



## The Heritage Family History School Records Project

### Information Sheet 1: School and Education



#### **What would School be like if you were living in the 19th Century?**

It would have been very different from your school today in many ways! If you had attended school at all you would probably have gone to some sort of Elementary School, which were

similar to Primary Schools today. At the start of the 1800s (the nineteenth century) all schools were run by voluntary organisations usually either a church or a charity, or by individual people. Many children did not go to school at all as most schools charged a fee and many parents could not afford to send their children to school. There were some schools for poorer families that were free and these were called Ragged Schools. (Why do you think they were called Ragged Schools? Any ideas?)

Today there are many different types of school – what type of school is yours? Take a look at the box further down the page and see if you can spot yours.

In the nineteenth century the Church was heavily involved in education as it felt it was its moral duty to provide education and especially religious instruction. There was strong competition between the Church of England and Nonconformists (other Christian churches) to establish church schools throughout the country. After a while the government helped to pay for schools by giving money to both the Church of England and the Nonconformists to run their schools.

Between 1862 and 1897 school inspectors visited each school annually to test the children. The amount of money given to the school depended on how well the children did in their tests – the better they did the more money the school received. This idea did not work very well. Many teachers felt the tests were unfair as the inspectors would sometimes choose children to test who had been absent from school, while some teachers only taught subjects that would come up in the test. This meant that the children were not getting a well-rounded education. By 1867 this improved as new subjects were added to the school curriculum.

By 1870 although there were many church schools covering a large part of the country, there were many places where there were not enough schools for the number of children. The government decided that in places where there were not enough schools, new schools should be built with government money known as a grant. These schools had no connection with any church and became known as **Board Schools** because there were run by school boards. A board was a group of local people chosen to run the school.

## **School Attendance and Work**

School attendance became compulsory in 1880 but only for children under the age of ten. Both the School Boards (or for church schools the School Attendance Committee) ensured that children attended school. The leaving age was gradually raised over the years until in 1947 it became 15 and in 1972 it became 16. The government has proposed to raise it again to 17 from 2013 and 18 from 2015.

It may sound great not to have to go to school but would you rather be working? Although nineteenth century parents may have wished to send their children to school, many needed their children to go out to work in order to help bring in enough money to feed all the family. During the early nineteenth century food prices became very high and fewer workers were needed as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Many parents could not get enough work or were poorly paid, so children were increasingly sent out to work to supplement the family income – jobs included work in factories and cotton or woollen mills and also down the mines. These jobs could be dangerous and the children were expected to work long hours. (You may like to do a follow-up project looking into the sort of work children of your ages did in the mines or factories to find out whether you would rather go out to work than be at school!) By 1893 children between 10 and 11 years were allowed to spend half the week in school and the other half in work.

## **Children and Factories**

Before 1802 there were no checks on how many hours children worked in one day. Some children were working not just long hours in the daytime but well into the evening or even all night! Not only were the hours very long but also the work was very strenuous and dangerous and there were many accidents in the mills where children hurt themselves badly on the factory machines.

A series of Acts of Parliament in the 19th century gradually reduced the number of hours that children were allowed to work each week in factories and mills, although few checks were put in place and children still worked longer than they were allowed to by law. Even so this meant that children had more time to attend school and factory owners were encouraged to educate children. Some mill owners were kind and wanted to help children learn. One of these was a John Marshall.

Children who worked for him only worked between 9am and 11am and attended the factory school for the other half of the day. There was a small fee for school attendance.

**Use an Internet search engine to see photographs of children working in factories.**

**Search on any of the following phrases:**

*Children in factories*

*Children in cotton mills*

*Cotton trade and mill workers*

### **What was it like to be at School in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century?**

These days your class sits in its own separate classroom and the teacher probably lets you get involved in the lessons by asking you lots of questions and what you think about things, as well as teaching you things you don't already know. It was not always like this! Separate classrooms were not usual until the 1870s. Before this many schools consisted of one large hall in which all the children were taught. (If your school dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century part of the building may have once been the original large hall).

In winter the classrooms could be very cold as there was no central heating. Most classrooms would be lit by a small open fire that burned coal. Sometimes it was so cold that the ink in the inkwells froze!

### **What were lessons like in the old days?**

Lessons meant endless repetition out loud of things that the children were expected to learn off by heart. In larger schools all the children would sit in the hall with the schoolmaster standing at the front. Each class sat on its own bench or form with an older child acting as a "monitor" and standing at the end of each bench. The monitor would have been taught the lesson for that day before school started and was expected to pass the information onto the children in his or her group.

On the wall at the end of each row would be pasted the day's lesson and the monitor would use a pointer or stick to help point to the lesson on the board which had to be said out loud and learned. All the different forms repeated their different lessons out loud and it must have been very noisy.

The use of older children meant that more children could be taught at once but how easy do you think it would be to learn like this?

A better idea was that of the pupil teacher introduced in the 1830s. Children over thirteen years old, who were good at their work, would be chosen to teach the younger children in groups. They received extra lessons themselves to train them as teachers. After three years these children could take an exam, which, if they passed, meant they went on to teacher training college. Many never took the exam or failed to pass, but went on to remain as unqualified teachers at the school.

The children studied reading, writing, arithmetic and religious instruction and by the 1870s also history and geography. They also had singing sessions and exercise sessions and the girls learned sewing and the boys, technical drawing. There was a lesson called the “object lesson” which was the nearest thing to a science lesson. The teacher would select any object from a glass to a pine cone and let the children inspect it and learn about it by using their senses e.g. touch, sight and smell.

Much more emphasis was put on copying out lessons neatly, and reciting lessons out loud than today when the teacher will ask you to use your brain to think of answers to questions and to come up with questions and ideas yourselves.

In smaller schools there were just a few forms for the children but whatever the size of the school they would have had to sit on had benches called “Forms” in straight rows rather than the tables you sit at today. There were many fewer books available and some pupils only had one textbook to work from for all subjects – and of course there were no computers or no Internet -- just pencils, ink pens, or for the younger pupils slates on which to write. Look at the picture of this schoolroom and see what equipment you can identify. Look for the inkwells in the desk and the abacus, which was used in mathematics and consisted of coloured beads on a frame.

Now use an Internet search engine and search for the words “slates for children in school” as this is what the younger children would use to learn to write. If your search engine offers you the choice to search for images only, select this option.



The 19<sup>th</sup> century classroom at the small school of West Wittering.  
See if you can spot inkwell, an abacus, a hoop and the school bell.  
*Thanks to The Weald & Downland Open Air Museum for the photograph.*

### **How long was the Victorian School Day?**

Classes usually started about nine o' clock and the day finished between 4 and 5 pm.

Unlike today there were no school meals – children went home for lunch and often had to have a two hour lunch break as they often walked a couple of miles or more each way .

### **Other 19<sup>th</sup> Century Schools**

We have seen that there were church schools and boards schools and some factories had schools.

Let's look at the other sorts of schools you might have gone to if you had lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Dame Schools.**

These were for very young children often run by a local person who helped often encouraged reading and writing but often had little education herself. The children did not learn much but it

often meant that it was easier for both parents were free to go to work and bring in much needed money.

### **Sunday Schools.**

With the growth of the Industrial Revolution children were increasingly required to work in factories and the only day they had free was Sunday. Sunday Schools were run by both the Church of England and Nonconformists. By 1803 there were over 7000 Sunday Schools. As Sunday Schools developed they began to concentrate mainly on reading Bible verses although secular (non-religious) subjects were also taught in some schools.

### **Workhouse Schools.**

A workhouse or poorhouse was a locally run organisation that housed and looked after people who were not earning enough money to look after themselves and their families. They also looked after orphans. (You may have heard of the workhouse in Charles Dicken's story Oliver Twist.) Workhouses have been greatly criticised by historians because of the way in which the inhabitants were treated, but many had schools that provided an education for poor children. The workhouse school in Leeds in Yorkshire for example taught reading and writing, maths and other skills such as spinning and knitting. From 1834 all workhouse children received three hours of lessons each a day.

### **Ragged schools**

These were schools for the very poor – in case you have not worked out the answer yet - the children's clothes were in rags and this led to the name Ragged Schools.

A man called John POUND adapted his shoemaker's workshop into the first ragged school where he instructed poor boys and girls in reading and writing as well as other skills such as cookery and copywriting. This example led to the formation of other ragged schools by charitable people. The schools were totally free.

### **Industrial schools.**

These schools were for poor children who were considered to be at risk from bad influences that might lead them to a life of crime. Children either went to the school on a daily basis or boarded (lived in) at the school. The children learned skills that would be useful for their adult lives such as sewing and knitting for the girls and gardening, spinning or carpentry for the boys. In most schools they also learned to read and write and had religious education.



*A typical 19<sup>th</sup> century school building with the pupils outside. Note the style of clothes they are wearing. Below pupils in the 1930s*



## **Types of primary school today.**

Today there are many different types of schools.

There are many different types of school and the different names usually relate to where a school gets its money from (how it is funded) or how admissions are controlled – so how it decides which pupils can join the school.

Take a look at the list and see if your type of school is listed.

### **Community Schools**

A community school is run by the local authority (local council e.g Kent County Council, Somerset County Council which employs the staff and owns the land. Community schools look to develop strong links with the local community, sometimes offering use of their facilities and providing services such as childcare and adult learning classes. Community schools are ‘non’-denominational’ – in other words, they are not linked to a particular religion.

### **Faith Schools.**

Faith schools are usually run in a very similar way to Community schools but are linked to a particular faith. This faith may be reflected in the way they teach and sometimes in how they choose who can go to the school. A Faith School can be connected to any faith – can you list the different faiths and find any schools that are connected with each faith? Use the Internet to search. Here are two examples to get you started:

Sikh Faith Schools -- The Guru Nanak Sikh Primary School in the London Borough of Hillingdon.

Hindu: The first Hindu state school in Britain opened in the London Borough of Harrow, where about 20% of the population is Hindu.

### **Foundation and Trust schools.**

Foundation schools are run by their own governing body, which employs the staff and decides who will go to the school. They are often linked to a charity that may have originally donated the land on which the school was built.

### **Endowed Schools**

These schools were set up with the proceeds of a donation from a particular person or people e.g. Lady Joanna Thornhill School, Wye, Kent. Lady Joanna died in 1708 and left an endowment for the “benefit of the poorest children of Wye for their better education”

### **Special Schools.**

Schools for children with special needs e.g. Frank Barnes School Deaf Children, London.

### **Independent Schools.**

Schools where children’s parents have to pay a fee for their children to attend.