



THE HISTORY OF CAPELLES SCHOOLS

The area of Capelles has had a very long tradition for learning. There are many records of schools on the site before this latest Primary School.

The States of Guernsey Archives Service is an ideal place to research any part of local history and I am indebted to them for their help in compiling this short history of the schools. The earliest record in the Archives comes from The History of Education in Guernsey by PJ Girard published by "Las Societe Guernesiasse" in 1978(Ref1).

THE EARLY YEARS

On the 26th of March 1785, De'laissance -Daniel Falla, Ezechiel Robin and Thomas Ogier authorised by Chefs de Famille St Sampsons, by contract of September 1780, with inhabitants of the Vingtaine de L'Epins, Vale for the establishment of a school for St Sampsons called L'Ecole des Hautes Capelles, sole (de laisse) of rente to other subscribers of the said school, Jean Laine, Jean Mahy, son of Nicolas, Thomas Robin, Thomas Le Poidevin, Jean Falla, and Michel Le Poidevin, guardian of Thomas Le Poidevin.

In the following month there were discussions about the erection of a bell and memorial stone.

In Jan of 1786 the Head Teacher's salary was fixed at 24 guineas per quarter (£100.80p per annum).

On the 14th January 1789, Ezechiel Robin gave a gift of £15 and 9 shillings for the bell and stone. In July of that year a meeting was held to discuss the ideas and opinions as to the type of commemorative stone to be erected to mark the opening.

The next recorded event was an invitation from Thomas Ogier and Jean Blampied, as founders and subscribers of L'Ecole des Hautes Capelles, St Sampsons. This was for a meeting at the school on the 25th of the month at 2.00pm to discuss the fixing of the tax to fund the salary of the school master, Pierre Robin, for 1789 and other matters relating to the school.

On the 20th of June 1790, Jean Mahy, son of Jean, of Pulus, St Sampsons, gave a donation of rent to Jean Blampied, son of Thomas, as representatives of the founders of L'Ecole des Hautes Capelles, St Sampsons, for the benefit of the school.

By June 1809, Pierre Robin, the Head teacher had his salary increased to £206 tournois per annum and a further £500 to be paid to other members of staff.

The end of November 1818, saw a further gift of rentes from Nicholas Robin, son of Pierre, to Daniel Robin, representative of L'Ecole des Hautes Capelles. This gift was quite momentous as it was for a school for girls. Further confirmation of this is found

in ## the recently published history of James Saumarez where we are told that he also gave rentes to establish the school for girls.

FURTHER LINKS WITH THE CHURCH

Francis Le Poidevin has written a fascinating book which charts the history of Capelles Methodist Church. (Ref2) In it he says that in the Minute Books of the Vale, it mentions that, "In 1779 it was decided by several parishioners of St Sampson's and L'Epine to build a school at Hautes Capelles so that their children could be educated in the district. A plot of land was given for the purpose, provided that the parishioners took over the small rente due to the land. The plot measured 24 perches. Each parishioner made a contribution towards the cost, and was mostly done by transferring rentes for the benefit of the school which was opened in 1784. It measured 50ft X 20ft and was 7ft high at the eaves. A bell was purchased and mounted on the school."

This was the same time in the island's history that Martello towers were being built.

GIRLS IN SCHOOL!

Up until this time it was considered that education was only fit for boys. Girls would stay at home and learn how to keep house, knit and sew. There only formal education being at Sunday School at church. Now was the time of change.

In the recently published book of The Life of James Saumarez (Ref 3) we read that, "In 1818 Saumarez appears before the Royal Court to commit a quarter of wheat rente for the establishment of a girls' school at the Capelles (this represented a legal agreement to pay a sum of money annually)". It is reasonable to suppose, with the thinking on education in those days, that there was already a school for boys on the site or at least in the area.

COMPULSORY EDUCATION

The 1st June 1900 saw a new law passed by the States which made school attendance compulsory. Unfortunately these new entrants to education started in buildings which were old, outdated and dilapidated

The Island had a visit from the UK. They sent their Chief Her Majesties Inspector. (HMI) He was less than complimentary about some of the island schools including Hautes Capelles Infants. He reported that, "such schools as Les Landes, the Maresquet and the Hautes Capelles Infant School are veritable plagues spots". He went on to criticise backless desks, lack of playground accommodation and the condition of the toilets.

THE WAR YEARS AND AFTER

When war was declared, education on the island became very fragmented. It took the Education Council a little while to organise themselves as they were not sure just how many pupils had evacuated and how many were left to be educated. They of course had also to find teachers to teach those who were left as many had enlisted and some had accompanied pupils to the UK in the evacuation.

The Education Council Archives show;

that schools started up again after two weeks. The Germans took over some schools as barracks and food stores and the Capelles School was moved out after a few months.

Malcolm Woodland remembers returning to school after their being a notice in the paper. He doesn't think that he went back to Capelles but to the tea rooms at the Picquerel, right at the end of Grande Harve, by the Salvation Army Fortress as it is now. The classes were all dispersed. He thinks that there were two classes at the tea rooms and there were some down at Salem. Later he went to Ker Maria with several classes and then for a short time to a little room by the Catholic Chapel at St Magloire, he went to one class there. They then moved to a place called the Salines, which had quite a large house up at Claque, and from there went on to Grande Maison at the bottom of Rue Sauvage, Roussel's vinery.

One way to stop the Germans commandeering a house was to set up school classes in there.

Malcolm tells us that one of the positive sides of these small classes and moves was that you got to know friends without the problems of big schools and knowing lots of people. As you moved year you went to another house. The tearooms where Malcolm restarted his education were commandeered by the Germans after about 8 months so they had to move out.

Teachers moved around with the class. It must have been hard for them, they could not move from house to house so you had the same teachers for all the subjects. (Much the same as Primary education today).

The school was divided for the whole of the Occupation. The first time that Malcolm went to a "proper" school was when he passed to the Intermediate, which was at Burnt Lane. The first time that he had seen a lot of classes and teachers altogether in the same building.

Brian Le Conte also recalls being at Capelles School. He too was educated in a series of scattered rooms. In the winter he wore "sabots" with car tyre soles, cloth tops and metal horse shoes to protect the soles. On cold frosty winter mornings you could skate down the Rue Sauvage.

Education had a less complex nature than the modern curriculum. He remembers that lessons were mainly Maths and English. They wrote stories and did sums and General Knowledge. Many of the lessons depended on the particular interests which the teacher had. Brian remembers having a teacher who enjoyed Nature Study. The class would visit the quarry at the Grande Maison to watch the kingfishers. When the exercise book was full it would be turned on its side to save paper.

Playtimes were spent in the front garden of the house. On the way home they would play marbles in the road. They used glass marbles from pop bottles. If you owned a "steely", which was a ball bearing, it was worth about ten glass marbled and was much prized. Wow betides any child today trying to play marbles in the road on the way home.

THE SCHOOL LOG BOOK

Life in school during the war years was far from easy. The School Log Book of the time has numerous entries which describe the fate of the pupils left on the Island in school.

There were regular examinations for "cleanliness". On Nov 25/26th 1941, complaints from careful parents resulted in Nurse Williamson examining all the children who found that 18 children were not clean. Letters were sent home and 7 children excluded until they were clean. By 1942 the situation was better, only two families were found not to be clean. Being clean was free from head lice.

December 17th 1942, saw the distribution of good second hand toys and books. All children were delighted. Can you imagine the reaction of present day children? In 1943 the Germans insisted that the German language was taught in all schools. On February 8th, Mr Le Feuvre started four half hour weekly lessons.

There were unexpected holidays and closures. School was closed when bombs fell nearby and failed to explode. "June 6th 1944 closed again because of the invasion of France." They did not reopen until July 31st.

A lack of fuel to heat the school saw it closed again on the 3rd November of that year but four concerned people gave a tree each to use as fuel.

By February 1945 the general shortage of food in the island is vividly described in the Log Book. "Today (Feb 19th) was the first time in the Occupation Period that not one child stayed at school for dinner –the bread ration (3lbs each per week) having been totally discontinued since last Tuesday. The parents of very few children kept them at home at the end of last week owing to a lack of food, but today have decided (all but one) to send them for one session daily. The children are thoroughly British with regard to the situation, and, though many are really very hungry, no complaints are heard, nor are tempers suffering.

The remainder of February is much the same but on the 28th great joy was brought to the children through the gift of half a pound of Cod Liver Oil and Malt.

On March 8th a two pound loaf was given. After three weeks without bread the children described it as being "like cake, like sponge cake".

By March 16, after the gifts of food, there is a marked improvement in the children's general alertness and brightness of manner, as also are some of the teachers.

If it had not been for the visit of the Red Cross ship Vega, the plight of the children would have been even more severe.

THE LATEST NEWS

In June of 2006, the Education Board decided to merge the two schools at Hautes Capelles on the retirement of the head of the Infant school. Mr Boalch was made head of the new school with Mr de Bertrand as his deputy. The new school is the largest Primary school in the Island with 539 pupils and 40 adults being employed to run it. The school has come a long way from those original days in 1785. Two common themes run through the life of the school. They are the contact with the church and the same families in attendance.

Thanks to:

The Guernsey Archives for their help.

Francis Le Poidevin - The History of the Capelles Methodist Church. (Ref 2)

Web site Google. Hautes Capelles Schools/ Return to School 15th July 1940

The Life of James Sausmarez.