

Bude Grammar School

1909 – 1972

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This document was written in 1975 by Malcolm Townrow, following a teacher training course at Culham College of Education, Abingdon, Oxon.

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The document was written as a “long essay” for the final part of my Education Course of a three year training session from 1973 until 1976. I subsequently qualified to teach English and Physical Education at secondary school level. My career took me back to my home region of the south west where I taught in a variety of secondary establishments in the city of Plymouth over a thirty year period. This copy of the original reflects the time when it was written in terms of educational theory. The history of the current secondary education establishment in Bude is referred to only briefly at the introduction and as such can only be mentioned in that way, no doubt there are documents post 1973 that reflect that establishment’s history.

Introduction

The history of the grammar school at Bude is only a very short time, dating from the beginning of January 1909 to the subsequent closure in December 1972, a period of only 63 years. Over that time the school became an important part of the community and the outlying neighbourhood of the countryside within a fairly large area. The school changed with the times both physically and in its educational outlook.

To gather my information for this study I decided to search into the past by visiting former pupils and staff of the school who now live and work in the Bude area. By discussion with these people I have found out some of the people, events and places that eventually became Bude Grammar School. The school moved with the times and so became the memory it is now. In the study I have included items from old school magazines which show the life of the pupil in the school as it was in pre Second World War years and also in times of a more recent past.

I can count myself as having been fortunate enough to have been educated at Bude Grammar School from 1965 until 1972 when the school moved from its old site to the new premises for Bude Haven Comprehensive School in Valley Road. This 'move' was itself the death of the Grammar School and now the buildings lie in waiting for someone to use them.

Chapter 1

THE ORIGINS OF THE SCHOOL

Before the Balfours Education Act in 1902 there was no secondary school of any sort in Bude.

It was in 1907, five years after the implementation of the Act, that building was started. The new Act was to change the system of education in England and Wales to ensure that secondary education was given a chance to work. Previously the system was a number of School Boards.

People elected by councils would organise the running of a school and the parents would pay a fee of up to a maximum of 9d a week to send a child there. The School Boards had wide powers.

They were free to decide whether religious instruction should be given in their schools. In every school a conscience clause operated which allowed parents to withdraw their children from religious education. Hence, religious instruction was given at the beginning or end of the school session so that the timetable would not be disrupted. Of course, money was an important factor and rising costs made life hard for the Boards trying to keep up their standards.

The government of the day decided that a major overhaul of the education system was necessary involving the abolition of the School Boards and their substitution by local authorities, what we know as LEA's, local education authorities. A major influence on the government was also the fact that Britain was being out-distanced in trade and industry by many foreign countries, notably the United States of America and Germany. The country needed a more efficient education system, especially secondary as well as elementary.

Consequently, in the Act of 1902, we had elementary and secondary education being dealt with together. The Education Act of 1870 had only been concerned with elementary education. The new Local Education Authorities were given the power to provide for education in all fields. The Act stated, "the Local education Authority shall consider the educational needs of their Area and take such steps as seems to them desirable, to supply or aid the supply of education other than elementary and to promote the general co-ordination of all forms of education....."

Before 1902, secondary education was mainly the privilege of those children whose parents were able to afford the school fees. Now it was felt that new moves had been made, so that the secondary school was now within the reach of the child of whom it was thought would benefit from a secondary education. It was a belief that secondary schools should at least be available to all boys and girls in the country.

Thus this Act became a framework for future development of the education system in England and Wales.

The man who was instrumental in putting this new bill before Parliament was the then Prime Minister, Mr A.J.Balfour. in his address to the House of Commons on the 24th March 1902, he outlined his reasons for reform and his methods of bringing the change about in the following manner: - "There are omissions and defects which it is the bounden duty of Parliament to remedy. One of these is the insufficiency of the supply of secondary education. Another is that by the very fact that you have given to County Councils and Borough Councils the right and the duty to intervene in respect of technical instruction.....alone, the normal and healthy growth of a true scheme of secondary education has been inevitably warped. Higher technical instruction can only do its work well when that work is based on a sound general secondary education."

“We find dealing with education two elective authorities in rivalry. Around the two authorities are scattered independent endowed schools and independent voluntary schools.”

“I cannot believe that this is a sound system of local government.”

“The second of the evils relates to the imperfect co-ordination of educational effort above the limiting line of elementary education. I am not one of those who will throw blame on the School Boards because they have in many ways trespassed on the territories of secondary education.....there was a great vacuum to fill, but frankly, I must add that these authorities for primary education have exaggerated their capacity for dealing with secondary education. If we are considering the whole field of secondary education, no more addition of higher classes at the top of the elementary schools will carry out the object we have in view.”

Finally, Mr. Balfour outlined the aims of the reformatory measures, “Our reform, if it is to be adequate, must in the first place establish one authority for education – technical, secondary, primary – possessed of the power, which may enable it to provide for the adequate training of teachers and for the welding of higher technical and higher secondary education to the university system. In the second place, this one authority for education being as it is, responsible for a heavy cost to the rate payers, should be in the rating authority of the district. In the third place, voluntary schools must be placed in a position in which they can worthily play their necessary and inevitable part. Our system should be one which will not encourage for the future the perpetual introduction of denominational squabbles into our local and municipal life; and the education authority should have at its disposal all the educational skill which the district over which it presides can supply.....”

It was upon Mr. Balfour’s recommendations that the County secondary Schools were established. Later on, after the passing of the 1902 Act, a set of regulations were issued to ensure that the new county schools should follow closely the pattern of the old public and grammar schools. Although they were reviewed as far as the actual timetable hours were concerned, the basic regulations were as follows: - “The course should provide for instruction in the English Language and Literature, at least one language other than English, Geography, history, Mathematics, Science and Drawing, with due provision for Manual Work and Physical Education, and, in a girls’ school, for Housewifery. Not less than four and a half hours per week must be allotted to English, Geography and History; not less than three and a half hours to the language where only one is taken or less than six hours where two are taken; and not less than seven and a half hours to Science and Mathematics, of which at least three must be Science. The instruction in Science must be both theoretical and practical. When two languages other than English are taken, and Latin is not one of them, the Board will require to be satisfied that the omission of Latin is for the advantage of the school.”

It was upon these Regulations that the County Schools were established, Bude County Grammar School being one of them.

Chapter 2

THE EARLY YEARS

Construction of a new school for Bude and the surrounding district began by order of the 1902 Act in 1907. The school consisted of a main building comprising the Hall, four classrooms and the woodwork room. One room on the east side of the building was set aside as a science room, while there were also classrooms, one for the girls and one for the boys and the Headmaster's study. On the whole, the layout of the school was very close to the progressive ideas of the old School Boards which had followed a layout with a central assembly Hall with classrooms opening away from it.

Without doubt there was great interest shown by the community in this new school to build a new school for the area. The Cornish and Devon Post had a short comment regarding the project in the newspaper for the week of the 26th October 1907.

“We understand that the ‘technical college’ scheme for Bude and District is developing favourably. For certain our County Councillor, Mr. Waddan Martyne, will watch its interests. It is hoped that soon there may be seen some signs of the building commencing and such a desirable institution established in our midst.”

Mr. Martyne did watch their interest and along with Messrs Thyme and Shearme, became the school's first governors, tributes that can be seen under the paintwork of the three rooms of the main building, where their names were put over the doors.

The Bude County Secondary School opened on the 1st of January 1909 and once again tribute was paid by the editorial comment in the Cornish and Devon Post for the week beginning the 16th January 1909 under the heading “Bude Secondary School.”

“The Cornwall County Council are doing good work in the direction of providing means for secondary education throughout the county. Such work should find an appreciative response, covering, as the County Council are, practically the whole area with schools available at reasonable rates for boys and girls and thereby putting a rung in the education ladder by which those who may climb from the primary to prime position of scholarship. The new school at Bude is now ready for work and it is to be hope that the institution will at once have material on which to prove its usefulness. There must be in the Bude district many who might benefit by the privileges now afforded by such an establishment and the County authorities deserve an immediate justification of their efforts to give Bude and its neighbourhood such a boon for educational purposes. The realisation of the hopes entertained by the promoters of this school should find its counterpart in the realisation by parents of their duty to use this splendid opportunity for continuing the education of their offspring on such comparatively easy conditions.”

So it was that the County Grammar School started with the Headmaster, Mr. Ralph John Rittenburg at the helm. The purpose built school was to accommodate sixty pupils but at first there were only twenty four, fourteen boys and ten girls. Their ages ranged from eight to sixteen. Their parents' occupations ranged from gardeners to gentlemen. There were four teachers including Mr. Rittenburg (who incidentally changed his name to Ritte at the outbreak of the First World War because of its German origin.) The headmaster was engaged on the 1st January 1909 and he taught Maths, History, Geography and Drill. His wage was £200 a year. Miss Mary Heapt

was engaged on the 19th January 1909 and taught English, Geography, needlework and Hygiene. Her salary was £110 a year. Mr. Ernest Steadman began on the same day to teach Chemistry, Physics, maths and Mechanics earning £110 per year. Last but not least, Miss Helen R. Parson who taught English, French, Latin, Drawing and Needlework was earning £100 per year.

Initially the school day began at 9am and finished at 4.30pm. A break was allowed at 11.15am and also another for lunch. Usually the children had three lessons in the morning and two in the afternoon.

In 1913 there were two classes of children who went into two groups. Those who had a scholarship were in 3a and the children whose parents paid for their education were in 3b. Many children would have to wait only a few weeks before the term to know whether they had won a scholarship and they used to cycle into Bude from Poughill, one and a half miles away, to see the results.

On being accepted each parent was required to sign a declaration that their child had not come into contact with anyone who had infectious disease and this applied every term.

During the First World War, the school experienced the presence of many Belgian refugee children who attended their school and this became a great help in the teaching of French. As the men went to war a number of women came to the school as science mistresses.

Religious education was given twice a week, very little in comparison to other schools in Cornwall which had a lot more. It usually consisted of reading the Bible. The standard of French became very high, possibly because of the presence of the refugees as well as a good teacher. Geography however, was not a well-taught subject because the new master began to push it to one side as he favoured Chemistry, although both subjects were his responsibility. The woodwork room was used, not only by the school itself, but also by the other schools in the area for half a day or a day per week. The girls also used the building for their Cookery lessons. The lack of school dinners during these times meant that children had to bring their own 'Oggies' to be warmed on the range at dinner time. As the railway came to Bude, the LEA in Devon requested that sixty children might attend the Grammar School in Bude from Holsworthy. This journey of only ten miles was more convenient than the twenty mile journey to Okehampton, so it was the school began to grow in numbers.

There were student teachers who spent four days teaching and were paid £25 per year for their trouble. One day was spent in school in preparation for transferring to teachers' training college.

The Blanchminster Charity began to send a pupil, usually a near miss scholarship entrant, who was sponsored in his or her education. Books in those days were a very expensive item and most belonged to the County. Paying students had to buy their own. The 'library' consisted of a number of cupboards in the Headmaster's study. This was also a great asset to the town of Bude as there was still no county library in existence.

Physical education in the school was very poor in the beginning because the school was constructed on a hill, there was little scope for expansion, and indeed there was only one grass tennis court outside. The school acquired a piece of land near Broadclose Farm, about one mile from the school and on this the children used to have their own games. The girls played hockey while the boys exercised at soccer. Although Cornwall was and is a strong Rugby Union county, it did not appear until later years. At first no inter-school matches were possible but when they

did arrive after the First World War they were long and arduous trips. For Bude to play Launceston College and Callington Grammar School away, a round trip of twelve hours was the rule of the day. As it took twelve hours for a round trip, Callington used to travel to Launceston to play Bude as an 'away' fixture! However, these games used to be great social occasions as is reported by a Mr.R.Hancock, an old pupil of the school who wrote about one of these trips in the Bude County School Magazine of December 1931. Under an account called 'Away Matches', he recalls on of these trips vividly : - ' Not so long ago I went with the school team to play an away fixture; and as we waited for a mere prosaic bus, I began to recall to mind the first time I went with a B.C.S. team – then in the humble office of Linesman. That was in the days of the two horse brake and the visit to Launceston was a twelve hour trip,'

'We used to assemble in the Strand, about 9 o'clock, the newcomers in the team early, the veterans, with a nonchalance we envied, much later. If the weather threatened, there was such serious discussion, albeit with an anxious eye on the "Boss", for we boasted that never had we cancelled a match for bad weather but here too, the youngsters were not consulted – not for them to express an opinion! In one respect we were all alike – wild horses shall not drag his name from me – turned up with the inevitable two parcels, the food one being distinctly larger than the other! And yet we played!'

'When the brake arrived there were more complications. The left hand corner seat at the back was, for some reason, the most prized and was occupied by some old Colour man: to him fell the duty of putting the 'slue' on the wheel for certain steep hills.'

'The linesman or scorer always occupied a small ledge immediately below the driver's box; so that his seat was like the seat of the Chairman or President but the position of the seat was only a similarity.'

'We walked up the steepest hills as a matter of course and then the captain dealt with such weighty matters as collecting the driver's tip and so forth.'

'Within a few mile of Launceston, at a once famous coaching Inn, now alas a mere poultry farm, we always stopped for lunch: there we ordered tea, mineral waters, or even, some folk, cocoa. Each man carefully paid double for whatever he had, since we had learned by experience that a scanty store of pocket money would probably disappear at Launceston and leave us destitute on the return; therefore payment in advance.'

'After the match, the whole side used to visit a Kinema at the top of the town, whence, I regret to say, we were once ejected because of the wealth of our cheering when our double figure win was put on the screen.'

The writer went on to mention the homeward journey which often took place in the dark. It is interesting to notice, however, his comments on the change that took place: - '.....These things are no doubt by now memories. Motor buses do in one hour what took us four: they are a democracy where all seat are equal, and where no duties fall to particular men: they are wind and weatherproof and they can climb all hills with a full complement of passengers.....'

(See appendix for photographs.) [See the Demise page in the left index for the images to which the history refers.]

The school sporting scene also provided occupation for the woodwork lessons. In 1912 the boys of the school spent a great deal of their time in the playing fields building a pavilion which saw good use for many years.

The examination also played an important part in the education of those who attended the school.

At fifteen years of age the children sat their Oxford Local at a junior level, while at sixteen years of age they sat the Oxford Local at senior level. These examinations were sat in the local Parish Hall situated in the town with the vicar, who was an Oxford graduate in invigilation. The Prize Day or Speech Day as it later became known, was also held in the Parish Hall and was a day looked forward to by many pupils.

These are the early days of the school, days which were full in content and happy all the time. As time proceeded some things changed but the basic seeds of a school community had been sown.

CHAPTER 3

THE MIDDLE YEARS

By the 1930's the County Grammar School was now a thriving and important asset to Bude.

However, it seems that the staff was not without a number of problems, one being the tendency of some parents to withhold their children from school. In the School magazine of 1931, the Headmaster made some interesting remarks on the situation in his report.

‘In presenting the 23rd Annual report on the work and progress of Bude County School, I am pleased to say there has been another small rise in numbers. The average number on the register for the year was 113, two more than last year and the average daily attendance was 106. Though the average attendance was good, it might have been a little better. I am sorry to say that the rules of the school are occasionally broken by parents who keep their children to help at home. This is not very considerate as it causes the Staff a good deal of extra work and also interferes with the work of the rest of the school.’

By now the local council had constructed a sea-washed swimming pool on Summerleaze Beach and as the Headmaster commented, ‘good use was made of the Swimming Pool. Five girls qualified for the Mile Certificate and five boys and one girl for the Half Mile.’

The house system had developed into a ‘three horse race’ with the Red, White and Blue houses. The rivalry was very strong, both in academic and sporting concerns.

As transport was still an expensive luxury, in the form of petrol driven vehicles, many of the children who attended the school from the outlying villages of Stratton, Poughill and Marhamchurch would cycle in from home every day. Those who lived farther afield would cycle in on a Monday, lodge in Bude until Friday and then spend the weekend at home.

To enter the school the children now needed a scholarship which had to be payed for by their parents. This meant that on average almost one third of a class were scholarship pupils. Other children remained at Bude Church of England School until they could leave at the age of fourteen years.

The times were definitely changing for it was recorded that three fifth form boys were told it was time for them to start to wear long trousers!

One of the most important things to be remembered in this time was the lack of new buildings or facilities. Sports were taught away from the school, the exams were taken in the Parish Hall, as was Speech Day and it was not until after the war that anything new was added. A local hall was used for the production of ‘Hiawatha’, but this meant a three quarter of a mile walk for those concerned.

These years were times of struggle, for many, and the outbreak of the Second World War meant that the school's development would be stunted even more.

CHAPTER 4

THE LATER YEARS

By the late fifties and early sixties the school had become an important part of the education system in the town of Bude and its surrounding district. The school, although small compared with the rest of the country, accepted many children from the areas almost as far south as Launceston and into North Devon. As we shall see later, events would lead to the closure of the school and the opening a new Comprehensive school.

In the school year beginning 1964-65, the school was forced to take forty to fifty new members into the first form. Consequently, the rooms were too small for so great a number of pupils and a system was introduced whereby half the year was in Form 1A and the other half in 1Alpha. Each class was given the same education though in some years by different teachers. This system was present right up to Form 5.

The school buildings were now very overcrowded and in 1965 a new library was opened with two small classrooms which were later joined into one. Subsequently, in 1966 and 1967, two more buildings were added to house the great numbers who were now attending the school.

Although a science block had been added in the 1950's, housing the chemistry, physics and biology laboratories and an art room, these were sometimes used as form rooms due to lack of space. A system of numbering was introduced to enable the transfer of pupils from lesson to lesson with the minimum of confusion.

(See appendix photograph 5)

Uncertain moves on the political scene had always spoken of a new school being built but it was to be nearly ten years before this dream materialised. The education of Bude's children had to be continued and success was achieved. A wide range of subjects spread across the curriculum.

When a pupil entered the school in the first year he or she encountered the subjects of English, Maths, French, Latin, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, History, Geography, Art, Music, Woodwork, Cookery or Needlework. All these were studied until the third year when options were taken, depending on ability, to be studied at 'Ordinary Level', the Cambridge Board as examiners. The compulsory element was in English, French and Mathematics with five other options, meaning eight were studied to qualification at 16 plus years.

The school day began at 9.00am in the Hall with the whole school present. By 1968 it became necessary to have two assemblies simultaneously, one in the Hall and the other in the Library, due to the problem of overcrowding. At first this was done in Houses and then in years so that the lower school was in the hall and the upper school in the Library.

There were five lessons in the morning, each of approximately forty minutes duration and three after lunch. To allow for this, lunch was taken at 12.40pm. There were still no facilities for dining on the school premises so every day the 'crocodile' had to wind its way down Carriers Lane and across the river to Bude Primary School where that school supplied lunch, when its own pupils had enjoyed their lunch. The afternoon session began at 2.00pm and ended at 3.50pm.

Sporting matters in the school still created a problem in as much that although a netball and basketball court had been added, the school was still lacking in other areas. Soccer was played on the pitch of Bude Football Club at Broadclose and only in decent weather and the Sports Day was always held at the Bude-Stratton Secondary Modern School, one and a half miles away in Stratton. The Parish Hall became a gymnasium when the local events permitted this to happen and the local outdoor swimming pool had to be used for swimming lessons and the Swimming Gala in the Summer Term.

A forward looking Headmaster, Mr. Law, always had the school under control, however, and he devised many new activities which the pupils could participate in all the time. Thursday afternoons were always eagerly anticipated by the pupils as the last period of the afternoon was set aside for a period which became known as the 'Clubs' time. Each pupil joined a club of his or her choice run by a particular teacher whose subject the club reflected. Some of the notable clubs were the Chess and Bridge Club and the Drama Club.

A school tuck shop, run by the Lower Sixth Form Girls began in 1966 and was open during the morning and lunch breaks and all profits were donated to a charity.

Cornwall County Education Committee sent peripatetic music teachers who were specialists on certain instruments and many pupils learned to play. This culminated in the formation of a school orchestra which gave many concerts in the town. Music festivals was added to the school calendar and at this, both houses now known as Godolphin and Trevithick, were able to compete adding to the rivalry between them.

The Sixth Form had to play their part in the administrative running of the school. The Lower Sixth Form were expected to have an occupation in school at which they could assist the staff.

For example, there were laboratory assistants who prepared equipment for future lessons. School savings schemes were also managed by the Lower Sixth whilst the Upper Sixth was assigned to the Prefect System, a Head boy and Head girl being responsible to the Headmaster. Once again a lack of space meant that sixth form private study was restricted to working in the Library or moving to the Blanchminster Buildings, a small upstairs office complex at the junction of Broadclose Hill and Lansdown Road, loaned to the school for their use. This necessitated a five minute walk in which much time was lost for lessons.

The Grammar School was fortunate enough to see the inauguration of a Parents' association which had two main objects, firstly to maintain a close contact and link between parents, Headmaster and Staff by meeting together and secondly to raise funds to provide extra amenities for the school. During its existence, the Association was able to provide the extra cash required for items which Cornwall Education Authority's budget would not reach to. A new edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica was purchased and an attempt at assisting after school activities by providing a transport service for those children who lived in the country and would have to miss their bus. These were just a few of the successes of the Parents' Association.

However, time was running out for the Grammar School. The policy of bringing Cornwall into line with the Government's policy of comprehensive education meant that the school would soon be merged with the secondary school at Stratton, although on a new site. Some of the problems of the old school were highlighted in a letter to the School Council, which was a small

organisation set up in the school to listen to any complaints of the pupils. The letter is written in 1968 by a member of the Fifth Form.

‘The school being surrounded by houses has no room for expansion, which is necessary since our school is very over crowded.’

‘Quite often a radio can be heard from neighbouring buildings. This has often put me off my line of thought and could prove disastrous during an O or A Level exam. Another noise problem is the siting of the Fire Brigade Siren beside the school.....’

The pupil continued to explain about the sports facilities or lack of them and then proceeded to point the view of his parents.

‘..... In the words of my parents, it is “atrocious not having a school canteen”. Earlier this term, we were returning from dinner at Bude Primary School when the rain poured down and everyone was drenched. All coats were smoked through. Nevertheless, we have to walk down to the Primary School for lunch.’

‘The bus system is badly set up. Co-ordination between our school and Stratton Secondary School is very difficult.....I arrive home at 5pm. Therefore it takes three quarters of an hour to get home whereas it could take thirty minutes.’

In 1969 it was decided that Bude should have a new comprehensive school. This was to be built on a new site in the Valley Road district of the town. The Bude Stratton Secondary Modern School would merge with Bude County Grammar School to form this new school. Building commenced in 1971 and although the date was put back due to construction problems, the new school was to open for the Autumn Term of 1973.

The old school buildings became deserted at the end of the Autumn Term of 1972 and the Grammar School ended its life on the site of the new premises from January 1973 until it officially ceased to exist in July 1973. Now the present buildings lie deserted except for the occasional use by local organisations.

The new comprehensive is known as Budehaven Comprehensive School with the old premises utilised as the lower school and the new premises as the upper school.

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