

## A History of Primary Education in Branston

Who could believe that an argument over walking a dog in Canwick in the seventeenth century would have a significant effect on the education of children in the neighbouring parish of Branston. For Thomas Garrett that argument with the Church authorities in Canwick was the final straw and his will was adjusted in favour of the neighbouring parish of Heighington and Branston. In his will of 1620 he gave land and properties to build and endow a school in Heighington for the education of boys from Heighington Washingborough and Branston.

This is the first reference to any formal education in Branston. Two hundred years later in 1830 twenty five poor boys of Branston were receiving instruction at the Heighington Endowed School in reading writing and arithmetic. There may have been private schools for those children who could afford it, there certainly were in many Parishes in Lincolnshire but there is no record of one until 1836.

In the early nineteenth century Sunday Schools provided the only form of education for many children, the Methodists in Branston had a school connected to the Chapel before 1842 when it is mentioned in White's County Directory.

In 1836 Peregrine Curtois, the rector, built an annexe to the Chancel, now the Choir Vestry, to serve as a school for boys and girls.

The following year the Hon. Alexander Leslie Melville of Branston Hall, erected a school in Hall Lane. It was attended by about 70 children who each paid a penny or twopence a week. Many families would have been unable to afford this, others unwilling to forego the few pence that the child could earn during the week. The first reference to a school in the south of the Parish was in 1856 when a school was set up on the border of the Fen in a building hired by the rector.

The rector seems to have been the driving force again in 1857 when a Boys Day School was appointed for 59 boys at a penny a week, it was held in a building belonging to the rector. The master was the Parish Clerk. The girls remained in the Vestry school.

In 1860 the Boys School was being taught by a Mr Sharpe (untrained) 21 adults attended Night School for thirteen weeks a year, five nights a week a twopence a week.

Before 1870 parishes were not obliged to provide schools, nor were parents responsible for ensuring that their children were educated. In 1870, however, William Edward Forster steered the Elementary Education Act through Parliament, setting up School Boards which were to provide satisfactory education for the poor. In that same year at a Parish meeting in Branston it was decided to establish a new school for all the children. Branston National School opened in 1873 at a cost of £1,200. Mrs Melville's school in Hall Lane remained open as an Infant school. It remained open until 1901 when, due to the financial burden of the upkeep of two schools, it was decided to close the Infant school.

For nearly seventy years the National School on High Street was to be the 'Village School'. It saw many changes. School Boards were replaced by Local Authorities in 1902. Electric lighting replaced oil lamps in 1933. During the second World War Jewish children from Cowper Street in Leeds were evacuated to Branston and the Methodist schoolroom was used as a temporary classroom. In 1948 it became a Church of England Voluntary Controlled School and by 1951 rising numbers caused the Chapel schoolroom to be used once again. New Classrooms were built on adjoining land in 1956 and central heating installed in 1963.

Meanwhile in the Fen School which had been opened in 1856 in a wooden building had, by 1944 fallen into disrepair and was closed. The Village hall at Branston Booths was used as a temporary school, the old building being demolished in 1946. In 1960 the Fen School was finally closed, only two children attending. The new Primary School on Station Road was opened in 1970 and in 1976 the Infant School was built on Beech Road. The Infant School retained Church of England control whilst the Station Road school became a County Junior School.

Today (1998) more than three hundred children of primary school age attend the village school.