

## **Early Impressions of the Burton Grammar School.**

(Jan 1900 July 1907)

By Aubrey C Baggleby.

When I arrived with my brother Arthur (I was about eleven and a half and he two years my senior), I felt myself a minnow among the big fish. I was quite small for my age. What was still more frightening was seeing boys whizzing through the air holding on to pieces of wood tied on to the ends of ropes, the other ends of which were fastened to a circulating metal plate at the top of a large, thick, shortened telegraph pole. I learnt afterwards that it was a "Giant Stride", and I enjoyed many a round on it myself in later years,

Assembly for prayers, read in his booming voice by the Rev. T.W. Beckett, followed by the hymn, sung to the accompaniment of a wheezy harmonium played by a young master named Cole. After he left, Cyril Hartshorn took over, but as an accomplished musician, that harmonium was a real trial to him. He hated it, but with only 150 boys or so, no-one else could be found to be pressed into service.

Mr. Beckett was to me a very imposing person with very large hands, which were used in such a way as to put the fear of the Lord into us. On one occasion, Jack Rudd, a member of my brother's form, felt the weight of it. What Jack said I never knew, but as a result, he received a cuff on each side of the face. For two days his face was red and swollen. Such things were accepted in the school in those days.

Mr. Beckett left, after I had been at B.G.S. for only two terms, to become Vicar of Anslow. Having been Headmaster since 1884, he had a special farewell at the prizegiving in the Town Hall. I was greatly impressed by Mrs Beckett, who looked after the twenty or so boarders. She had been greatly liked. With no public transport, except trains, and almost no motor-cars, boys from a distance had to board, Willie Wain from Bretby often came by pony, and stabled it in High Street, near the market place.

In September 1900, Mr. R.T. Robinson, from Wyggeston School, Leicester, succeeded Mr. Beckett, and caused a stir when he introduced Saturday morning school from 9.0 am to 12.30 in place of Wednesday afternoon 2 till 4.0. His reason seemed shameless – we were fresher in the mornings, and Wednesday afternoons could be used for games. He omitted to mention the extra one and a half hours' work. • In fact, not many boys played football and cricket at school then.

The games were run by a Sports Club to which members had to pay a fee of 2/6d per term and supply their own gear, and pay for any travelling, e.g. to Ashby, Lichfield, Atherstone, etc. This was a prohibitive expense for quite a number of boys, in those days of large families and low salaries. The days of financial backing by the Local Authority and the State were yet to come. There were also "Bathing Sheds" by a backwater of the Trent. The "Field" as we called it, lay immediately behind Peel Croft, and the pavilion was a very drab corrugated iron covered hut, the only window being a large wooden panel in one side, which could be pushed open by an iron rod, and fastened by putting the end in a staple. There was no groundsman. It was a D. I. Y. world then. We rolled the pitch and marked out the whitewashed lines ourselves. For non-school matches, "Tommy" Stevenson, who took Form 1 for all subjects, and who had been said to play on occasion for Warwickshire, and "Taffy" (W.H.) Robinson, R.T.R.'s brother, and still later, A. Rigby, (Physics master), all played in the cricket team, and R. T. R. himself: "Dicky", turned out at centre half in the football team at least once. J.W. Ramshaw, who came when the Physics Lab, was built, also played football at times. Two record scores of later days, probably 1905, stand out in my mind, as I was Captain then. At cricket, School 52 runs or so, Congregational Church 8, of which 3 I believe, were extras – Richards, as wicket keeper, being

so keen that he missed the ball twice. At football, also I think against the Congregationalists: 24 goals to nil, Sam Oulton scoring eighteen.

When I first went to B.G.S. I was put in the fourth form on the strength of having gained one of the three Feoffees scholarships, but, having done no Latin or French before, I had to catch up with my class-mates,. In what was called the "Extra Division" I did intensive Latin Primer and Gepp work, – about eight lessons a week, and spent the whole of Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons doing French – so missing all lessons in both Music and Art. By the end of the school year (January to December in those 4 days), I had advanced far enough to start on Vergil's Aeneid IX in Latin Div.IIb and *Rémi et ses amis* in French Div.IIb.

Cambridge Local examinations were compulsory for fourth forms and above, so at 12 years of age I joined my brother and a lot of other boys in evening preparation work from 6.0 p.m. to 8.0 at the School from about mid-October to early December. I remember the gas-lighted, rooms – no electric light then – I think we had incandescent mantles, but I'm not sure. One incentive for these examinations for the more gifted boys and their parents was that, for 1st Class Honours 36/- worth of books of one's own choice were awarded; 24/- for 2nd Class and 12/- for 3rd. In the days when all books and stationery had to be paid for by one's parents, such awards were very welcome. Books belonging to school-leavers were often bought for new boys. Several of mine had belonged to Billy Balfry, and I wondered why they had "J.C.K:Balfry" in them. They were brothers. My brother knew Billy well.

Earlier on I mentioned Jack Rudd's beating by Mr. Beckett. R.T.R. gave one beating which I should think stood out for years in the minds of all who beard it. Len Hearn, G. L. Hearn, who later gave money for a prize to the school, and so must have forgiven the indignity, was the victim. Having been reprimanded for smoking, he was seen by "Dicky" smoking again in High Street. The whole school was assembled and "Dicky" lectured us about the offence, He then ordered Len to go to his study. In a few moments we heard a "swish". Being boys, we started to count. We became more and more amazed. It went on until we had counted 21 strokes, but not a cry. Later I asked Len why he hadn't shouted out, and he said: "If he'd have given me one more, I'd have yelled the place down". (It occurred to me later that R, T. R. possibly hit something else after the first few strokes,)

In 1900 the Staff consisted of:-

- The Headmaster, who took his Maths classes in the Big Room on the left of the entrance, under the clock, and handy for the bell-rope, which was pulled at the end of each lesson, as well as for assembly morning and afternoon. He was assisted by a young man named Cole, who left when Mr. Beckett retired.
- W.T.Jeffcott, who taught Latin, French and Shakespeare in Classroom D, and a New Testament Gospel, for the first-half hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. His nickname was "Piggy".
- J.Mills, who taught middle school Maths and History, in Room A, and an Old Testament book, alternating with Jeffcott on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, in the Big Room. His nickname was "Nitty".
- T.Stevenson, who took Form I in all subjects in Room C, and did most of the Extra Division French on Monday, Wednesday and Friday p.m. His nickname was "Tommy".
- J.W.Mackay taught Form II in most subjects in Room B. He also did some elementary Latin.
- H.T.Walker taught English, History and Geography in various rooms, mainly D. and F. An Oxford MA and a gentleman, but hated his job.
- W.H.Walker, who taught English and other subjects, usually In Rooms E or F. He wore exaggeratedly deep collars and cuffs.
- G.H.Storer, who taught Chemistry and occasionally Nature Study Demonstration lessons in the Lecture room, and practicals in the Lab.

- R.T.Robinson succeeded Mr. Beckett as Headmaster in July 1900 and he taught Maths and History In the Big Room, as Beckett had done. After that, Mackay left and W.H.Robinson, R.T.R's brother came. He taught some of the Latin and helped boys going to Cambridge with their compulsory Greek. He was nicknamed "Taffy".
- About 1902, Classroom E was extended to make a Physics Lab. about the same size as the Chemistry Lab, and J.W.Ramshaw came to run it. To our amused surprise he issued as our textbook Edser's *Heat for Advanced Students*. That was our Introduction to the subject!
- About 1904 Ramshaw left and was succeeded by A.Rigby from Leeds University, and about the same time a Swiss border Frenchman arrived to help the French along. He was A.Péquinat and at the end of his first year the very first ever French Oral examination was held for Cambridge Local, and I had the honour, my name beginning with B, of being the first to face the ordeal. I survived. The examiner, Professor Weekly of Nottingham University, had, luckily for us, studied at Geneva University, so our French accents were not too far apart.

The following are some of the text books used in those days, under Mr. Beckett. and for a time under Mr. Robinson

Arithmetic,	Hamblin Smith.
Algebra,	Hamblin Smith, later changed to Hall. and Knight.
Euclid,	Todhunter, later Marshall (Euclid was still in vogue.)
French.	Chardenal for Grammar and sentences. Set books for Cambridge Local.
Latin.	Kennedy's Latin Primer, Caesar to Division III, Gepp's Latin Prose. Vergil, Ovid-and Cicero for Div. I and II.
English.	West's Grammar and Verity's Texts of Shakespeare's Plays. (Only one play was studied each year, so we had to know several speeches, all the notes and glossary. There were no modern books or verse.
History.	Ransome. R.T.R. introduced Miss Thompson's book, and it seemed a strange history book.
Geography.	Longman's series for both political and physical geography
Trigonometry.	Hall and Knight, I believe, up to De Moivre's theorem.
Calculus, Differential and Integral.	J.Edwards.
Mechanics.	Loney, for both Statics and Dynamics.
Physics.	Edser's Heat for Advanced Students.
Chemistry	Roscoe?

## **,Random Jottings**

During the Boer War we began Military Drill after School, and Sergeant-Major Maher put us through our paces whether in the school playground or on the field. We also had targets under the covered shed in the playground for rifle-shooting. We used ordinary rifles with Maurice tubes inside them, making them suitable for the 22yard range. "Kitten" Thompson was our "crack-shot".

In a match in 1902 against the Barton Gentlemen for whom S.L:Evershed, county Captain of Derbyshire C.C., and his brother Frank, a Rugby International, played, my brother, C.A.Baggley, managed to score 30. They were so pleased that they gave him a bat, and continued to give two bats for the best batting and bowling averages in later years. In 1907 I got the one for batting and H.A.Jones, later Dean of Manchester, got the one for bowling.

In,1905 "The Cygnet" was hatched. At a meeting in the Chemistry Lecture room, H.S.Staley was appointed Editor. He left at the end of term to go to Birmingham University, and later to Cambridge, and I succeeded him as Editor. I still remember Mr. Jeftcott's final clue in the Acrostic which he compiled, but persuaded me to send in under my name It ran:-

"My whole is our Captain in work and in play,  
And this is what we can call him today."

The uprights of the other six other clues beginning and ending with the letters S T A L E Y and E D I T O R. Acrostics were the fore-runners of the modern Crosswords.

When Mr. Beckett died in 1907, I, and I think Arthur Bonfield, went with the Headmaster to represent the school at his. funeral,

We always had prayers again at the end of afternoon school.. After the service, the headmaster read out the names of boys who were to stay behind for detention for various misdemeanours.

We wore red and blue wide-striped cape, ("bull-scarers") costing 2/6d, (perhaps. 1/6d) or round black or dark blue "polo" caps with the school badge in front. No blazers. These caps annoyed the Park Street boys, so there were frequent battles between us and them, on our way to school.

### **Comments on members of the' Staff.'**

- W.T. Jeffcott. A good teacher, but very sarcastic. Used to go to sleep in his chair in D room each afternoon after teaching for about fifteen minutes. We preferred to do our exercises rather than to wake him up.
- J. Mills. A very conscientious good teacher. Very precise.
- T. Stevenson. Rather happy-go-lucky, but good with small boys.
- J. W. Mackay. I hardly knew, him. He seemed dour. He left soon after I went to B.G.S.
- W. H. Walker. Rather pretentious and artificial. He left about 1902.
- H. T. Walker, A good sort but a poor teacher.
- G. H. Storer. A keen teacher. Interested in boys.
- J. W. Ramshaw. Good teacher. Very energetic.
- A. Rigby. Keen but not inspiring.
- W. H. Robinson. Noisy. So were his classes. Very willing to help the boys.
- A. Pécquiot. A good teacher. Very friendly.

### **Headmasters**

- T. W. Beckett. I had only two terms with him. I found him awe-inspiring,
- R.T. Robinson. An excellent teacher with a number of characteristic mannerisms. Very sharp at times. He was very keen on History and old monasteries, etc. An excellent mathematician.