

Schools in Fakenham

Until the second part of the 19th century schooling for children depended on the ability of parents to pay for it. It is said that a school, run by a Mr Hall, was held in Fakenham's old Market Cross after it was condemned in the early 1800s!

There were also schools run by well-to-do ladies in their own homes but these were only for girls and infants. James Flaxman and his wife ran a school from their house on Fakenham Heath but James blotted his own copybook by getting involved in the enclosure riots which saw the setting alight of the town pump. For his part Flaxman was given 500 lines in Norwich Prison!

Between 1833 and 1839 the government found money to fund the establishment of 'National' schools for Church of England children and 'British' schools for others such as Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalists, Brethren and others. Fakenham's National school was opened in Church Lanes in 1839. The girls and infants had to wait another 9 years for their school to open at the bottom of the hill in Wells Road. Meanwhile, the Congregational minister at Fakenham, the Rev Legge, was campaigning for a 'British' school for the town. A British school was opened in what was the Station Road (now Norwich Road) in 1844. It was not in the best place. It was cramped and there was no provision for the installation of large windows. The outside lavatories were a problem in the summer when all the windows had to remain closed. The Sanitary Inspector was never very happy with this school!

There were problems with pupils in this school. Children from the poorer families often turned up at school not having had breakfast (there was no money to buy food until the end of the day). These children were tired, out of sorts and liable to pick up illness which would spread around the school. In August and September boys would take time off to top up the family income at the harvest, although the law said that they could have time off to attend school! The Boys' part of the British School burned down in 1868 but carried on with equipment borrowed from the Parish Church and the Baptists

In 1903 the responsibility for schools passed to the Local Authorities and a new Council Elementary School was built in Queens Road. This took in the Children from the two older schools although older girls and boys were separated. Land to the north was earmarked for an extension but the Great Depression put a stop to that. Instead it was de-stoned by the boys and turned into a sports field complete with poplar trees planted in pairs to act as goal posts! Land to the South was earmarked for a gym but it was never built, becoming instead the site of the wartime air-raid shelters. It passed to the army after the war where they built a house for the officer. It was eventually given the wrong name of Post Office House because a telephone exchange was built on the site in the 1970s.

A new education act in 1918 provided provision for Secondary education for those up to the age of 18 years. Highfield House in the northern suburbs of Fakenham was purchased in 1922 and converted into a school. It was a mixed school with very little segregation. This worked so well that it was used as a model of other schools. In 1935 the arrangement was adopted by Queens Road School which built a corridor between the girls and boys schools. From 1931 it had been known as Fakenham Central School.

The 1944 education act changed the organisation of schools to infant, junior, Modern Secondary and Grammar. Highfield House became a Grammar School and the top half of Queens Road became a Modern Secondary (known as a Secondary Modern School).

With the reorganisation of schools after World War two, children from the local village schools, Fakenham private schools and from RAF stations came to Queens Road school putting pressure on accommodation. In 1947 some HORSIA type temporary classrooms were built (these lasted for another 40 years!) and later, some of the school garden was sacrificed to build yet more classrooms. In 1956 work began on building a new school in Field Lane. This came at the time of the Suez Crisis when petrol and steel were in short supply. Eventually there was enough built to enable pupils to walk from Queens Road to have lessons at the new school. Work was completed in 1958 and the school was officially opened in 1959.

This left Queens Road to the junior school. The old National school for boys became the headquarters of the Town Band while the girl's school became the Church Hall until it was replaced by a new house on the site. The British School was given over to retail and in the last few years the entrance to the old school has been restored, with the exception of the wooden door, to act as the entrance to a café.

In the Jubilee year of 1977 the staff of the new Secondary Modern school came up with the idea of a name for the school to bring it into line with others in the County. It was then called the The Lancastrian School in recognition of Fakenham once being part of the Duchy of Lancaster.

In 1982 the Grammar School was merged with the Lancastrian to become Fakenham High School with the former Grammar School site becoming Fakenham College. About this time a dedicated Infant school was opened in Norwich Road.

The High School and College are now an Academy.

For more information see 'Hard Forms and Homework' by Jim Baldwin

Although this title is now out of print there are second-hand copies to be had.