

## Schoolchildren Pre-War

The following extracts are taken from the West Lothian Courier of 2 January 1914.

They detail the third annual report on the medical inspection of the schoolchildren for the year ending July 1913, by John Hunter, MB, ChB, DPH.

*For the purpose of Medical Inspection the area comprises the whole of the County of Linlithgow, and in addition, that portion of the Parish of Kirkliston which is situated in the adjacent County of Midlothian, and in which is situated Newbridge Public School.*

*Number of Schools and Scholars – the total number of schools in the area is 51, comprising 43 public, 1 under trustees, and 7 voluntary. The voluntary schools are all Roman Catholic in denomination. This total is the same as in the previous year. During the year additions have been made to two schools, namely; Uphall Public School and Bathgate Academy. These additions are now in full use. Two new schools have been built at Craigbinning and Whitburn. The former replaces the old and unsatisfactory school at Craigbinning. The latter may be called an addition to the present school at Whitburn, but the new building is quite apart from the usual school. Both schools are now in full use. Work has also been commenced on an addition to Stoneyburn School.*

*There are no special schools in the area, nor are there special classes in any of the ordinary schools for abnormal children, such as those who are mentally or physically defective.*

*The total school population is approximately 17,000 children, of whom about 12 per cent are in attendance at the voluntary schools, whilst the remainder attend the public schools.*

During this medical inspection, it was noted that many of the children were wrongly clothed.

*Quite frequently during the examination of the boys, especially the very young ones in the group of entrants, I have observed that the fork of the braces at the back was close up to the neck and that this frequently caused a bending forward of the head and a stooping of the shoulders. In several instances the buttons on the back of the trousers might have been absent altogether because the trousers were practically suspended from the boy's neck.*

*Again amongst the girls, many of the older ones were found to be wearing extremely badly fitting corsets. In nearly all of these cases it was quite evident that these garments had been previously worn by another and older member of the family for whom, for reasons which need not be specified here, they have become unsuitable or uncomfortable. Many articles of clothing can, with some slight alterations, descend from one member of a family to another but corsets are certainly not to be included in this class.*

Barefooted children were also noted during this inspection. According to this report 5.3% of boys and 5.4% of girls attended school with 'poorly shod' shoes. 0.6% of boys and 0.2% of girls had leaking boots and 1% of boys and 0.2 of girls were barefooted while attending school.

*There is also a decrease in the number of children attending school with bare feet, only 17 boys and 4 girls being noted in this state. From a medical point of view the bare-footed children are not so likely to suffer evil effects as those who have badly leaking boots with thin worn through soles.*

7.5% of boys and 10.2% of girls' examined were below average for their weight and were noticeably undernourished. Defective feeding at home was a problem in 1913.

*The greater proportion of the children who were found to be suffering from malnutrition was made up of those in the poorer classes who at the same time were also found to be dirty and occasionally verminous.*

*In this County, defective feeding and actual physical defect, such as anaemia, account for many of the cases. By defective feeding is meant not insufficient, but unsuitable food. In technical terms the diet of these children was found to contain too much carbohydrate, too little protein and fat, and often too much material of a non-nourishing nature in the shape of tea and cheap sweets.*

In the 1913 Medical Inspection, John Hunter noted that there had been a 3.6% drop in girls with 'verminous head' from the previous year. The majority of the verminous heads belonged to younger children at 8.3%, John Hunter blames this on 'incapable and indifferent mothers'

*The following table shows the improvement in regard to verminous conditions of the head which has been observed during the three years since Medical Inspections commenced. In dealing with the figures referring to the girls, the very large reduction in the second year is partly accounted for by the fact that the older girls were examined for the first time that year.*

1910-11 ..... boys 2.3 per cent & girls 21.6 per cent  
1911-12 ..... boys .07 per cent & girls 9.8 per cent  
1912-13 ..... boys .06 per cent & girls 6.2 per cent

*The state of children's teeth during inspection was startling. The report detailed it as being 'indifference to the teeth'.*

*Condition of Mouth and Teeth – this has again to be described as most unsatisfactory. Out of a total of 1585 routine girls examined, only 358 had satisfactory sets of teeth, and out of 1661 boys examined, the same number were found to be in a similar condition. I use the word 'satisfactory' instead of 'sound' because many children were found who had had several teeth extracted at different periods. Their teeth were satisfactory in that there were no dental caries present, but they did not constitute a complete set.*

## The Effects of War on Children

On 7 April 1916, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported that West Lothian teachers attended a conference at Grange Public School in Bo'ness. They were addressed by Dr Morgan, Principal of the Provincial Training College. Dr Morgan's topic was 'Problems of Education after the War'.

*In our scheme of education for adolescents, instruction must be given regarding the means of improving national stock. But education will fail if it only strengthens the body. It must fashion the soul that tenants it. The war had showed more clearly than ever that character must be the main objective in education. Glaring defects had been shown in the results of our moral education. We see them in the amount of moral shipwreck in life, the intemperate, the dishonest, the impure, the lack of discipline in many of our industries which was endangering our success in the war. Part of the solution in combating the cult of unfettered freedom was to emphasise the importance of social service, and in creating the sense of being in a great common enterprise of civilisation.*

On 27 July 1917, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported on the effect that the war had on juvenile morale and behaviour.

*The police records demand the attention of all interested in the training of the young. Mr Munro Fraser, Chief Inspector of the Western Division, in referring to the increase in the number of juvenile offences, says: 'Such causes as the absence of parents and social workers during the war, the darkening of our public streets, the high wages earned by juveniles, and the prevalence of the fighting spirit – not by any means an unmixed evil – are to be credited with most of these outbursts of misdirected activity.' Mr Wattie, Chief Inspector of the Northern Division says: 'The general tendency of all these causes has been an earlier assertion of independence of control. Something, too, must be set down to the spirit of manly emulation of brothers and fathers at the front. The principle cause is youthful energy finding a wrong outlet, the true remedy lies in its redirection, not in repression. Already the greater bulk of the adolescent population are well provided with the scope for employing profitably their leisure hours, whether through Boys Brigades, Boy Scout Patrols or attendance at continuation classes, and social improvement must be looked for by the persistent extension of these hopeful agencies. While, however, the physical wellbeing of the children has on the whole improved, and no effort is being spared to prevent intellectual loss due to the war, the Department regrets the apparent break in what it hoped was a steadily rising improvement in morals and manners'.*

There was also a huge impact on education and school life.

*No one interested in the welfare of children can view without deep concern the fact that some thousands of pupils are leaving school at present with an educational equipment the defects of which will never be made good.*

## Farmers and Child Labour

On 2 June 1916, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported that Linlithgow School Board had discussed proposals to take away two weeks of the summer holidays, to give a two week holiday in October instead. This holiday was suggested as a way to help farmers with their potato-lifting.

*In view of the controversy which has been taking place for some time on the subject of altering the school holidays of the public schools to permit children being employed by farmers in the parish, in which they were asked to reply to certain queries on the subject. The circular was in the following terms: 'The School Board are shortly to consider whether owing to the war, it is expedient to provide special facilities by making suitable school vacations for the employment of school children in securing the crops, and they therefore desire to have first-hand information from the farmers in the parish as to whether they think such assistance is required, and if so, when it could be most advantageously given. I will therefore be obliged by your kindly filling in answers to the annexed questions and returning the sheet to me as soon as possible.'*

*The queries were:-*

*Do you think that the assistance of schoolchildren is required for the securing the crops, either grain or potato?*

*If you think such assistance necessary, what period or periods of the year do you suggest for freeing the schoolchildren?*

*The clerk reported that only fifty per cent of the farmers had troubled to answer the circular at all. Forty-six circulars were issued, and 26 replies were received. In reference to assistance connected with securing the white crops, 10 farmers say that the assistance of schoolchildren is desirable, and 16 say that it is not required. In regard to securing the potato crop, 24 farmers say that the help of schoolchildren is necessary, and 2 say that it is not. The time suggested for help in potato-gathering is generally the month of October.*

During this School Board meeting, it was established that the only school affected by the possible need for potato-lifting was Bridgend School, while Linlithgow Public School was not affected at all. A disagreement broke out amongst the members of the School Board.

*Mr Davie – But the imported labour from Ireland is not forthcoming.*

*Mr Dyke – I say it has been forthcoming.*

*Mr Davie – I say it has not.*

*Mr Dyke – I speak from first-hand experience and Mr Davie is speaking from second-hand. He merely says what he is told, but I go among the farmers and I am giving my own personal experience.*

*Mr Davie – I am giving my experience.*

*Mr Dyke – I beg your pardon, you are never amongst them at all in the way that I am.*

*Mr Wilson suggested that in cases where juvenile labour was desired, the parents and farmer might make application for the temporary exemption of any boy, and the Board might give these requests their best consideration. He thought it would be a pity to give October school holidays to the public schools when so few of the pupils would be engaged in potato-lifting. The Chairman said he was quite sure the Board would consider Mr Wilson's suggestion. Continuing, the Chairman said it might prove a serious business to allow children to work out of doors in bad weather in October, as some of them might contract illnesses lasting for months, and he did not think the Board should take the responsibility of allowing the children to do so. He did not think that there was a great amount of potato-growing in their district, as it would not compare in this respect with counties like Haddington and Ayrshire. Only one of their schools, Bridgend was affected by this question, and it was only slightly affected last year, while Linlithgow Public School was not affected at all.*

*Mr Davie – I think it was affected.*

*The Chairman said that he was told by the headmaster it was not affected. He believed if a vote of the parents was taken on the question that 90 or 95 per cent of them would say, 'No we do not want our children to go to the fields on a winter day and gather potatoes' and he did not see why all the school children should be compelled to take a holiday in October for the sake of five or six per cent of the children who wished to go potato-gathering.*

*Mr Davie – In these exceptional times, when labour is so scarce, we ought to consider the matter.*

*The Chairman thought the best way to deal with it was by the plan suggested by Mr Wilson.*

On 7 April 1916, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported that West Lothian teachers were addressed by Dr Morgan, Principal of the Provincial Training College at a conference at Grange Public School in Bo'ness. His topic was 'Problems of Education after the War', suggesting that school leaving age should be raised to 15. He knew that this suggestion would not be welcomed by employers and parents.

*The first step should be to raise the age at which it is permissible to leave school to 15. This is necessary both on educational and biological grounds and it is an essential part of the democratic ideal of the free and unfettered development of capacity in society. Of course there will be opposition from some employers and parents. It was once thought impossible to keep children at school after nine because of the value of little children in the mills, although it was known that this was doing irreparable injury to the children, and was depriving adult workers of a livelihood. Working class parents would be willing to make the sacrifice of keeping their children at school a year longer than at present provided they are convinced that it would be for the children's good, and after the war will be an opportune time to raise the compulsory school age as, besides being a great and necessary educational reform, it will lessen the overcrowding of the labour market when millions of workmen free from the war.*

## How the War affected Staffing for Schools

At the end of June 1915, schools in Linlithgow closed for almost two months. On 9 July 1915, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported that some 8,000 Scottish teachers volunteered for war work during this time. Teachers in Linlithgow had offered their services.

*We understand that teachers in the Linlithgow district have almost unanimously offered themselves for war service during the summer vacation, and they have thus helped to swell the army of about eight thousand who have agreed that the shining hours of the holidays are not to be given up to play but to work of a kind that none of them ever experienced before.*

On 3 December 1915, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported:

*At the monthly meeting of the Linlithgow School Board on Monday evening – Rev. F.P. O'Brien, chairman presiding – it was intimated that two of the teachers at the Academy, Messrs Lockhart and Gilchrist, desired to be relieved of their duties to enable them to undertake military service. After consultation with the rector in regard to the work of the Academy – it being pointed out that the school is already short staffed in regard to male teachers, and that the withdrawal of the two teachers mentioned would interfere with the work of the Academy and the evening continuation classes – it was agreed that Mr Gilchrist's application be granted, and that in the case of Mr Lockhart the Board lodge an appeal with the local Recruiting Tribunal. It was also agreed that the Chief Inspector of Schools should be communicated with on the subject of permitting certain relaxations of the code in respect to size of classes and other matters which would facilitate the work in view of the depletion of the staff.*

On 23 March 1917, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported:

*Mr Dunn, rector, Academy, Bathgate, made application for temporary extension for Harry Blackwood, age 28 (married), teacher of English, History and geography, Thornwood, Bathgate. Mr Dunn, in support of his claim, said Mr Blackwood was the only male teacher in the Academy. He (Mr Dunn) had come back from retirement to his old post as rector when Mr R. A. Brown, the rector who succeeded him, was called to the colours over two years ago. It was not to be expected that he could go on forever and a day. In a higher-graded school, where junior students ranged from 14 to 19 years, it was absolutely necessary to have a male teacher – at least one. He had made no appeal when any of the other teachers were called, but this was the last. There were 800 scholars in the elementary classes and 200 higher-grade students, and they really could not do without a man. Temporary exemption was granted till 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1917.*

On 11 May 1917, the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* reported:

*The military appealed against a decision of the Bathgate Tribunal in granting temporary exemption till 30<sup>th</sup> September to Harry Blackwood, principal teacher of English, history and geography in Bathgate Academy.*

*The trustees asked that he be allowed to remain until the end of the session in June.*

*Mr Dunn, interim rector, appealed for the Academy. He said that they were a higher-grade school of 200 pupils. There were 40 junior students, and he had had to appoint females to take the place of the men on the staff already called up. The ages of the pupils ranged from 12 to 20, and he thought it was right that Mr Blackwood, who was the only man left, should be in the service of the trustees to take charge. He (Mr Dunn) reached the age-limit four years ago, and he had been working these last three years. He could not go on much longer, and if he retired and Mr Blackwood were taken for the Army, there would not be a man left to take charge.*

*Mr Blackburn K.C. – How many male teachers were there before?*

*Mr Dunn – The rector, the art master, and the classical master all joined the forces. I am acting as rector in the rector's absence. The Local Tribunal were unanimous in granting temporary exemption to Mr Blackwood. But if you think it is necessary that he should be called up, I should ask that he might be allowed at least to stay until 13<sup>th</sup> June, when the session ends and give the trustees an opportunity to find a substitute.*

*Mr Blackburn – What is the age of the oldest boy in the Academy?*

*Mr Dunn – Within the last month we have had three over 18 years of age called up for the Army. We have girls up to 20, junior students.*

*Mr Blackburn – Is it a fact that what you originally asked for was temporary exemption until 7<sup>th</sup> April?*

*Mr Dunn – Yes, when Mr Anderson appeared first of all, I certainly asked that Mr Blackwood should be allowed to remain until the examinations were over, but when I began to think over it, it had a different look altogether.*

*Mr Blackburn – Second thoughts are different altogether. (Laughter)*

*In reply to a suggestion from the Bench that women could be employed as teachers, Mr Dunn said that a woman could not look after boys of over 18 years of age.*

*The military appeal was sustained, the man not to be called up before 20<sup>th</sup> May.*

The shortage of teachers led to many older teachers being brought out of retirement. For at least one of them, the effort proved too much

On 29 March 1918, it was announced that Linlithgow's schoolmaster Mr James Walker had passed away. Mr Walker had taught in Linlithgow for over 40 years and it was reported that he came out of retirement to help with the shortage of school staff due the war.

*Last Saturday morning Mr James Walker, who for over forty years was a teacher in Linlithgow, passed quietly away at the rooms he occupied in High Street. He was at his post on Friday, and taught his class as usual, although he was far from well and on the following morning he was found dead in bed. Mr Walker may be said therefore, to have died in harness, he gave the last remnants of his strength for the benefit of his pupils to whom he was closely attached. Former pupils, many of whom are far away at this moment, will learn with deep regret that their old schoolmaster has passed away. In February 1914, Mr Walker retired under the age limit, and on that occasion he was made the recipient of a striking testimonial subscribed for by the general community. But the rest he had hoped for was not to last very long. When war broke out in the following August, and one of the teachers Mr Robert McKay was mobilised with the Territorial Force, Mr Walker consented to forgo his well-earned period of leisure and he came back again to the school to resume the teaching of his class. Devoted as he was to his profession, he did not spare himself, although he had almost reached the age of seventy.*