

Hetton School

Like most schools, Hetton has been less than concerned to keep detailed records of its past. Hence this brief history is culled essentially from the two logbooks of the school(s), we say schools, as re-organisation has been a constant factor in the last 62 years, as you will see.

As Hetton-le-hole Lyons Council School it was opened on June 12 1912, though the first scholars (all boys) were admitted (all 230 of them) in August of that year. There were six staff: the headteacher Mr. James Heslop, three certificated assistants, one pupil teacher aged sixteen. Pupils were aged from eight to fourteen, their attendance earning by 13 September the first of what were to be many half-day holidays as reward. Though staffing was increased by one (a Mr Myers who was later to become headteacher at Houghton) little disturbed the even tenor of early years, or at least little was recorded other than that a fire drill cleared the school in 58 seconds!

HMIs (Inspectors appointed by the government) were more common visitors to the school than would seem commonplace in later years. There are odd references to curriculum - drawing of bulbs replacing English on 29 September 1913, the exchange of 20 library books with Easington Lane Boys School, the creation of a (much - inspected) 'manual' department in 1913. The school was closed on 18 May 1914 to allow pupils to visit Sangers Circus.

A brief HMI report in August 1914 commends the school for 'a sensible scheme' in general though it indicates that in the matter of Physical Exercises 'the details of the elementary positions in some cases should receive attention!

The First World War had its impact on the school largely in terms of staff 'taking up military duties', the subsequent changeover to a largely female staff and - later - leave of absence to staff welcome relations and friends back from the front on leave. One ex-teacher, a Mr. T. B. Pyburn, was recorded killed in action in July 1917. Nevertheless there was still time and need to record other matters. On November 26, 1915 'Mr. A. Smith, in marking St. V register, made an error which he afterwards corrected by erasure. The irregularity was pointed out to him at the time so as to prevent a recurrence'.

Salaries at this time are met with a decent reticence, the exception the appointment of a pupil teacher on August 15, 1916 at £15 a year.

School at such time ran from year to year on an identical timetable. Enforced changes in 1916 reveal a standard curriculum with History, English, Geography, Music, Physical Exercise and Observation lessons predominating. A visit of a 'Wild Beast Show' in March 1917 provided a half-day holiday break from routine, and gardening was a regular if moveable feast in case ill- weather. Less pleasant closures or alterations to timetable resulted from the 1918 and 1919 influenza epidemics.

In the year 1918/19 the school expanded to include a 'higher top' class, apparently a successful attempt to raise both the age group and the academic attainments of the school- and much inspected by HMIs.

Further financial notes creep into the log - the appointment of a certificated assistant in 1920 at £210 per annum, an attack on the school garden by some marauding cows which did £6 worth of damage. Apart from which the logs for early twenties merely record the comings, goings and absences of staff, the occasional holiday for royal marriages and (albeit less frequently than twenty years earlier) attendance holidays. By 1923 teachers salaries seem to have been more of a talking point, one teacher being appointed on a scale ranging from £163.6s.8d to £304, another from £175. 0. 0d to £380 - the effect of the 1922 pay rise?

A further HMIs inspection in 1922 reported on the results of re-organisation to provide advanced instruction - presumably the 'higher tops' classes. A good supply of text-books was in existence and the school now possessed a room 'for the teaching

of Elementary Science' and two new classrooms 'in the playground'. Staffing difficulties had been experienced and insufficient 'boys of sufficient ability' were coming through to profit from the new classes. The curriculum for the 'advanced' classes aged to 14 now included science and French. Meanwhile 17 boys in four years had left the school to proceed to secondary (grammar?) schools. Generally the report found things 'not altogether satisfactory'. Considerable inattention and even slackness were noticed in younger classes and much teaching was "very ordinary".

The general organisation of the school should be re-considered with a view to putting the work on a satisfactory footing.' Meanwhile the work in the school garden received special commendation.

Little of note is entered in the logbook throughout the early twenties until a Board of Education report dated 25 May 1925. Two graduate members of staff had been appointed, though there had also been much staff absence. No one yet stayed at school beyond 14 but the proportion completing a full (three years) advanced course had reached 58 %, 21 boys in four years had received scholarships to Secondary Schools. The advanced course included elements of English, Mathematics, Science, Geography, History, Drawing and Physical Training. More praise occurs this time around - for a sensibly practical science scheme, 'decidedly good work 'in Maths,

'very great interest' in Geography. However a good many boys are described as dull and backward despite a good general attitude. Good work continued in gardening.

In conclusion the school and its headmaster were commended for, in particular, 'attainments in fundamentals' and a good 'working tone.' Evening classes too were lively and well attended. In March 1926 there was a further partial report on the school's Handicraft Centre, praising methodical, neat and accurate work, but complaining of lack of initiative allowed to pupils to extend their mental and manual efforts to the full. Demonstrations of physical training prowess held twice in the spring term suggest that the school had developed a particular reputation in the field, and then in October 1926 yet another report - praise for the headteacher's aiming high, for the pupil's care and thoroughness, for the Physical Training exercises, and for the garden!

The chief problem was identified as being the wide range of ability in each of the ordinary classes - further differentiation was called for to 'meet the peculiar needs of the slower children.'

At this stage the school had seven classrooms and a hall The roll was 349. Class sizes varied from 33 to 50.

The late twenties apparently regained the even tenor of earlier days, through smallpox outbreak affected staff attendance in the summer of 1927, while the school had a day's holiday for the solar eclipse of 29 June 1927. The next item of note was the installation of electric light to the school in October 1928

It was in January 1929 that the school was reorganised again into a Senior Mixed School, now with twelve staff, eight men and four women teachers-the shape it was to retain for a number of years. In celebration the school was repainted!.

HMI inspections began again in the November of the year.

At that time they reported 244 children from 11 to 14, largely entering the school direct from the junior department. There were seven classes, three in the first year, two in the next with the 'brighter' children streamed on entry. Twenty children had remained in school beyond the statutory leaving age, though there was some concern over low intake, especially as in four years 76 children had gained admission to Secondary School.

There was little apparent curricular development, though now there were specialist teachers in Science, History, Geography, Singing and Drawing. Praise for 'a wide range of Literature,' for recitation, for Maths teaching that was 'painstaking and thorough', for 'drawing of outstanding merit' and choral singing. Dispraise for note taking in History, an 'over-scientific' approach to Geography and for weak sight singing. The school garden received its usual encomiums. Generally a steady advance in efficiency was noted.

The late twenties and early thirties saw a development in 'educational visits', at first close to home, but by 1930 and 1931 to the Lake District and to Edinburgh. 1932 has reference to discussions on accommodation and organisation but though 50 scholars were transferred to Easington Lane Senior Mixed School at the end of the summer, there is nothing to suggest why until yet another HMI report in November 1932. The roll had increased in three years to 338, originally plus the fifty transferred. One junior school classroom had been handed over to the senior school, 31 were staying on beyond 14.

The major curricular change had been to stream out the 'least bright' scholars of whom there were 98. The staff numbered 12, a P.T.R. of 1:28. Little new was reported, though the inspectors disliked the abridged books being employed in the teaching of English, and suggested theoretical geometry could well be abandoned in Maths. Work in Science was highly praised, History was 'earnest and methodical', Drawing over-formal. The B classes were much praised for a lively interest and a pleasing keenness in response but the C children were 'retarded' though making fair progress. The garden continued well. The school was above average as regards efficiency of organisation and standard of work. There was an admirable spirit of endeavour.

The years, at least as revealed in the log, passed uneventfully. A school camp was instituted in 1935 and subsequently grew. Staff came and went. There were film shows. Mr Gilbert Myers, having been with the school since 1912, was translated to headship of Houghton-le-Spring Junior Mixed - after many interviews recorded one by one. There was a spate of lantern-slide lessons on Empire countries. The 1937 school camp terminated in an outbreak of food poisoning.

January 1938 saw another HMI report. The school had reduced in members to an annual intake of 80. The three streams had declined to two. French, having been reintroduced to the curriculum again disappeared. Nevertheless the school was pronounced 'commendably healthy' and the garden continued 'beautiful.'

1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War saw the school first temporarily closed then opened again to provide 'grouped courses of instruction'. The first air raid drill in January 1940 saw all pupils in shelters in three minutes. War seemed to affect the school (or at least its log) little, though for some reason the Whitsun holiday in 1940 was summarily cut in half 'owing to the National situation'. There was an air raid on 3 July 1940 and a member of staff left for industrial war-work. His temporary replacement was Mr. James Kirtley, later deputy head of school and not to retire until 1978, though he left for the RAF in December 1940.

Air raids continued to disturb the smooth running of the timetable. There were 'War time cookery' demonstrations for parents. The Headteacher, Mr. Heslop, and his colleague in the junior school, a Mr. Robson, became 'fire watchers'. In fact it was snow not war which closed the school in February 1941, though only for two days. Air raid warnings became common place, school often beginning late after the previous nights, alarms.

There were pleasanter events - a visit by the old vic with 'The Merchant of Venice' to Sunderland, Labour Day holiday on May 1st, a repainting of the school in May 1941. The piano still got tuned and HMIs continued to inspect the school garden. Potato picking in term time was made legal - with permission from the headmaster. The result was a reduction in attendance to 80.7%.

Air raids continued through 1942. War Savings Schemes were instituted, £364.10s was collected during 'Hetton Warship Week' in February 1942, and the school swept the board in a poster competition designed for the event. Staff turnover was high and mostly women teachers were employed. The Headteacher, Mr. James Heslop, retired on 30 October 1942. He had been head for thirty years. His replacement was Mr. Arthur Lonie.

So far as log and its new keeper were concerned, things continued much as normal - head inspections, holidays, staff absent and returning, the occasional air raid. One member of staff, a Mr. Kidd, had a week's leave of absence for a course of lectures on Russia. 'Wings for Victory' week in April 1943 raised £700 in the school bank. Juvenile Employment Officers made increasingly frequent appearances. 'School feeding' made its appearance on July 8th 1943, 118 children staying for dinner, 46 free and 72 at the cost of sixpence each. There was a book salvage drive and a National Day of Prayer in September. Mothercraft reached the timetable as a special lesson. The soap ration gave cause for concern.

By 1944 the war's effects on the school seemed at an end. Another member of staff, the same Mr. Kidd who studied Russia, was promoted to a headship at Esh Winning. With the exception of the head, all of the staff were now female. 1945 was marked not by V.E.Day, though that was celebrated by holiday and religious services, but by two burglaries - the first amounting to 8 shillings and 6 pence, the second of thirteen and seven pence. 35 sticks of barley sugar and some malted milk tablets. A thirteen-year-old boy, Albert Edward Smith, confessed to the crimes. There was also vandalism in the school garden in June, but tea and sports to celebrate peace were held anyway. V.J.day in October saw another holiday and another break-in, this time by a prisoner on the run from Durham Prison. Gumboots and overalls were stolen.

Staffing gradually returned to normal during 1946 with the return of male members of staff. Mr. J. Dixon, caretaker of the school for 28 years retired in October 1946. Mr. Heslop, first Headteacher, died in the November. 1947 was uneventful but by 1948 reorganisation again threatened. There were discussions on extra classroom accommodation and problems associated with the raising of the school leaving age to 15.

September 1948 saw the admission of 93 pupils, 3 new members of staff (including Mr. H.Willis, who was to serve the school in increasingly senior positions for the next thirty-one years) and the use of the hall for needlework teaching. A film sound projector was installed. Short of internal redecoration the only departure of the year seems to have been an open day - apparently the first - for parents.

October 1949 saw some advance on discussions of extensions to the school, new classrooms and a dining centre - and the state of pupil lavatories gave cause for concern - though nothing concrete seemed to emerge. The school's first speech day took place in July 1950. In September 1950, of three new staff, one was Mr. J.Haughan, destined to serve the school for the next thirty some years. October saw the clearance of wartime air-raid shelters. 1951 was uneventful, though it marked the appointment of Mr. S. H. Prior to the staff - yet another teacher who would see out more than thirty years in the school, as were most of the early 1950's to judge by the log. An accident to a teacher, Mr.T.A.Borstell, sustained while trying to close a window, is a highlight to a long sequence of holidays, staff absences, medical inspections and occasional visits by Inspectors. There were celebrations to mark the Coronation of 1953, each pupil receiving a mug, souvenir book, chocolate and a half crown National Savings stamp from the council.

1954 saw another departure, the first recorded foreign holiday by pupils - to Germany - and x-rays were added to the battery of medical inspections. The school's 'Commercial Centre', unrecorded heretofore, seems to have been worthy of various HMI inspections. Structural problems through the winter of 1954/5 were occasioned by flooding of the site and dilapidation of prefabricated classrooms, presumably the result of the discussion of extensions seven years earlier. Redecoration took place in 1955. The first visit of the County Psychiatrist is recorded in October. Eight children were examined.

The HMI report refers both to the school's reorganisation in 1945 (which seems in reality to have been no more than reference to the changeover to a Secondary Modern School). Particular mention is made of the Commercial Centre, which was also teaching pupils 'from six other schools in the area'.

Of particular interest are the destinations of pupils after school - for boys coal-mining, engineering and building, for girls, factories, shop assistants and clerical. Unemployment was not a problem

Premises fell 'short of normal expectation of provision for secondary education'. There was, inter alia, no proper provision for boys' lavatories, no separate provision of gymnasium or dining hall, no school field, five temporary classrooms (from 12) no metalcraft room, no needlecraft room, insufficient storage, and no library.

Nevertheless the school ran smoothly. The fourteen staff showed a sound general level of professional competence and gave freely of their time. The school was dual streamed, with most teaching specialist, though form teachers taught 'general skills'. German was taught to the more able. From 1954, final year pupils had followed either a commercial or a technical course, both described as 'soundly planned'. Pupils were willing, their work neat and orderly. History, music, gardening (!!) and woodwork are singled out for praise, though needlework and geography had weaknesses. 'Native speech' appeared too much in evidence in the classroom'.

The report's conclusion refers to 'sound orderly work and endeavour' if a lack of 'adventurous planning'. It must have been fairly heartening to those who worked there. There were, incidentally, 241 pupils, 3 over the statutory leaving age.

1956 saw the school rewired and a sale of work led to the school acquiring a tape recorder. 1957 saw two groups taught as one, upwards of 50 pupils, owing to 'difficulty in obtaining staff' though matters were eased in September when a new member of staff was appointed and perhaps briefly when miners, holidays meant a first week attendance of 60%. Discussions continued throughout the year and the next on a school field, but the only attention the school received was the reflooring of classrooms. Towards the end of 1958 however, the Barrington School, an ex-infant school, was readapted as a practical block for the school, though it was not to come into use until September 1959.

External exams made their appearance, twelve pupils being awarded Northern Counties School Certificates in 1959 and commercial subject pupils being rewarded with East Central Division Technical Examination Board Certificates in 1958. Intake had settled at 80 a year (two forms) and staffing was stable.

Transfer of woodwork and Domestic Science to the Barrington block led to plans for an art room, a needlework room and a staff room in the main school and repainting began.

The first use of the word curriculum in the log occurs in February 1960, though the only 'new' curriculum departure - a two-year course in Commercial Subjects for 25 selected pupils did not begin until September 1961. Mrs. I. Woodfine, later to be Senior Mistress of the school joined as class teacher in September 1961. Also in that month is recorded the first teachers strike, one day by three members of the N.A.S.

Reorganisation again reared its head with plans for a multilateral unit in Houghton and Hetton in July 1962, though the school seems to have been little affected, except by more frequent meetings of Headteachers at Houghton. Meetings also continued to occur infrequently about the creation of a school playing field.

Meanwhile in September 1963 there was discussion over the creating of a campus site for three schools, the first to be Hetton Lyons C.S.E. Examinations were mooted and G.C.E. classes in English and Maths, were selected from the multilateral unit. New regulations for transfer from primary to secondary education were under discussion. Change was obviously in the air and appropriately enough there was the school's second change of headship in 51 years, Mr. Lonie retiring to be replaced by Mr. G. Orr at Christmas 1963, though Mr Orr did not take over till the following Easter.

The school gained a uniform (shared with the other 'unit' schools) in 1964 and (at last) a new playing field in the same year.

In September of that year there were signs of change to come- intake was down to 43 compared with 80 some five years earlier. The whole school roll was now 199. Easington Lane Secondary Modern School began to use the Barrington Craft Block. The Commercial Centre suffered structural damage due to subsidence and its future was under discussion. Fifth year courses within the multilateral unit were discussed and Eppleton began to use Hetton's craft facilities - the small schools were coming together. G.S.E. courses began, most significantly work was to start on new school buildings in May 1965. Meanwhile the first use of the phrase 'Comprehensive Education' is recorded in June 1965.

In 1967 the school roll was down to 170 (it dropped to 160 later in the year). Discussions were taking place about amalgamation with East Rainton Secondary Modern. On July 21 that year, Hetton Lyons Modern School left its premises at Four lane Ends to move to the North Road site for the following September.

The new school opened with 232 pupils, some 70 coming from East Rainton and with 12 full time and 3 part time staff. Workmen were still present but the school was recorded as 'quickly settling down'. Certainly little of outstanding interest seems to have occurred to disrupt normality in the year that followed. Miss A. Johnson, who had taught in the school for 38½ years, retired in July 1969.

The school's official opening took place (a little tardily) in March 1970, but little was happening - perhaps more frequent in - service courses, perhaps more visits from and to school. The school seemed to be marking time. Staff turnover was higher than it once had been, perhaps a sign of change elsewhere, but no changes were noticeable in Hetton, though the roll was rising steadily - to 312 in September 1971, a four-form entry including a G.C.E. stream of 29 pupils, then to 343 in 1972, 410 in 1973. New staffs were appointed in quantity. It was January 1973 that reorganisation was again mooted - a merger with Eppleton Secondary in September 1975. House systems and family grouping were mentioned. 11+ transfers were still however a fact of life. September 1973 saw an internal reorganisation of the school in advance of second-stage buildings. Staffing had reached 25. 1974 was to see the transfer of responsibility for the school from Durham County to the new Metropolitan Borough of Sunderland. Discussion began over reorganisation involving amalgamation with Easington Lane Secondary Modern. Second stage building commenced, though Durham C.C. are reported as 'no longer interested in those schools leaving them on 01.04.74.'

In the event little seems to have initially occurred as a result of the change of local authority. 11+ transfer continued. The roll in September was 426 and there were 25½ staff. Reorganisation was in the air with frequent visits from and meetings with HMI and the local inspectorate. Hetton Secondary and Easington Lane Secondary were to amalgamate, adopting Eppleton Secondary as a first year annex, though most Eppleton pupils would transfer to the new Sancroft School. In January 1975. Easington Lane School was destroyed by fire. Their first three years were transferred to Hetton County Primary, the older pupils moved within the week to Hetton Secondary. Attempts were being made to agree a common curriculum with the three Houghton Schools, but the independent Hetton was determined to go it alone. A new staffing and curriculum structure was agreed and by June all Easington Lane pupils were Hetton pupils.

Hetton Secondary School (once Hetton Lyons Secondary Modern and before that Hetton-le-Hole Lyons Council School) was to be Hetton School (the name comprehensive was never official though it was adopted locally). At the end there were 26½ teachers and only 8 of them would be there ten years later. The now new Hetton School opened with 807 pupils and 46 staff, operating on a split site with the first fully comprehensive year still some two miles away at Eppleton. It was a period of settling in, of in-service courses for senior staff, establishing of rules and procedures for staff as well as pupils. Works Experience for fifth year pupils was a new departure. There was much coming and going of advisers and of officers of the authority which more than much detail of the log perhaps indicates a changing and developing school.

Disciplinary problems seem to have been evident among older pupils, perhaps not surprisingly, given the essential amalgamation of three schools into one. A report by a senior inspector however indicated that staff were achieving 'full control and a varied and balanced curriculum'. There seems to have been no connection with a bomb threat in March 1976, which turned out a hoax nor a concert by Northumbria Police Band the same month.

The school continued to grow - to 823 pupils, 47 staff in 1976. It was also a period of much promotion within the school, yet 'falling rolls' already loomed as a threat on the albeit distant horizon, and re-organisation of schools in the Houghton area were being discussed with HMI.

The larger school led to more complex staff problems. A disciplinary matter concerning a teacher already on extended probation takes up much space in the log in late 1976. Much however that the log records is only of passing interest, though breakdowns to the school heating system in the winter of 1976/7 and to the newly installed tannoy system bulk large.

The death of Mrs Hutson, then head of year three is recorded in February 1977. She had been Senior Mistress of Easington Lane School for many years.

In March of that year the first ever school play is recorded. Less cheering is the first teachers strike to be recorded for a number of years when the N.U.T joined N.U.P.E in protesting public spending cuts. It would be the last of its kind.

July 1977 saw a local inspection of the school by the local authority's advisory staff. The report was not received until the following December. Inter alia it remarked that 'the head and his staff are aware of what is required of them and are ready and willing to accept responsibility'.

Mr. Kirtley, Deputy Head of the school retired that summer after thirty seven years at the school.

Perhaps there is significance in the number of disciplinary and social problems affecting pupils recorded, of case-conferences and visits from psychologists and social workers. Perhaps it is indicative of changing attitudes in society or methods of dealing with problems. Or perhaps it merely indicates the immediate interests of the head.

1978 saw the school roll increased to 875, staffing up to 51. There were still problems with heating and with the newly installed alarm system to the school. The appointment of Mr. K. Stittas deputy headteacher signalled the beginning of what was to be a rapid change in the school's management. Mr. Stitt began at the school in January 1979. At Easter of that year, Mr. H. Willis, who had performed a senior management, function as Director of Studies, and who had been at Hetton for thirty one years, left for a senior post elsewhere. In March of that year, Mr. J. Hutson, first deputy head of the school, died following a heart attack. He had been headteacher of Easington Lane School for twenty years, deputy at Hetton for four. Mr. R. Horn was appointed as deputy from the following January. When Mrs. I. Woodfine retired in the summer of 1980, Mrs. M. Thomas was translated from Head of Science to complete what was a rapid change.

Meanwhile life went on. The spring term of 1979 was much disrupted by industrial action by the N.U.P.E. and G.M.W.U and foul weather. For over a month only fifth year pupils were taught. Teachers union sanctions followed on with somewhat less dramatic effects, but some disruption occurred.

In 1979 proposals from the school to be allowed to develop a sixth form gained the somewhat grudging support of the officers of the authority, more surprisingly perhaps the full support of the elected members. Fate took a hand when a fire destroyed a large part of Eppleton Junior and Infant Schools over the October half term. The result was overcrowding of the Annex and an authority decision to build the third stage of Hetton School on the North Road site. Such would be the likely costs that the sixth form proposal was withdrawn. Meanwhile 1980 began with the building of the pathway for the Moorsley Road entrance, a mere thirteen years after the school opened. The 'third stage extensions' planned were more extensive- a sports hall, music and drama suite, new classroom block, new science lab, and major internal alterations to provide more classroom space.

September 1980 saw the school continuing to increase in size, to a roll of 912, with 53 staff, though the threat of 'falling rolls' keeps cropping up in the log. Public meetings on the subject began and the question of a Hetton sixth form again raised its head.

The need for good public relations and exercises to improve such was clear - Hetton, like other schools, was increasingly in the business of selling itself.

September 1981 saw all pupils on the North Road site. Discussions were held on the possibility of Youth Employment Project Education taking place in the school. Less apparently significant was the adoption by and of the school of the schools council industry project. In the event the latter was to prove much more far-reaching. The last of the new buildings, the sports hall and music/drama suite was handed over for use in March 1982. In the same month teachers' industrial action began again.

The school was to reach its peak roll of 922 pupils and peak authority staffing of 54 in September 1982, though later events would briefly increase the staffing figure by other means to 56. In March 1983 Mr S. Prior, head of boys 'crafts, retired after 32 years at the school. In July, Mr. Orr, only the third headteacher in the school, retired after nearly twenty years. His replacement was Mr. K. Stitt, the deputy head of the school. Perhaps significantly his first local authority meeting was to discuss 'falling rolls and secondary school re-organisation'. A consultative document however guaranteed Hettons survival, though yet another re-organisation was possible.

The school took on involvement in the secondary science curriculum review. A resource area and suite of classrooms was created for pupils with special educational needs. The school began to develop a reputation locally and nationally for developing work experience in school, an S.C.I.P. project. Corporal punishment was abandoned by decision of the school's governors, that is the local authority education committee. The school meals service was reorganised on a cafeteria basis. Most significantly the school was adopted by the local authority as one of four to run courses on the new Technical Vocational Education Initiative - the result was increased staffing (2 in 1984, 2 more in 1985) and much increased funding for curriculum development.

The school was continuing to grow and to change