

DAWPOOL

Dawpool C.E. (Aided) Primary School

A Short History by Jenny Whalley



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school that, while they grow in knowledge,
they may also grow in grace; and learning to
love You, may learn for Your sake to love and
serve their fellow men."*

Amen.



Thurstaston Dawpool Church of England Primary School is situated at the head of School Lane on the north-eastern edge of Thurstaston Common, a setting which is not only perhaps the most attractive school setting on Wirral, but also the most unusual, because of its apparent isolation from any immediate community. School Lane itself boasts only five houses and one farm. It is not surprising, therefore, that, after commenting upon its picturesque situation, the first question most visitors ask about the school is, “But where do all the children live?” In fact, the school serves the southern half of Irby Village and the small community living in Thurstaston Village itself – although in former years it served a much wider, though far less populated area. Dawpool C.E. (Aided) Primary School is still a traditional village school which it proudly retains and cherishes.

Many changes have taken place to the school since its foundation by Deed of 30th December 1865. It was originally located in Thurstaston Village, close to the Parish Church of St Bartholomew, on a triangular piece of land bounded on the north-west by the road to Dawpool farmyard, the south-east by Old Dawpool Lane (now Station Road) and on the south-west by Dawpool Farm. The only permanent feature is, in fact, the school’s name “DAWPOOL” which was taken from the former small hamlet of “Dael Pol Town,” the derivation of which is a deep pool or creek lying at the mouth of a steep, rocky valley opening through the cliffs on the shore of the Dee. It is difficult to decide the old port’s exact location. Bryant’s map of Cheshire, dated 1830, shows it at the end of a lane called Dalpool Lane running from Thurstaston to the shore – following the course of the present Station Road for a short distance and then curving northwards and westwards until it reached the estuary, where the site of “Dalpool Town” is shown just within Thurstaston Parish. In the late 16th Century, the “New Key” (Quay) was constructed at Neston which proved most inefficient, as vessels of greater burden than twenty tons were obliged to remain at Dawpool. All that remains now of this mysterious, ancient anchorage are some large hewn blocks of sandstone scattered along the river’s edge. It is hard to imagine the ships in Dawpool Deep, their sails furled, riding to anchor, silhouetted against the backcloth of the Welsh hills, or to realise that this was “once the celebrated rendezvous for the embarkation of the troops of Lancashire and Cheshire.” (Mortimer’s History of the Wirral 1847).

The building of the original school had been the idea of Joseph Hegan. He had felt that it would benefit the poor children of the parish of Thurstaston and adjoining townships. As is the case now, there was no heavy industry locally and, in those days,



the majority of dwellers worked as farm labourers.

In Joseph Hegan's will, dated December 31st 1864, the initial trustees of his estates, which included the premises of the school, house and gardens, were to be John Hegan, Adam Kennard and Charles Hegan and, in the second instance, to be his daughters Grace Kennard and Agnes Hegan. Eventually, however, the school was vested in the Rector of Thurstaston, the Rector of Woodchurch and the Vicar of Frankby as trustees.

The school itself was very small, having dimensions of only 18 feet by 40 feet. The actual classroom measured 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ feet by 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Even though the playing area was cramped, it was sub-divided into an area for the boys and an area for the girls. The first teacher was a Mrs Jeffries and the average attendance was fifty pupils. The first entry in the original School Log Book is dated October 24th 1870 and recorded the visit of Her Majesty's inspector, "The Reverend O. Smith," to the school. Subsequent entries reveal the regular checks made by the inspectors upon the standards attained by the pupils. It was upon the results of such inspections that the annual grant the school received was calculated. The Log reveals how the school repeatedly failed to meet the standards set by the inspectorate with consequent reductions being made in the school grant. However, as the Log itself illustrates, this situation may well have been the result of the school's situation in a rural farming area rather than any fault on the teacher's behalf. School work for the children in the late 19th Century came a poor second to their farm work. Attendances fell dramatically at harvest time, sometimes almost to nil. The entry for April 13th 1877 states "Attendance poor due to the potato season," while the one for October 3rd 1877 blames poor numbers on blackberry gathering. During the Winter, access to school along the mainly unmetalled road was restricted by ice and snow and the children were often forced to stay at home. Sickness also played a major part in absenteeism at this time. Scarlet Fever was prevalent and chest infections usually meant a lengthy convalescence for the children. In fact, during the Whooping Cough epidemic of 1898, the school closed its doors completely from August 8th to August 28th. Often the inspectors reported upon the "sinful practice of copying," and one wonders how often this was the result of undiagnosed short sightedness rather than any inherent wickedness in the child!

By 1893, the school had become grossly inadequate. There was no proper sanitation.



Although there was drinking water, this was piped from a local spring. The accommodation for proper slate work (the equivalent to the modern exercise book) was too inferior for any worthwhile results. The census report for the period showed that the population was increasing and so there was need for a bigger school. The nature of the existing site precluded any possibility of alterations or extensions.

During these formative years of Dawpool School, the Ismay family had taken residence at Dawpool Hall, the former home of the late Joseph Hegan and in 1884 they demolished the Hall and erected the fabulous mansion of "Dawpool" — a house which entertained such guests as the Prince of Siam who visited "Dawpool" on January 5th 1886. The Ismays were wealthy ship owners having originally founded the White Star Line, owning such ships as the Oceanic, Teutonic and Atlantic. In December 1902 the White Star Line was sold. It would seem that such a transaction would never have taken place but for the death of Mr. T.H. Ismay, who dedicated his life to the company. However, his son Mr. Bruce Ismay became Chairman and Managing Director of the White Star Line and in 1912 sailed on the maiden voyage of the ill-fated Titanic, being one of the fortunate few to survive. It is difficult to gauge the feelings of the local people towards the Ismays. In the Enclosure Award Act of 1885 the village of Thurstaston had been absorbed into the grounds of Dawpool Hall. Full compensation had been paid and there were no evictions or demolition of cottages. However, the closure of the local inn, the Dog and Partridge, was most unpopular with "regulars" because the promise of a replacement was never fulfilled. It would seem the inherent independence of the sons of the soil, and the resentment of the obvious power of wealth, had been stirred to the depths.

Thus it is, perhaps, that a sort of folklore arose concerning the Ismays and the part they played in the developing of the new Dawpool School. It is suggested that the school was re-sited owing to the fanaticism of Mr. Henry Ismay, who was apparently unable to stand the sight and noise of grubby children at the gates of his estate. This suggestion is further enhanced by the knowledge that, when the new road was being made from West Kirby to Heswall, the engineers planned to bring the road close to the Ismay house. At his own expense, the road was re-routed through the solid sandstone rock of the hill now known as the Thurstaston Cutting. This was also the case in the siting of the railway which was laid as far from "Dawpool" as possible. However, this is only perhaps a small part of the story because the Ismays were evidently great philanthropists.



At the turn of the century, therefore, it was mooted that a new site should be found for the school. The fact that the trustees, the three rectors, owned the parcel of land opposite Mr. J. Roberts' farm and had held this in trust since the Enclosure of Thurstaston Common in 1885, made this the obvious choice. It was stated in the local paper of the time that this position was "A very beautiful one and has an extensive view over the Wirral Peninsular." It would certainly be difficult to disagree with this observation, and in one way or another a lot of thanks perhaps should be offered to the Ismays, as it was Mrs. Margaret Ismay who generously donated £2,300 towards the total costs of the school — the remaining £165 being subscribed by the residents of the Parish and neighbourhood.

It should be noted that in 1902 the old school became known as Dawpool National School and was a voluntary Church of England School by "Usage and Custom". There were twenty-eight boys, thirty-one girls, and seventeen infants on the school register, 31st December 1902. The following shows the ratio of pupils from the various districts:

	BOYS	GIRLS	INFANTS
Thurstaston (whole)	4	11	8
Irby (whole)	16	12	3
Caldy (whole)	8	8	6

There was a headmaster's house attached to the school, but it was too small for him and his family and so the managers paid for a residence in Heswall. The headteacher was a Mr. Samuel Scholes. He had a trained certificate 2nd Class, and was paid £107 annually. His assistant was Jane Peers and sewing lessons were given by Mrs. Saline Scholes. The headteacher taught as well as supervised the children.



EXPENSES FOR 1902

Books and Stationery	£4.10s.9d
Fuel, Light and Cleaning	£19.3s.1d
Rates, Taxes and Insurance	
Diocesan Inspection Fee	£2.0s.2d
Work in School Yard, Cheque Book and Bank Commission.	£4.14s.9d

The record of this year was made by the Rev. Ambrose Charlesworth.

In June 1905, Mrs. Margaret Ismay laid the foundation stone of the new school. Prior to the ceremony, the Rev. Charlesworth read a copy of a document which was to be placed under the stone. This gave a brief history of the school and stated that the new buildings were erected in accordance with the requirements of the Board of Education. A plan of the building was also enclosed, as were the names of the Architect. Mr. J. F. Doyle — the builders, J. Thomas and Sons, Oxton - the Rector, Rev. Charlesworth and the headteacher, Mr. S. Scholes. Current local papers and coins of the realm completed the package. After the service Mrs. Ismay entertained the children to tea in the old school.

On Saturday 27th January, 1906 the school was formally opened by Mrs. Ismay. Many parishioners and residents attended. The church was represented by the Bishop of Chester and the Rev. A. Charlesworth. After a procession traversing the boundaries of the new school. Mrs. Ismay opened the building with a gold key. Following a short religious ceremony, the Bishop gave an address in which he reminded those present that “the gift of the schools by those interested in the welfare of the Church of England was another instance of the fact that the property of the Church was not derived from the State, but was the result of the generosity of loyal sons and daughters of the



Church.” He also referred to the “great interest which, for generations past, the clergy and laity of the Church of England had taken in the secular and religious education of the country, and to the debt which the country owed for the instruction so imparted at a time when other agencies were apathetic upon the subject.” He also emphasised that “Church people must be loyal and obedient to the laws of the state for the time being, and must be no parties to anarchical methods.”

On the opening of the new school, the old school passed into the hands of Mrs. M. Ismay for the sum of £100.

According to the Board of Education the new school was to be conducted by the trustees as an Elementary School within the meaning of the Education Acts 1870 and 1902. Out of school hours the trustees were permitted to allow the Rector to use the school buildings for the purposes of a Sunday School in connection with the Church of England. At this time the trustees were Miss Ida Ismay. Mr. G. Johnson - farmer of Dawpool Farm, William Hamlet Smith - farmer of Irby Hall, and the Rev. A. Charlesworth. In theory the trustees acted as managers and were not allowed to receive any remuneration, or to be interested in the supply of work or goods to the Foundation (the school).

The following paragraph of information is solely due to the first hand knowledge of Mr. Ted Kendrick of Greenheys Road, and the Misses Kendrick of Irby Mill Hill, who attended Dawpool School from 1905. They remember that every first Monday in the month the children would walk to the council school at the Puddydale, Heswall - the girls for cookery and the boys for woodwork. Every Christmas there was a party and in the summer there were several outings. One was to Larton Farm at Newton on a horse-pulled cart for sports and tea. Other visits took them to Birkenhead Park, the Liverpool Art Gallery and Museum, and even a trip on the Overhead Railway. They also remember being allowed over the common at lunchtime and playing on the swing-boats at Roberts' farm. The sort of games they played in the playground were rounders and terseys (a sort of hopscotch). On Ascension Day the pupils would be marched down to Church. The school day was from 9.00 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. The older girls had the opportunity to take Housewifery at the Higher School Hoylake Parade. The children, however, had to walk there and back and this depended upon whether their parents could afford to replace their worn-out shoes. When Mrs. Newling started they



can remember having to recite prose. Finally, they looked on Mr. Scholes as an excellent teacher, adding that he was also a Special Constable. (On the south-east face of Thorstone Rock Mr. Scholes has kindly left to posterity a carving of a late 19th century steam train.)

In 1917, the managers received a directive from the Education Committee to dispose of the services of one of the Assistant Teachers, Miss B. Newling or Miss C.A. Martyn. However, the managers felt it would be impossible to arrange the grouping of 53 children between 2 teachers, namely the Head and one Assistant. It would seem the Education Committee's order was final because in 1919 Miss Newling resigned.

1921 was a busy year for the school. Firstly, two of the managers were requested to inspect a piece of land adjacent to the school with a view to its being rented and used for organised games. From this time Sports Day became an annual event. On a lighter note in 1921, it is recorded that a schoolmaster reported being assaulted by a cleaner. The latter was requested to make an apology but, as none was forthcoming, she was dismissed. Finally, the year saw Mr. Scholes tender his resignation. The managers requested that the replacement should be male, but the Local Education Authority felt that, as the average number of pupils was below 70, and that few were seniors, a headmistress, Miss Claxton, be appointed. She took up her post in December 1925 and was formerly appointed in September 1924.

This proved to be a new era for the school with great advances being made in the school building itself which ultimately led to a more conducive atmosphere for education.

In November 1926, Miss Claxton requested a dividing screen to be put in the schoolroom because it was becoming extremely difficult to teach several classes simultaneously.

On June 3rd 1929, the managers agreed that all children over 11 years of age were to be sent to West Kirby Central Church School in accordance with the scheme of the



Rural Dean (Canon Brooke-Glyne). In October the local council agreed to add sanitation to the school and to carry out the work themselves.

In July 1933, Miss Claxton asked for electric lighting for the school which was completed in July 1934 for a cost of £16.4s. It would be hard to envisage our children nowadays without these necessities, but at that time they were looked upon as giant steps in progress.

In 1943, during the 2nd World War (1939-45) Miss Claxton resigned and was replaced by Mrs. Davis. At this time, it was decided by the managers that Dawpool School should become an Aided Primary School with room for 80 pupils. The headteacher pointed out that there were another 16 on her waiting list. Thus plans were put forward for a new kitchen and dining room. The managers then suggested that, if the Education Authority took over the work, the school would accommodate more pupils. In 1947 the canteen was erected.

On the 1st May 1955, Mr. E.C. Hayes took over from Mrs. Davis. At that time the 100 pupils were taught by the headmaster and two teachers.

The new Rector of Thurstaston, Canon Spencer (1957-1965) began to put pressure on the Chester Diocese to lend money for the school to be extended. It had been decided that Dawpool should remain a Church of England School under the Education Act 1944. Under this system the board of managers, all Church members, selected the teachers from the Education Authority. As an aided school the Church was liable for all the buildings and outside repairs. e.g. painting, whereas the state had to decorate inside and had to supply desks, chairs, books and other such items. In 1951, a new primary school had been opened at Coombe Road and this highlighted how out of date Dawpool had become. The children still had to walk across the playground to the toilets and some were even taught in the canteen. The number of pupils decreased with more now going to Coombe Road. The need for further extension and improvement of the school was never greater.



Three new classrooms were planned but Mr. E.C. Hayes fought successfully for a fourth one. The old infant classroom became the kitchen, the girls' cloakroom became the headteacher's room, W.C. and cloakroom, the boys' cloakroom became the general store at the end of the hall, there was a new entrance into the hall and the old canteen and kitchen were demolished. The new extension was officially opened by the Bishop of Birkenhead in 1965.

A system of zoning was then agreed for the two schools. It was decided that Dawpool should accept the children from Thurstaston Road south of the Anchor Inn, the school side of Mill Hill Road. And the roads off it and Thurstaston Village. Of course, as Dawpool was a Church School, it could still take children from the whole Parish.

In 1968, a meeting was held between the parents and Rector of Thurstaston Mr. G.O. Needham. Mr. T. Thomson, secretary of the Managers, and Mr. E.C. Hayes, the Headteacher. It was decided not to form a Parent-Teacher Association, but a society with the aims of arousing more interest in the school and helping to raise money for the building fund through social events. The managers were not to be involved, and accordingly F.O.D.S. (Friends of Dawpool School) was formed. Through the hard work and dedication of successive committees and with the support of all the parents. F.O.D.S. has raised considerable revenue to the benefit of the school and pupils.

The next major event in the school's history was the reorganisation of local government in 1974. The school, which had up to this point been under the jurisdiction of the Deeside Division of the Cheshire Education Authority, became part of the newly formed Wirral Education Authority.

One of the problems facing the new Wirral L.E.A. was the fact that each of its three constituent parts operated a different system of "secondary" education. While the Bebington and Deeside areas were organised in terms of a selective system of secondary education with transfer at eleven, Birkenhead and Wallasey were organised into three-tier comprehensive systems with transfer to middle schools at twelve in Birkenhead and thirteen in Wallasey. To meet the government of the day's requirement that local authorities submit proposals for the ending of selective

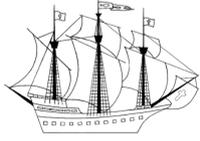


education, plans were published in April 1976 for the introduction of a three-tier system of comprehensive education in Deeside and Bebington. Under these proposals, Dawpool was destined to become a 5 years to 12 years Combined School and plans were made to extend the school by the addition of an extra classroom, resource room, cloakroom and toilets to accommodate the extra age group.

On April 30th 1979, Mr. E.C. Hayes retired as Headteacher, having served the school for twenty-four years, during which time he had not only dedicated himself to the well-being of the school, but also played an important role in the life of the Parish Church. Before the work on the new extension could be commenced, political changes brought about the cancellation of the proposed re-organisation of Bebington and Deeside Schools. However, at a meeting of the school governing body on 6th June 1979, it was decided that the building of the extension should nevertheless go ahead and work commenced in September 1979. The extension was finally dedicated on Wednesday 2nd July 1980 by the Bishop of Birkenhead, the Right Reverend Ronald Brown, at a service attended by the Director of Education, Mr. M.(i. Nichol, the Diocesan Director of Education, Canon J. White, and the Rector and former Rector of the Parish of Thurstaston, Rev. M.B. Kelly and Rev. G.O. Needham. Among those present were some former pupils who had attended the original dedication of the school in 1906. In addition to the work on the extension, the building contractors had been commissioned to remove the old partition screen in the hall and so increase the space available for such activities as Physical Education and Drama.

Dawpool Church of England School has occupied its present position now for over 100 years. Two extensions have been added to the original Ruabon Red Brick building, more than doubling the school's original size. We are fortunate in these modern times of development, that the school is still sited in one of the most pleasant and unspoilt natural settings in Wirral. Perhaps we should look back to its humble beginnings — and not forget the people who have served the school with great perseverance and dedication - to the making of Dawpool School.

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Amen.