

# ELEMENTARY SCHOOLING IN SHINCLIFFE

1841 – 1968

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The first public school in Shincliffe, 1841

During the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the only schools which existed in Shincliffe were the Dame schools or Private Adventure schools as they were sometimes called. They taught reading, writing and sometimes arithmetic for, perhaps, 2p per week but they were here today and gone tomorrow.

From 1837 borings and sinkings were being made at Shincliffe to locate the profitable coal seams and by 1841<sup>1</sup> the colliery had become fully operational. The population was increasing as a result and rose from 302 in 1831 to 1137 in 1841 when a considerable part of the colliery village had been built. In 1839 the railway from Shincliffe to Sunderland was completed providing an essential means of transport for the coal mines of the area. The station is where the W.I. Hut is today.<sup>2</sup> Then in 1842 the line was extended to Houghall to link up with the colliery which opened in the same year.

The first Rector of Shincliffe, the Revd. Isaac Todd, was a public spirited man who had a strong interest in education and clearly believed that the children of Shincliffe should be given the opportunity to learn to read, write, use numbers, and receive religious and moral instruction. He ran his own small boarding school with the help of a teacher at the Rectory taking, at one time, 12 boys between 8 and 13 years from as far afield as Cumberland and Paris. Shincliffe was not a wealthy living and the income from the school may well have provided a useful supplement to his stipend.

By 1840 Government grants were available for building schools and Isaac Todd managed to obtain a grant of £82.0.0 towards the building of a school at Bank Top, close to the colliery. Altogether, with gifts from Dean and Chapter, the colliery owners and others, the school was built for £300. The school, which was large enough for 80 pupils, was opened in 1841 with Edward Henville as Master. It operated on the Monitorial system where a number of older children would instruct the younger ones, hearing them read, say their spellings, do sums and supervise their writing on slates. The Master taught the older children and supervised the school from his high desk and chair at the front of the schoolroom.

The school pence would be between 2d and 4d per week according to age but the colliery owners made a contribution to the fees of their employee's children.

The old school buildings, now converted into two cottages, can still be seen today.

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<sup>1</sup> Shincliffe Colliery began commercial operation in 1839.

<sup>2</sup> After closure the old station buildings were used as a council depot before being converted to private dwellings. The Shincliffe Memorial Hall (now the Women's Institute Hut) was built on the embankment in the 1920s.

### Providing school places for a growing population, 1861 – 1865

As time went by and the population increased the school at Shincliffe Colliery, sometimes called the National School because it was connected with the National Society, a Church of England educational charity, became overcrowded.

In 1860 the Dean and Chapter gave the Rector and Churchwardens a site for a new school at Bank Foot, where the old school and house is today, although these were later buildings as we shall see. The following year, in 1861, the Government gave a grant of £86.12.6 towards a school for 42 girls and 44 infants which was built on what is now the lawn below the old school buildings. The boys continued to go to the old school at the colliery.

By 1866 the existing school premises had once again become overcrowded and were inappropriate for the method of teaching using Pupil Teachers which had been introduced by the Government in 1840. The Dean and Chapter once again gave land, a Government grant of £128.15.0 was obtained and £644.1.0 raised by subscription. The new building which consisted of the school house and adjacent building faced west on a higher site than the existing school. The girls and infants moved in to the new school, the old school at Bank Top was sold for £300, which went towards the building of the new school, and the boys moved down into what had been the girls' and infants' school.

This was a complicated manoeuvre but necessary to improve accommodation and the quality of teaching. In 1862 the system of Payment by Results had been introduced which made the Annual Grant dependent largely on the children passing the examination in the 3Rs conducted by Her Majesty's Inspector.

### Meeting the requirements of the Elementary Education Act 1870

In 1870 the first Elementary Education Act was passed which, among other things, set new standards in the provision of school places. Every parish was required to provide by voluntary means or by a rate-aided School Board the accommodation which the Government calculated was necessary. It did not make education compulsory however. This did not come until 1880. Shincliffe was assessed in 1871 and found to need an additional 155 places. The population had risen by this time to 2123.

Steps were once again taken by Isaac Todd, the Rector, and the colliery owners to provide what was required by voluntary means and so avoid having to form a School Board. A School Board would have levied a rate and this could have been an expensive option particularly for a major concern like a colliery. By 1873 Her Majesty's Inspector decreed that a school was required at the colliery as well as

additional accommodation at the Church School. This had already been anticipated by Joseph Love, the colliery owner, and in 1871 he had agreed to provide a site and school at the colliery which he conveyed to the Rector and Churchwardens. It was to be managed by the Church, the teachers were to be members of the Church of England and the Rector was to have superintendence of religious and moral instruction. This was a remarkable agreement for its time as Joseph Love was a life-time member of the Methodist New Connexion and nationally there existed a great deal of suspicion and even animosity between the Church and Nonconformists on educational matters. Nevertheless, this appeared to be a satisfactory outcome for Shincliffe and the new school was opened in February 1874 with Mr R. R. Taylor as Master.

Sadly the Revd. Isaac Todd died in June 1873 but not before work had been put in hand to extend the new school built in 1865 at Bank Foot. A Government Grant of £297.7.0 was obtained and the newly extended school was opened on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1874 with Mr Hoyle as Master and all the children under one roof. What became of the old boys' school the records do not divulge.

#### The closure of Shincliffe Colliery and a surplus of school places, 1875 – 1886

The year 1875 heralded a period of considerable uncertainty about the future of Shincliffe Colliery. In January the National School Log Book recorded that the majority of the workforce had been given notice; but then there were reports of a change in working practice underground and later that the number of workers was being increased.

Whatever was the case, over the next few years the workforce gradually declined. This is shown by the average attendance figure at school. The National School at Bank Foot was affected most when between 1875 and 1881 the average attendance fell from over 100 pupils to 41. There was a quick turnover of masters, each being pressed to take a reduction in salary and resigning rather than doing so. Finally in 1881 the Managers decided that the school was no longer viable and that it must close.

The Colliery School continued to function but here the fall in average attendance was not as great as at the National School only falling from 134 in 1875 to 121 in 1886. The school depended upon the Colliery for financial support including the subsidy for school fees, but in 1886 the Colliery finally closed, the financial support ceased and the Colliery School too had to close.

The Church was quick to take advantage of the situation and the National School re-opened on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1886 with Mr John Carr as Master and 147 children on the roll. It has remained in the village to the present day.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The school at Bank Foot continued to be used until 1968 when it was replaced by the present Church school in High Shincliffe. The old school and school house at Bank Foot are now private houses.

### The village school in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the elementary school was established as part of the fabric of village life, its standards were gradually improving and its curriculum was widening. But change was always round the corner. 1902 saw the passing of an Education Act which created Local Education Authorities (L.E.A's) for elementary education and provided rate-aid for the voluntary schools for the first time. Shincliffe chose to remain a Church of England school rather than take the option of becoming an L.E.A. school.

Shincliffe School passed through a time of relative stability under the leadership of Mr Carr who, after 21 years' service, retired in 1921. His place was taken by Mr H. Appleton at a time when there were 156 children on roll.

The curriculum and teaching methods changed gradually after the ending of the system of Payment by Results in 1897. One example of this was the introduction of rural science and gardening in rural schools. Shincliffe too had its school garden on the ground to the north of the building.

Then came the second world war and in September 1939, shortly after the outbreak, 33 children from Warrier Street School, Walker upon Tyne were evacuated to Shincliffe with 3 of their teachers. In March 1940, Mr Appleton was called up for military service leaving Miss Marriot<sup>4</sup> in charge. Air-raid precautions were taken and shelters constructed in the school garden where they remained until the 1960s.

With the 1944 Education Act and the introduction of secondary education for all the structure of the education system was changed once again. The elementary schools had served their purpose in giving children from 5 to 14 years a good basic education but they did not have the facilities or the specialist staff to provide an appropriate secondary education. In 1949, like many other small village schools, Shincliffe became a primary school taking children from 5 to 11 years. It also became a Church of England (Controlled) School which meant that the Church passed its financial responsibility to the L.E.A. and the management was shared with local representatives. With the addition of parents and teachers so it remains to the present time.

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<sup>4</sup> Miss Cecilia Marriot had previously been a teacher a Shincliffe School but upon her marriage to Noel Morgan she was required to give up her career. However, during the second world war, with many male teachers in the services, married women teachers were welcomed back into the profession.

The development of High Shincliffe and the building of a new school, 1968

Following the closure of the colliery in 1886 the population of Shincliffe Colliery gradually declined, many of the miners' houses became derelict and Bank Top took on an air of desolation. Over the years the old streets were demolished leaving but a few with names to remind us of former days.

In the 1960s the future of the school was once again in doubt and once again new development and the prospect of a rising population secured its future with the building of Hill Meadows in 1964, Whitwell Acres in 1968 and then the extensive housing on the colliery site itself which was completed in 1975. But it had become clear in the 1960s that the old school at Bank Foot was not sufficiently large nor did it have the appropriate facilities for a modern primary school. History seemed to be repeating itself when in 1968 the present Shincliffe Church of England (Controlled) Junior Mixed and Infant School was built on the site of the old colliery.

The staff and the children moved into the new school in the Summer Term of 1968 with Miss Alice Chapelow as Head Teacher. Miss Chapelow had joined the staff in 1934 under Mr Appleton. When he retired in 1955<sup>5</sup>, she became Head Teacher following in a tradition of long and faithful service.

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*This paper was researched and written by Michael Lowes in May 1994. A shortened, edited version entitled "Schools and Schooling in Shincliffe" was used for the Parish Council Centenary Exhibition in the same year. The original paper has been reproduced with additional footnotes.*

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Appleton retired in July 1955; Alice Chapelow was officially appointed Head in January 1956.