

20th Century Sparks!

School

Early days of education

In 1880, the government made it compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 10 to attend school. By 1944 the school leaving age was raised to 15 and the 11+ examinations - which saw ability determine the type of secondary education a child could receive - was introduced. The period between these years saw some of the foundations of modern schooling emerge.

On this page and in **Chalk, slates, sponges and ink!**, **Teachers** and **11+**, you can explore memories of attending school in the local area of Brighton and Hove, during the first half of the 20th century.

Visit the **Timeline for Schools** for an overview of the general development of education.



Study Areas at Roedean School, c. 1900. This room at Roedean School is where pupils at this boarding-school would study when not in classes. Each pupil had a desk with a small book-shelf for textbooks in front of it. Some pupils have personalised their areas with vases of flowers and photographs. The room is lit by gas-lights.
Brighton & Hove in Pictures

First day memories

For the children of 1940s Hanover, Finsbury Road School was our window on the world. The entrance was two doors away from where we lived and I couldn't wait to be old enough to go there.

The infants' department had a separate entrance in Southover Street and to this heaven on earth my Mum was going to take me the very next morning. Apart from the wonderful smell of chalk dust and warm milk, the only clear memory of my first day is playing in the sand table and watching fascinated as lots of tiny low tables were set up at the other end of the vast room. Only when the teacher said, "Come along now, it's time to lie down," did I realise that they were in fact canvas folding beds."

Janis Ravenett - Snapshot

I remember quite clearly my first lesson. On each tiny desk was placed an arrangement to teach us to lace up our shoes. Two pieces of cardboard, each with a line of eyelet holes, were joined together with a piece of string, and we were shown how to do the crisscross lace-up. Most children wore high-low boots at that time, and although the high-lows were fastened by mainly passing the lace around a series of clips, there were also quite a few eyelets. The later boots and shoes were all eyelets of course.

I have thought many times since what a sensible and practical lesson that first one was, shoe-lacing for beginners.

Sid Manville - Everything Seems Smaller

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School

Chalk, slates, sponges and ink

We didn't have books and pencils, but slates and chalk, and when we wanted to clean them we had to go to teacher, who would look at what you had written, then give you a damp sponge to wipe your slate.

L. Scarborough - Backyard Brighton

When the time came for us to use the slates (these were an oblong piece of roofing slate with a wooden frame around same) another boy would go around the class giving out round slate pencils.

Albert Paul - Poverty, Hardship but Happiness

In the other room pupils sat six to a desk. These were a long bench with two shelves. The bottom one was narrow - this was to put books, paper and pens on - the top was wider and had three inkwells let into it.

We had just moved from the time when the ink was made in a small room off the girls' cloak-room. This ink was made of powder grated from a block and mixed with water. If too much water was added it only left faint marks on the paper. If not enough water was added, it wrote like mud.



Children in class
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The ink that followed came in large earthenware bottles, and the ink monitor had to collect the inkwells from the classroom, take them to the cloakroom, fill them from the bottle and return them to their places. And woe betide anyone who spilt the ink!

Doris Hall - Growing up in Ditchling

Strange as it may seem, I got paid half-a-crown a month for being a monitor, though I don't know whether it was official or not. It may have come out of the headmaster's pocket; anyway every time I forgot to do something like changing his pen nib in his study, he would fine me threepence but at the end of the month I'd still get my money. I had to stand up in front of the class and keep control of them, which I had to do as monitor every time the teacher left the classroom.

John Langley - Always a Layman



School

Teachers

All the male teachers had walking sticks, although it was quite obvious they could all walk perfectly well without them. Entering the school through the Coombe Road gate meant that they had to cross the playground. I suppose the stick gave a bit of a boost to their ego or something, especially as the boys obeyed the golden rule that you must not run across the path of a teacher, or risk jostling him in any way, but you must stand 'respectfully still' as he passed by.

Sid Manville - Everything Seems Smaller

Miss Knight was my first teacher in the new school. Miss Knight taught us sewing and knitting, but when it came to my knitting she passed me by, saying that she couldn't teach anyone knitting who was left handed. I went home and threw myself in the armchair, completely miserable. My other memory of Miss Knight is that she kept a large sweet jar on the shelf in her cupboard. If you did something well, you got a reward.

Ruby Dunn - Moulsecoomb Days

Another teacher was Miss Williams who was very tubby. If she had been given the chance she might have been a good teacher. She was not trained, but had come in to help out during the war years of 1914-18, and stayed on. The classes were far too large, also of a great age range. She had to my mind a too great love of making us sing part-songs and duets, pairing us with the most unsuitable partners, usually someone to whom we were not speaking at the time. Her favourite song was 'On Yonder Hill There Stands a Beauty'. The boys would sing, 'On Yonder Hill There Stands a Beasty'.

Doris Hall - Growing up in Ditchling



School

11+

I was the only one in my class to pass the eleven-plus at Finsbury Road, but I didn't want to go to the grammar school because all my mates wouldn't be going, and because of the price of the uniform, which was too much for my Mum to afford. So I went to Fawcett, opposite St Peter's Church with my friends, I got a good education there and had no regrets at not going to the grammar school.

Backstreet Brighton

I sat my exams and passed for a Grammar School education at Varndean School for girls, but due to the fact that you had to wear a uniform there my mother told me that I could not go, because she could not afford to buy one. I had to settle for a Secondary School education at Brighton Intermediate School for girls in York Place."

Barbara Chapman - Boxing Day Baby

I could not wait to get out to work. I had to pass a special test, called the Industrial Examination, to enable me to leave school. I did pass it, so the headmaster called me into his study and said "Well John, would you like to be a trainee teacher?" So I said "Oh for God's sake no." "Well why's that?" "Oh, I could never stand in front of a class and look at those faces all day." So he said "I know what you want to do, you want to go on the railways, where your mates are," and he was right.

John Langley - Always a Layman

Unfortunately my education stopped when I was 14, and I forgot it all, If only my Dad had let me carry on schooling and I had gone to the Grammar School and, who knows, from there perhaps to University, as some of the boys I went to school with did, my life would have been totally different.

Bert Healey - Hard Times and Easy Terms