

THE HISTORY OF MANOR STREET SCHOOL

(Home of Braintree District Museum)



BEGINNINGS

The first phase of building work for Manor Street School was completed in 1862, partly on the site of the 1820 British School and also on land, originally part of Manor Farm, which over the years had passed through various hands before finally being purchased by the silk manufacturer George Courtauld. In those days school attendance was not compulsory, and many children were used for cheap labour in industry or agriculture. Through the influence and funding of the Church and a few wealthy philanthropists however, schooling was slowly becoming available to a wider segment of society, and Manor Street School was a good example of this.

George Courtauld bequeathed £2,200 to build the school, together with a further £1,000 for the Trustees to use for maintenance. The original legal document of 1851, which sets out the terms under which the school was to be established, declared that it was to be “for the education of children of the labouring, manufacturing and other poorer classes”.

Manor Street School was unusual in that it was founded as a non-sectarian institution at a time when other Board Schools and National Schools had strong religious backgrounds. Governance and management was to be under twelve people, elected annually, of whom five were to be parents of children in the school. An extract from the Trust Deed can still be read on a marble plaque in the main Museum gallery.

In 1875 the school was handed over to the Braintree School Board for a rental of £1 per year and an agreement that religious education was to follow that shown on the Trust Deed. At that time very little money was available to maintain a school and great economy had to be exercised; the Headmaster trained a number of older children to act as 'monitors', who were given the task of 'teaching' what they had learned to younger children. Parents were expected to pay towards the costs of education, and the collection of this money often caused problems. An entry in the school logbook for 1886 reads: "Have had great difficulty collecting the fees. When the children are sent home for them, they do not return".

EXPANSION



An entry in Kelly's Directory reveals that by 1890 Manor Street School was a Board School for 500 children, with an average attendance of 130 boys, 130 girls and 95 infants. In 1897 a separate building was added for the infants, which now houses Braintree District Museum's Learning for Life Centre.

Children attended Manor Street School until the age of 14, with only a few leaving earlier to attend Braintree High School in Coggeshall Road (now the Social Services Offices). This changed in 1938 when all children left at 11 and those not gaining a place at the High School went to the newly built Margaret Tabor School in Panfield Lane (now demolished).

During World War II many evacuees and teachers came to Braintree, and some were allocated Manor Street as their wartime school. During this time air raid shelters were built on the playground area opposite, which is now a Council car park, and these were replaced by a canteen, hall and kitchen after the war.

CLOSURE AND REVIVAL

In 1987 the School celebrated its 125th anniversary with a large programme of events, although it was already scheduled for closure due to its limited and dated facilities. Manor Street School finally closed in 1990.

Not long afterwards the School building was handed over to the care of a Trust that, together with Braintree District Council, aims to house and manage the District's heritage. Braintree District Museum opened its main galleries within the Manor Street building in October 1993, with the John Ray Room and Learning for Life Centre following in 1996 and 2002 respectively.

Nearly 150 years later, the legacy of Manor Street School lives on – the Museum authentically maintains one of the original Victorian classrooms which is frequently brought to life with role-playing school visits, and many other objects and archives relating to the School's history can be found within the Museum's collections.



DID YOU KNOW?

The name Manor Street refers to the locality of the Bishop's Manor of 'Raines', as recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086.