

Brough School during the Great War

Anne Speed

Brough Church of England Primary School was opened in 1897, with 41 children on roll, divided into two classes. The cost was £500, raised by public subscription, which included £100 donated by Cecil Smith Woolley himself.

The school log book records Woolley as

“a great benefactor to this place and greatly beloved by all who knew him.

Cecil Smith Woolley was the founder of this school and church.”¹



The school building was small and contained only two rooms for teaching; the main room measuring approximately 6m² and the classroom slightly smaller at 5m².

Brough Church of England Primary School²

There was also a tiny playground outside, a portion of which was set aside for gardening. Although the accommodation had been planned for up to 58 children, it was fortunate that numbers never reached higher than 45, since conditions were crowded even at this level. During the Great War, the average number on roll was 32.¹

When war broke out in 1914, Miss Florence Griffith³ had already served for seven years as the Mistress of Brough School. There had been difficulties with recruiting and keeping staff ever since the opening of the school in 1897.

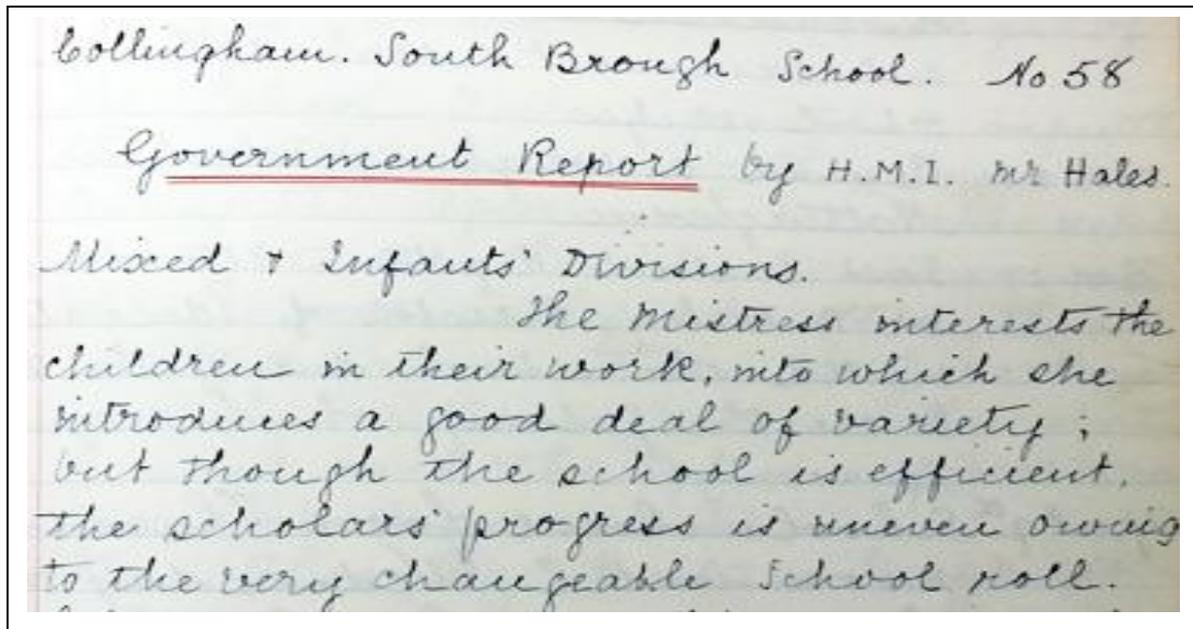
Under her tenure, however, the school had gone from strength to strength. She continued to lead the school throughout the war, successfully managing her school despite many challenges.

¹ Information from Brough School log book, Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives

² Photograph from box EC JJ, Collingham Archives, Jubilee Room

³ Miss F.E. Griffith recorded as “Mistress” at Brough School in Kelly’s Trade Directory 1912

In the school log book Miss Griffith frequently recorded her frustration with fluctuating numbers on roll: *“With the exception of two children, all others are children of farm labourers, hence there is much to contend with; the school roll is often changing. Labourers, as a rule, do not stay long in the district.”*



Extract from inspection report

In January 1914, this problem was recognised in the report above, from the Annual School Inspection, carried out by HMI Mr. J.E.Hales.⁴

As well as the changeable school roll, progress was hampered by irregular attendance. Farmers were short of labour and turned to young boys to help out in the fields. They were required to dig potatoes and help with the harvest each summer, which kept them away from school for several weeks at a time.

On one occasion, Miss Griffith recorded that a ten-year-old boy had been employed by a local farmer *“to take a beast to Newark Fair.”* In 1918, two boys missed school one day, to take sheep to Farndon. Miss Griffith complained, *“These boys are constantly working for farmers.”*

Soon after the end of the war, the school was still exasperated that young boys were *“away from school being employed by farmers. This is cheap labour for the farmer and ought to be stopped – children cannot progress when this procedure is allowed.”*

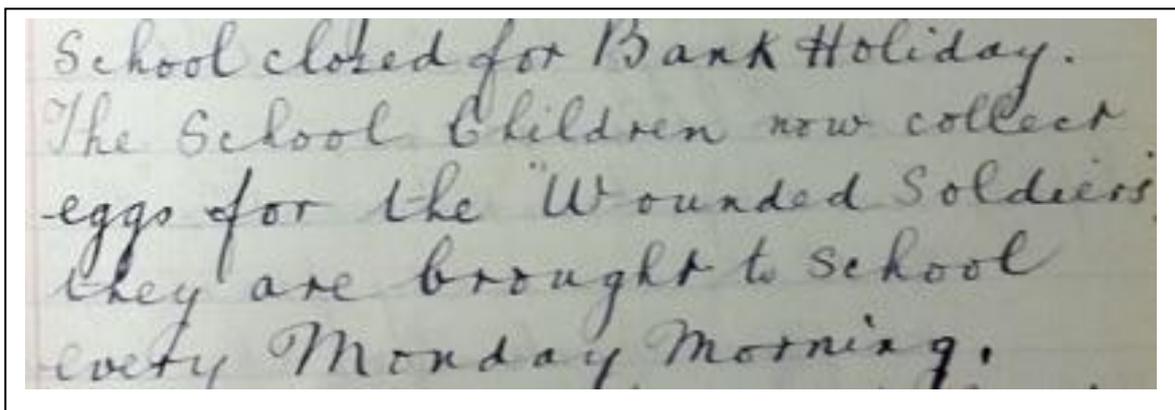
⁴ Extract from Brough school log book, photographed by Anne Speed. Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives S/L40/2/1

Bad weather during the war had an effect on school attendance too. Children had to walk to school whatever the weather and many were poorly clothed. On several occasions the school was closed, due to heavy falls of snow. In March 1915, there were no lessons, due to impassable snow drifts. In January 1917, children struggled all week to get to school through the snow and in January 1918, the weather was so bad that only four children made it to lessons. In February 1917, severe frost caused inkpots to freeze overnight.⁵

Even when teachers and children arrived in school, it could be bitterly cold inside the building. The temperature was recorded as below 50 degrees on one occasion and the fire, which Miss Griffith had to light when she arrived in the morning, would fill the main room with smoke.

Despite these difficulties, lessons proceeded throughout the war years and the children contributed a great deal to the war effort. They sowed potatoes, peas, swede and cabbages and tended the growing vegetables in their school garden. In November 1914, vegetables were given to Belgian refugees, accommodated in Collingham. Throughout the war years, children at the school packed vegetables, which were sent to the Red Cross Hospital for wounded soldiers in Newark.⁵

Every Monday, children brought surplus eggs from home, which were sent to the Red Cross depot for distribution. Up to 30 eggs each week would reach wounded soldiers at the hospital.⁶



Extract from log book

⁵ Source: Collingham and District in the Great War by Trevor Frecknall

⁶ Extract from Brough school log book, photographed by Anne Speed. Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives S/L40/2/1

Mittens and shirts were made in school lessons and sent off to the Red Cross. The older girls knitted scarves and socks for soldiers.

In late summer, school would close early so that children could gather blackberries in Norton Woods. In all, more than 40 lbs were collected. They were made into jam, as part of the *Waste not/Want not* government scheme.

In common with other local schools, children at Brough brought money to school each week to buy War Savings stamps. A total of £153.0s 6d was collected.

Basic supplies of educational materials were scarce indeed. Books became tatty and there was a shortage of writing materials. Miss Griffith's efforts impressed HMI Bruce Webster when he inspected the school in 1917; *"The mistress has been complying with the persistent request of the Education Authority to use less exercise books and to economise on account of the war."*⁷

At last, the Great War came to an end, but the children at Brough School continued their efforts in supporting the wounded. In 1918, as news of the Armistice reached the school, the children were busy packing vegetables for the Red Cross Hospital in Newark. They simply carried on, *"with a cheerier spirit."*⁷



*Celebrations of Peace in Collingham 1919*⁸

The following year, in July 1919, Brough joined the Peace Celebrations in Collingham and Miss Griffith wrote in the log book *"The children went in Mr. Horner's wagon, decorated with flags and evergreens."*

⁷ Information from Brough School log book, Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives

⁸ Photograph from postcard in Box WCD FF1, Collingham Archives

