story of Lillian Kay**

Researched and compiled by Derek Leach

When Lillian Kay retired as Headmistress of Dover Grammar School for Girls in 1977, she gave a speech at the Old Girls' dinner about the history of "a very lucky person". Some of the members present asked Lillian to repeat her talk and so began her regular addresses to local societies about the memories of her childhood and career.

Now all these memories have been collected together in a book due to appear in November 1999. Derek Leach has recorded them and presented them in a chronological history of her life. It is all there, supported by many personal photographs and photographs of old Dover. Many of us have heard part of it if we have attended one of Lillian's talks but now the whole story is told; the vivid descriptions of her childhood in the Pier District of Dover, her extended and complicated family background, her early recollections of the First World War; her school days, college years and subsequent teaching career. Dovorians will read it for the nostalgic descriptions of old Dover. Old pupils of the Grammar School will want to relive their memories of schooldays. Anyone who knows Lillian, or has heard one of her talks will want to own this book.

Copies cost £10.00 and are available from some local bookshops, including W.H. Smiths, from Dover Museum and Dover Library or direct from Derek Leach, 24 Riverdale, River, Dover CT17 0QX (01304 823926). Postage and packing in the UK costs £1.50. Cheques should be made payable to D.A. Leach.

Derek is prepared to deliver to Society members within Dover free of charge or purchasers may collect from him by arrangement.