

Education in Countesthorpe, 1902-1956

This essay will consider education in Countesthorpe, a village six miles south of Leicester, between 1902 and 1956, and will cover the Cottage Homes, the County Council School and the Church of England School. Throughout this period there was also a Sunday School at St Andrews Church, though it remained relatively unchanged.¹

The Cottage Homes were established in 1884 on land to the west of Countesthorpe village by the Leicester Board of Guardians. These were a collection of eleven cottages and three schools on a 55 acre site, intended to hold up to 250 children. Initially they were intended for children whose parents were in Leicester Union workhouse, but as the Cottage Homes developed, they also housed orphans and children who had family problems.² They were never considered part of the village, despite many of the children attending St Andrews Church and many going to local Countesthorpe schools: in their distinctive uniforms, they were seen as 'worlds apart.'³ In the 1950s, there were attempts to make the Cottage Homes less institutionalised and more like a home environment. The last child left in 1974.⁴ The Homes are now large private houses, while adjacent land forms part of Countesthorpe Community College.

Following the Education Act of 1902, the County Council became a Local Education Authority, whose purpose it was to provide whatever schools were necessary within its area. Until this point Countesthorpe had two Church of England schools, one for 98 infants and one for 91 older children, although by 1900 the former was full and the latter overcrowded.⁵ A new County Council school was provided to accommodate 60 children, and by 1908 it was full, but had taken children away from the church schools, which now only had 59 infants and 81 older children.⁶ In 1912 the church school for the older children was censured by the inspectorate as 'a bad building'.⁷ A new church school was completed in 1914 for the older children, at a total cost of £820, funded partly by a grant of £80 from the National Society and £60 from the Diocesan Board.⁸

In 1928, the local education authority proposed a reorganisation of Countesthorpe schools, under which all senior scholars would attend the church school and all junior children would go to the council school although, under a compromise to satisfy the vicar, those junior children who were already at the church school could remain there until they had completed their education. The children were to receive separate religious instruction, and the management of the two schools was to remain separate.⁹ This is the beginnings of separate schools for different ages. Schools in the area also began to cooperate with each other over the dates of school holidays, firstly within

¹ <http://countesthorpe.leicestershireparishcouncils.org/26254.html> (accessed: 25 Jul. 2013)

² K. Saunders, G. Ambrose and C. Payter, *The Countesthorpe Cottage Homes ... A World Apart*, p. 4

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 9

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁵ *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1899), p. 63.

⁶ *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1908), p. 67

⁷ CERC, NS/7/1/3534, letter 4 May 1912.

⁸ CERC, NS/7/1/3534, Certificate 18 Jul. 1914.

⁹ ROLLR, DE 3627/61, 19 Nov. 1928

Countesthorpe and then over a wider local area.¹⁰ In 1932, the children from the Cottage Homes were moved from the Countesthorpe schools to schools in Leicester.¹¹

In 1921 the national leaving age of children was raised from 12 to 14, so two additional years had to be accommodated in senior schools. In June 1938 a Modern school opened in South Wigston,¹² and the local education authority decided that the children at Countesthorpe would be transferred from the age of 11 to South Wigston Modern School,¹³ showing the beginning of specific secondary education, but also reducing the role, and perhaps the perceived status, of the church school.

The Council School did not escape the horrors of the Second World War and made precautions to protect their children. In 1940, new windows were installed to protect from Air Attacks.¹⁴ Similarly, in 1942, school officials submitted pleas to have a new air raid shelter built in the boys' playground.¹⁵ However, the biggest problem schools faced during the war was staffing, as many teachers were taken away from teaching to serve in the armed forces. The managing body of the Council School sent many letters to the Director of Education requesting new teachers. One reply outlines the national problem: 'Had a normal supply of teachers been available, there is little doubt that some measures would by this time have been taken to improve the conditions. The supply of teachers is, however, now inadequate for peacetime standards of staffing, and I can hold out little hope that a change can be made in the near future.'¹⁶ In 1945, this problem was temporarily solved in the form of an evacuee teacher from London, Miss Gambie, who became a temporary teacher.

After the war, there was a far greater emphasis on child safety, health and cleanliness. There was also further reorganisation of the Countesthorpe schools, with the Director of Education advising in 1955: 'The Church of England School will become the infant school from which the children will be transferred at the age of eight to the County School which will become the Junior School.'¹⁷ The church and county schools would no longer be 'competing' for local children, and education was developing into the system we recognise today.

To conclude, this period of education history in Countesthorpe shows the changes that were taking place nationally and their effects at the local level. It shows the development of age segregated education in the form of infant, junior and secondary schools: the beginnings of modern education.

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¹⁰ ROLLR, DE3627/61, 27 Oct. 1930, 27 Oct. 1937.

¹¹ ROLLR, DE3627/61, 27 Sept., 1932.

¹² ROLLR, DE3627/61. 27 Jun. 1938

¹³ ROLLR, DE3627/61, 18 Jul., 1938.

¹⁴ ROLLR, DE3627/61 11 Jul., 1940.

¹⁵ ROLLR, DE3627/61, 28 Jul., 1942.

¹⁶ ROLLR, DE3627/61, 14 Mar., 1944.

¹⁷ ROLLR, DE3627/61, 10 May, 1955; TNA, ED 21/33439; ED 21/33440.