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On 16 July 2014, a personal view, and history, of Woodhill School, written by Adrian Sunman, was appended to this document, and the editors would like to express their thanks to Adrian, for permission to publish it.

THE OLD SCHOOLS OF COLLINGHAM

The Baptist School



This is the earliest school for which we have evidence in Collingham. It was founded in 1718 by William and Mary Hart, who bequeathed lands to trustees so that the income should be used to teach poor children of both North and South Collingham. The founders stipulated that both the trustees and the master should be of the Baptist persuasion. The children were to be taught to read and write and were also to be instructed in the true principles of the Christian religion. Schools of this type were known as charity schools, many being founded in the early years of the eighteenth century. The school at Besthorpe, first founded in 1712, provides another local example.

In 1828, when an enquiry was made by the Charity Commissioners into the running of the school, the average attendance was 22-23 pupils, all of them boys. It was not necessary for the children to be from Baptist families, only five of them falling into that category. They were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, the rudiments of geography, and the principles of the Christian religion. The master (a Baptist) was paid the rents of the trust property (£39 per year) out of which he had to provide the scholars with reading and writing books, and slates, and also furnish fuel for the school. The school was housed in a building erected around 1810 on a plot of land in North Collingham purchased by the trustees.

In 1865 a new schoolroom was built on what is now Baptist Lane; this building forms the southern part of the present chapel. [*Now a private residence.* ED] In 1877 the school appears to have been closed for boys, as a number of them were transferred to the Board School. Despite this, the school was still described as mixed in 1881, although by 1888 there were only girls – 43 on the total roll, with an average attendance of 28. The last reference to the school in the Baptist church minutes is in 1886, and by the early 1890's it must have closed. In 1903 the schoolroom was extended and converted into a chapel to replace the original one, which had fallen into disrepair.

The Girls School, South Collingham

This school was built by subscription in 1839 as a National School, which meant it was a Church of England school. It was in those days a mixed school. Directories of the 1840's and 1850's alleged that it could accommodate 200 children, though it is doubtful whether this was ever put to the test. The Diocesan inspection schedule of 1867 gives a total of 96 children on the books, including 20 infants. The eldest of these was 14 years old.



At this Diocesan Inspection in 1867 the children were examined in scripture (Old and New Testaments, catechism and prayer book), reading, writing, spelling from dictation, and arithmetic. The two children in the highest group (Standard Six) were also examined in geography. The children achieved 255 passes out of a possible 444 – a pass rate of 57.4%. This was less than the 66.2% achieved at Marnham, but better than the 38.6% at Winthorpe, and only 28.7% at Weston. The inspector complimented the children on their religious

knowledge, but suggested their poor performance in arithmetic was due to the low level of reading ability in the school.

Following the Education Act of 1870, it was decided to establish an elected School Board in Collingham. This board met for the first time in January 1876 with Mr Thomas Smith Woolley as its chairman, and Dr EG Wake (the historian of Collingham) its vice-chairman. The managers of the National School agreed to transfer the school building and the scholars to the control of the board, and from this date the school became a non-denominational board school.

By the early 1900's, increasing numbers of children attending the school made a complete reorganisation necessary. The board was granted a lease of the former Wesleyan school, and in November 1894 the boys were moved there, leaving the former National school building for the girls and infants. In 1902 the School Board was wound up, and its two schools were transferred to the County Council's Education Committee. In 1962 the Girls School, like the Boys School, was closed and the pupils transferred to the new John Blow Primary School.

The Boys School, North Collingham.

In 1855 the Wesleyan Methodists in Collingham built their present chapel in the High Street. Behind it they built a schoolroom (now the Wesley Room) to house a Wesleyan day school. White's Directory of 1864 noted that the room would accommodate 100 children, and that the average attendance was 90. The school was not endowed like the Baptist school, but relied on contributions from local Methodists. A notice in the Newark Advertiser of 2nd March 1859 announced that two sermons were to be preached by Rev Marmaduke C Osbourn of York in Collingham Wesleyan Chapel on Friday 4th March, and that collections would be taken after each service in aid of day school funds. Notice was also given that on the following Tuesday a public examination of the children was to take place in the schoolroom, "after which the Children will receive their usual treat of Tea and Cake".

The Wesleyan school was still in existence in 1874, but it probably closed soon afterwards since the establishment of the School Board and its non-denominational school in 1876 made its existence to some extent superfluous. In November 1894 the Wesleyan Schoolroom was taken over by the Board for use as a boys school.

From the very beginning, the boys school suffered from a lack of space. The master in 1894 noted on the first page of his log book, that there was "only one room to work in" despite the fact that the boys were grouped into seven standards. This problem was to grow acute by the time the school closed in 1962, but in the early days the situation was alleviated to some extent because the idea of compulsory education, laid down by parliamentary legislation and the bye laws of the School Board, took some time to become firmly established. In a rural community it was traditional for children, especially boys, to help with agricultural tasks from an early age – the younger ones bird scaring or gleaning, the older ones helping with pea pulling, harvesting, digging potatoes, rod peeling, etc. In addition local attractions, from Newark Fair to Swinderby Flower show, made their mark on attendance figures.

The boys school was closed in 1962, and the pupils transferred to the new John Blow Primary School. *[After transferring from the Girls School which he had attended as an infant, the editor left this school in 1957/8 to attend the Magnus Grammar School (now the Magnus Church of England School) in Newark. ED]*

The Infants School, North Collingham.

This school was built in 1870, and presented to the parish of North Collingham by Mrs Hanna Lesiter, wife of Rev Charles Lesiter, who was vicar of North Collingham from 1802 until 1859. The school, and a house for the teacher, were built in a corner of the garden of The Old Hall, the home of the Lesiters.

Being a Church of England school, it was run under the auspices of the National Society. To some extent, it always had to compete with the infants department of the South Collingham school, and while while the number of children on the books in the 1870's was over 60, it declined steadily thereafter until in 1900 the total number of children was 34. Despite its small size, the school appears to have been efficiently run, and, apart from one bad spell during the mid 1890's, HM Inspectors declared themselves well satisfied on their annual visits.

The subjects taught included reading, writing and spelling, arithmetic, drawing, needlework and knitting, singing and recitation. The very youngest children, who were taken from the age of three onwards, were given tasks such as sorting coloured wool, or threading beads, to keep them occupied. Like all groups of infants, the children sometimes became over excited, a problem some teachers coped with better than others; one of them wrote in the log book that she was having trouble with the children eating walnuts and playing with chestnuts.

After 1900, the number of children attending the school remained steady at just over 30. at the end of 1909 the school was still flourishing, but some time after that it closed, and its pupils transferred to the girls and infants school in south Collingham.



[Now Collingham Youth & Community Centre, the editor was one of the last pupils to attend this school, and remembers the transfer from there to South Collingham girls school. It was particularly hard for him as he lived in Queen Street, and went from just crossing the street to get to school, to having to walk the whole length of the village. This puts the closing of the school around 1951-53.]

The school stood empty for some time, and was sliding into disrepair, but a group of villagers, including Connie Osborne, Madge Linggard, Canon Rupert Stevens, and others, leased the building from the Southwell Diocese for 21 years for the sum of £1; the stipulation was that it should be-

come a Youth & Community Centre. Completely voluntarily, they restored the building, and maintained it for the length of the 21 year lease. Around 1996 it passed into the ownership of the village having been purchased by Collingham Parish Council. Responsibility for the care and maintenance of the building rests with a management committee, but ownership remains with the village, and the building appears on the Parish Council's asset register. ED]

Other Schools in Collingham

In addition to the schools described above, there were several private schools which flourished in the village from time to time. Little is known of many of them beyond a brief entry in a trade directory. One of the longest surviving, was a boarding school for ladies in South Collingham, run by Miss Jane Halliley. This was established before 1844, and was in existence for over 30 years, finally closing some time between 1874 and 1881. Other schools for ladies included those of Louisa Turner (c 1832), Miss Ridge (c 1855), Mrs Rachael Grosse (1860's), and Miss Sarah Jane Gibbons (1880's); these were all in North Collingham. Other schools mentioned in nineteenth century directories include those of Rachael Derry and Ann Knutton (Both 1853), Miss Emma Jane Bourne (1874), and John Horatio Bennett (1881).

From the 1880's onward, some of Collingham's private schools are still remembered today. The day school run by Miss Ann Wilkinson (mentioned in directories of 1881 and 1888) was held in the cottage on the south side of the Memorial Hall on the High Street. The two Miss Turtons ran a day school in Markham House on the High Street, and the Miss Fosberys, daughters of a rector of South Collingham, had a school in The Cottage, in the corner between Stocks Hill and Westfield Lane.

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Woodhill School

A personal tribute by Adrian Sunman

Largely using the premises of what had been a wartime Land Army hostel, Woodhill opened in 1954 as a secondary modern school but as one in an intentionally rural location with a particular emphasis on teaching rural studies and a resolutely country ethos. For twenty four short years it was to offer the young people of Collingham the benefits of a unique educational experience. Speaking on a personal note it was for me a very special place, more so than I probably realised during the time that I spent as a pupil there. Perhaps for me it was all the more special because I had 'family connections' with the school. My grandmother, Mrs Elsie Sunman, served as school secretary until her retirement in 1963 and my uncle, Mr Alan Sunman, taught rural studies there until the end of 1965. With some help from the pupils in his class, Alan's contributions to the school included the building of pigsties for the rural studies department and the planting of a row of Poplar trees near the school boundary at the bottom of South Scarle Hill.

My own involvement with the school began in September 1974 when I went there as a pupil for the first time at the age of eleven. With never more than 180 pupils on the roll at any one time and, I think fewer than that in my day, Woodhill was, by secondary standards at least, a small school. Therein, however, lay its strength. As a small school it had a strong sense of community, good discipline and, the ratio of pupils to teachers meant that academic standards were high. Many Woodhill pupils went on to further education and more than a few went on to University.

Like many schools at the time, Woodhill had a house system. At Woodhill there were three

houses when I arrived – Scott, Shaftesbury and Da Vinci. I was in Da Vinci house (not that it ever did anything to improve my artistic capabilities) and I remember the periodic house meetings which always took place at 3.30pm, a quarter of an hour before the school day ended. Due to the winding down of the school and a consequent reduction in pupil numbers, the house system was reorganised in 1976. Two houses, aptly (if unimaginatively) named Wood and Hill replaced the old three.

My first form teacher at Woodhill was a Mr Ken Cartwright, who taught Geography and some PE. His form covered two years and was known as 1-2 C.

In my third year at Woodhill my form tutor was Miss Mary Nicholson and her form was known as 3MTN. Miss Nicholson (or Mary as she now likes to be called) taught us English, RE and, I recall, some drama. She was rigorous in her insistence on the use of correct English and I am inestimably grateful to her for pointing out the error of such usages as double negatives. It was perhaps as an RE teacher though that she really came into her own and I remember her making good use of the local resources at her disposal for this. On one occasion she allowed me to take the class round All Saints and give a talk on the building. On another occasion she took us down to St John's and we had a lesson devoted to the 104th Psalm window in the South Aisle. Miss Nicholson had a cupboard at the back of her classroom which contained all sorts of things, including outfits for drama and every edition of Fleet to roll off the press since its inception in 1964. Even in those days I had an interest in local history and events which had taken place only ten years earlier were 'historic' to me. Whenever I got the chance to take a sneaky look at those early editions of Fleet I did so, although it was difficult to avoid getting caught!

Another teacher I remember well was Mr Sid Turner who taught History and was a keen enthusiast for his subject. I remember him once showing us a film about the medieval field rotation system at Laxton, an arrangement which, I believe, is still in place. When I was in the third year he took a group of us to York, ably assisted by Housecraft teacher, Mrs West. We walked along the historic walls, visited the Castle Museum, Railway Museum, Shambles and Clifford's Tower. Unfortunately we didn't have time to visit the Minster, one of York's most visible and, in my humble opinion, worthwhile attractions, but I have since made up for that omission.

Mrs West taught Domestic Science (or Housecraft as it was known in my day) and I am grateful to her for teaching me the basics of some rudimentary cookery and the correct way to fold a shirt. I remember her telling us that rock cakes derived their name from their shape, not their intended consistency! One of our earliest lessons with her was devoted to the cooking of a full English breakfast and we were allowed to devour the results – fortunately it was during the first period on a Friday morning. I remember too the high degree of security enforced when we had to add brandy to Christmas cakes in order to moisten them. The brandy had to be brought to school on the morning in question and handed to her first thing, whereupon it was securely locked away until the moment it was required during the lesson later on. Some of us must be eternally grateful to her for instructing us on the correct way to brush our teeth and the importance of also washing our combs whenever we washed our hair. Occasionally, she brought people in from outside the school to give demonstrations of various kinds. I seem to remember her asking a local butcher, the late Mr George Townsend, to come in talk about various cuts of meat.

Mr John Jones taught science and rural studies in my day. I don't ever remember working up much enthusiasm for science as such, but I did enjoy rural studies and the opportunities it presented to do things outdoors instead of being confined to the classroom. We kept some livestock including chickens and pigs which were taken periodically to market. I remember a field visit to Newark Cattle Market once and being told not to nod whilst the auction was taking place in case it got interpreted by the auctioneer as a bid. Little did I realise then that

a few years later I'd be working in premises next door to the market, but such are the small twists of fate. Mr Joe Armstrong helped to maintain the rural studies area.

Alfred Fisher, Woodhill's one and only headmaster, was a Yorkshireman who rolled his R's. Blessed with a powerful voice he needed no amplification when addressing the school during assemblies, fire drills or Speech Days. Like many of his generation he was strict and not inclined to suffer fools gladly. It was part of the job though and 'went with the territory' so to speak. He was a kind man though and we all knew it. His dislike of bureaucratic officialdom was no secret either. I, for one, remember the withering tones which he used when referring to County Hall during assemblies. On the occasions he was free to teach, his lessons were always interesting and well prepared. Not many, I suspect, knew of his voluntary work as a listener with the Samaritans or as a lay reader in the Lincoln diocese. Prior to Woodhill opening he was the headmaster of Besthorpe Primary School, a school which continued to thrive until a few years ago when closure was forced by declining numbers. One of the teachers I remember best was Mr Brian Taylor, deputy head and form tutor for the fifth form. He taught us Comprehension and, I think, Composition. Mr Taylor was a great philosopher and had a wonderful way of looking at life, despite having had more than his share of personal misfortune. He could be strict and was when occasion required. He certainly had choice words for anyone caught running down the corridor – something I often did. However, he also had a tremendous sense of fun and this came over in his lessons. His death, some years after the school closed, robbed Collingham of a truly great character.

During breaks and at lunchtime we were free to roam more or less as we pleased although the playing field was off bounds, being used only for games lessons. Having been allowed free run of the field at John Blow I resented this restriction at first but soon realised that it was for good reason as it was rented, not owned, by the school and used heavily for games.

Dinners were much as they had been at John Blow although there was a choice, albeit a limited one, and we collected what we wanted from a hatch instead of being served at tables. Like many young people I had a robust appetite and used to look forward to those occasions when I was on the last sitting and there was a possibility of enjoying some 'seconds'!

Another memory I have is of the fire drills when we were expected to evacuate the building within a specified time limit and line up form by form near the tennis courts. I seem to recall that however quickly we evacuated and got ourselves out there, it was never quite fast enough for Mr Fisher's liking, a fact which he never failed to impress upon us.

Woodhill School was fortunate in being richly blessed with a sizeable assembly hall and a well equipped stage to go with it. Two or three times a year the Collingham Players, a local drama group, would use these excellent facilities to lay on a play. Although their involvement with the drama group did not coincide with my time at the school, both my father, Mr George Sunman and my uncle, Mr Alan Sunman, were members of the Collingham Players in the early days. However I do remember that whilst in use by the Collingham Players, the hall was out of bounds to students but we were excused assemblies and I really rather liked that.

My greatest joy at Woodhill, however, was the library which was well stocked with both reference and fiction. I remember discovering Arthur Mee's 'King's England, Lincolnshire' and Nicholas Pesvener's 'Nottinghamshire' there as well as enjoying the schoolboy delights of 'Just William' and 'Billy Bunter.' On more than one occasion Miss Nicholson caught me reading in there instead of doing work which she'd set me!

Much as I would have liked to, I was not, alas, to complete my school days at Woodhill. In 1976 those responsible for organising education in Nottinghamshire decided that the local schools should be reorganised along comprehensive lines and it was decided that Woodhill was surplus to requirements. I, along with other children in my age group, was transferred in

September 1977 to the Lilley & Stone School in Newark where I spent the remaining 18 months of my school career.

Despite a valiant fight to keep it open, Woodhill finally closed in July 1978 and, with that closure came the end of an era. It would be possible to dwell at length on the closure of Woodhill but I won't. What I will say is this. Without a doubt the closure of a truly marvellous school resulted in an incalculable loss to the community of Collingham and its young people. In educational terms it must surely rank as one of the worst mistakes ever to be made. Although I am no longer a young man (as the medics have seen fit to remind me) fond memories of Woodhill remain and I am determined that the school will not be forgotten about so long as I have anything to do with it! Woodhill's rural ethos perhaps best found expression in the school song, the Birthright, of which I still have vivid memories:

The Birthright by Eiluned Lewis - Woodhill School Song 1954-1978

We who were born in country places,
Far from cities and shifting faces,
We have a birthright no man can sell,
And a secret joy no man can tell.

For we are kindred to lordly things,
The wild duck's flight and the white owl's wings.
To pike and salmon, to bull and horse,
The curlew's cry and the smell of gorse.

Pride of trees, swiftness of streams,
Magic of frost have shaped our dreams
No baser vision their spirit fills,
Who walk by right on the naked hills.