

# St James's Church schools through the years



The boys' school in the 1880s

Early on in his incumbency, Revd Fitz Wygram discovered that only thirteen children out of a local population of 1,100 went to any sort of school. Having a keen interest in education, he made a grant of land in Mill Lane to the vicar and churchwardens *"on trust for the education of children and adults, or children only, of labourers, manufacturing and other poorer classes, and for no other purpose"*. In 1867, when the schools were built at a cost of £315, School Road was just a country lane with a narrow entrance from Windmill Lane. The Boys' School was where the Greenwood Centre stands today. The Girls' and Infants' building was where some houses have now

been built, opposite the Greenwood Centre. Beyond the warehouse on the same side, were the two teachers' houses, built in 1886.

The schools were to be run on the principles of the Church of England's National Society for Promoting Religious Education (founded in 1811 and still in existence). The children were examined annually in the three R's by Her Majesty's Inspectors, the amount of grant being assessed on the success of each individual pupil. The management committee was composed of local resident communicant members of the church who subscribed to the schools. The funds for running the schools came from the church offertories and donations, the government grant and the children's pence (the children had to pay an amount towards their education), together with other subscriptions and letting the school rooms for various activities like the New Hampton Cottagers' Flower Show and *"dramatic entertainments"*. By the time the schools of St James's, Hampton Hill, were started, the state had begun to concern itself with education with the first great Education Act being passed in 1870.

During this period the children had to sit at long, backless desks from 9.00 to 12.00, and from 2pm to 4.15pm. There was very little equipment but Scripture, Catechism and Church History were well taught, for the annual reports of the Diocesan Inspectors were almost uniformly good throughout the school's history. Many children left before their eleventh birthday. The staff at the St James's Schools consisted of a certificated teacher at the head of each division, uncertificated assistants and pupil teachers.

In 1882 the Schools' Committee complained of the *"continually increasing demands of the Education Department for greater variety of reading books and other book requisites"* and indeed the minutes show that demands continued to increase. In the following year a *"box of objects"* was suggested for the infants, with a demand for *"occupations of an interesting and instructive sort"* and suitable wall pictures. By the mid 1880s, the schools were no longer the concern of the committee alone, a local and parochial matter. They had to conform to what was becoming a national system. Forms had to be filled in, registers meticulously kept and teachers' pay recorded. The Diocesan Inspectors, Her Majesty's Inspectors, School Attendance Officers, the Sanitary Inspector all made reports, and, worst of all from the Committee's point of view, costs continually increased.

By 1889 the schools were in financial difficulties. The committee threatened to close them and open Board Schools unless more money was forthcoming. The committee and many others objected to the new Board Schools, as religious teaching was to be undenominational, and the schools were to be supported from the local rates, which would have to be increased to cover this. The vast majority voted for the continuance of the church schools and against the opening of a Board School. Subscriptions were promised and donations given. Although disappointed by the small monetary response, the committee decided to carry on the schools and to seek donations from the Hampton Water Companies, as many of the children were those of Water Company employees. However, the first subscriptions from the companies were not made until 1896.

In 1891 Lord Salisbury's government passed an act making education free in the state schools and permitting the voluntary schools to follow suit. Under the Free Education Act the government still gave the old grant, and also a new one, in lieu of the children's pence, but it left all the rest (about one quarter) to be provided for locally as before, in the form of subscriptions, bequests, rents and other sources, or else by a rate levied by a School Board. *"We wish to point out to our subscribers that they are only asked to supply half-a-crown out of each pound that the school costs. If through failure to sustain our voluntary effort we are driven to a School Board, we shall not only lose in most part the real religious education now afforded to our children, but shall have to pay largely for all the increased cost of Board management. In addition to this, too, there must be a heavy expenditure for new buildings at the Hampton end of the School Board District, and towards this we shall have to pay our full share."*

In the 1890s, some twenty years after the Education Act of 1870, illiteracy had been banished, and the basis of education was being widened. The school inspection reports were usually very satisfactory and in 1894 showed that *"the teachers' work has been well and conscientiously done. The result of such careful scriptural teaching cannot be lost upon the children in years to come. May it long be possible for the National Schools of our land to be maintained, in which the teaching of Christianity has a foremost place! I am sure the parents will rejoice with the Managers that the Reports are so good."* However, the financing of the schools was still proving difficult and in 1895 a big Fancy Fair was arranged which cleared the then current debt.

The Day School prizes were distributed every year, sometimes as much as £16 worth, money which had been raised by subscription and by the concert given by the children in the Victoria Hall.

In 1902 another important Education Act was passed which, among many other changes, altered the position of the Voluntary Schools by giving them aid from the rates. Hereafter, the Middlesex Education Committee was represented on the Board of Management of the Hampton Hill Schools. The span of school life became five-fourteen years, though a child could leave at twelve if it had a certificate showing it had reached Standard VI. Success in examinations at the age of eleven enabled a girl or boy to proceed to the grammar schools or to the State secondary schools set up after this Act and to continue education to the age of sixteen or eighteen. The June 1903 magazine reported: *"It is a matter of considerable importance that today the control of our Schools passes into the hands of the new authority, that is, a Committee appointed by the County Council. A small body of six Managers will carry on the Schools under the direction of this Committee..... The financial matters will be managed entirely by the County Council Committee, excepting that the Schools which are our own property, will have to be kept in proper repair by us."*

During the early twentieth century, teaching became more original with a widening curriculum. More amenities were added mostly due to the regulations of the Middlesex County Council or the Board of Education. During the 1920s there was a long tussle between the managers of the church schools and the Middlesex Education Committee. The schools were doing well, as the reports of the Inspectors showed, and scholarships had been won to Twickenham County and Hampton Grammar Schools, but the buildings were old and it became more and more difficult to keep up with the council schools. In 1920 the Middlesex County Council gave notice that it proposed to build a new boys' school to accommodate four hundred. The managers made no objection to this, but they decided to take no action on the suggestion to unite the girls and infants under one head teacher.

In 1924 the managers were informed that the Middlesex County Council proposed to build a mixed senior school in Windmill Road, and that the church schools should then accommodate infants and mixed juniors. The managers said that they were *"strongly opposed to a mixed school in principle,"* and referred the council back to the 1920 plan. In 1925 the church schools were placed on the *"black list,"* and in the next year the Board of Education wrote to ask the managers' intentions as to the future of their schools. Later in the year the Board outlined three schemes and the managers chose a school for two hundred children to the age of nine.

In 1927 the Middlesex County Council insisted that the church school should be a mixed school and although against their principles, the managers had to give in. They appealed to the parishioners for funds to carry out the necessary repairs. Revd Harvey wrote, "*The School Managers' . . . one desire has been to do what is best for the children in the parish, and to devise some plan whereby the greatest number of children may still be kept under the influence of the Church . . . it is of the most extreme importance in these days that the children should be well grounded in the Faith upon which our great national character has been built up.*" He called them to a meeting, and said that £150 would have to be raised that year. The response was so disappointing that the managers were compelled to report to the Middlesex County Council that "*they have no alternative but to leave the matter in the hands of the Committee to provide the necessary accommodation.*" Thus the attempt to maintain the schools as church schools came to an end in 1928.