

8. Ridge School

RIDGE SCHOOL MINUTES BOOK: 1903-1925

A ledger (minus its cover) was recently rescued from a fire and donated to King John's House & Tudor Cottage Trust. It contains the minutes of Ridge School (eastwards from the top of Pauncefoot Hill), and it has been agreed that the Trust will now deposit this significant record with the Hampshire Record Office.

First, however, a full copy has been completed thanks to the industry of Pat Genge. The following is a synopsis of the information gleaned from this fascinating ledger.

Meetings of Ridge School Managers

The Ridge School Minutes Book begins in October 1903 in the wake of the 1902 Education Act. This Act had transferred authority from the old School Boards to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) administered by the relevant county or borough councils.

Although a small school, Ridge was high in prestige, and strongly supported by the Hon. Evelyn Ashley. Under his chairmanship early managers' meetings were held at Broadlands House. Other governors included the Rev J. Cooke-Yarborough, vicar of Romsey, and Mr E. Hoddinott of Moorcourt, who represented the Minor Local Authority. Later entries reveal the reasons for the appointment of the other three managers – Rev. R.A. Sidebottom (who was first Correspondent for the quarterly meetings) was curate of Romsey Abbey, Mr G.W. Brown represented the LEA and Mr Douglas Everett seems to have been appointed by the chairman, probably as secretary. Over time these individuals were gradually replaced for various reasons.

The Director of Education for the County loomed large throughout the minutes. It was to him that the Correspondent had to send an inventory of the school furniture and had to apply for authority to order coal as well as request a sales book, stock book, petty cash book, and the Managers' minute book, with a subsequent request that the stationery should be bought locally from Mr C.E. Waters.

Crucially, it was decided 'that the Church should pay £1 6s 0d per annum for Sunday coal'. At the next meeting, however, the Rev. Cooke-Yarborough objected to this amount 'as the fire would probably be lighted only about twelve times in the year for Sunday services'. It was decided that he should confer with the school mistress and settle a fair charge (15s 0d was agreed).

The purchase of coal, wood and stationery was a continuing issue for the managers - as was also the need for constant reviews of staff salaries. The salary (+ free house) of Miss Edwards - the headmistress during 21 years of the minutes book - went from £80 in 1903 to £287 at her retirement in July 1924. Despite that, there were obvious difficulties in attracting quality staff to the rather isolated location of Ridge School. Miss Edwards' replacement left after just one term, and several had rejected the post when the minutes book was discarded in January 1925.

Similar problems applied to the assistant teachers, who changed frequently. Perhaps that was why, in December 1916, the assistant teacher (uncertificated) was granted an extra £2 10s 0d per annum to cover the 'greatly increased cost of living' and 'wear & tear of bicycle'.

Cleaners were also a recurring topic. Two different people were employed, the LEA paying for a school cleaner on weekdays and Mr Ashley paying personally for another 'to undertake all the work in connection with the Sunday Services'. But the school cleaner's work included moving the desks for divine service, lighting the lamps and ringing the bell on Sunday 'for which the Hon'ble Evelyn Ashley pays her five shillings per annum'.

The death of the Hon. Evelyn Ashley was announced at the meeting of December 1907; his son and heir, Mr Wilfrid Ashley, replaced him as chairman. This meeting was held in the Broadlands Office. For some years thereafter the meetings were held less frequently and either in the Broadlands Office or at Mr Hoddinott's Moorcourt. It was not until August 1910 that Wilfrid Ashley chaired another meeting at Broadlands House.

Incidental problems arose regarding broken windows, contaminated well water, the need for a monitor and for fire guards, the heating charge to be made to those hiring the schoolroom, the eternal matter of head lice, measles, falling pupil numbers, bad weather. In 1918 the school had to close

'owing to prevalence of influenza', during the great epidemic. More happily, a half-day holiday was declared in 1921 for the presentation of the Bird & Tree Shield at Broadlands. The following year a full day's holiday was granted for Princess Mary's Wedding Day.

A rather uncertain message is conveyed with a managerial decision that 'The question of marking the Registers on days when the attendance was bad was left to the discretion of the Head Mistress'. But a very decisive rebuff was given to an adverse report on the boys 'offices'. The Correspondent wrote to the Director of Education: 'I am directed by the Managers of the above school to ask in what respect the position of the boys' offices are objectionable, they have been in the same position ever since the school was built & no nuisance has so far arisen. They are flushed down once a day.' That final statement must have forestalled any argument!

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