

THE RAGLAN SCHOOL 1928-1949

21ST ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

On Being 21 by J. Dean

First Infant Headmistress

Twenty one years ago, on a snowy, windy Saturday afternoon in March, the Rt. Hon. Charles Trevelyan unlocked the front door of the Raglan School and the shivering crowd of parents, teachers and children were glad to enter the warmth of the School and leave the inclement weather outside.

Many times my thoughts have returned to that afternoon and the beginning of a new school. The air was vibrant with pleasure, pride and expectancy. The Education Committee was justly proud of its new school, the first for many years. The parents were busy contrasting this building with the one they knew as “our school” and they were wondering, too, how their children would fare in a school with unknown teachers and no tradition.

When in the following September the School had increased in numbers so rapidly that a separate department for infants under its own Head became necessary and I shouldered the responsibility of being the first Headmistress, I knew that the opportunity was both a challenge, a great privilege and also an exciting adventure. It is given to few teachers to have the opportunity of starting an entirely new school.

At Raglan in 1928 we had the future before us. There was no past hampering us with preconceived ideas, no tradition, only a challenge and a great opportunity.

We have now arrived at one of the important milestones in our life. We are twenty one years old. Naturally we feel as any single human feels on attaining the age of twenty-one. We are still more concerned with the future than with the past and yet the past, our past, has some meaning for the future and so today we can and should look both backwards and forwards.

It is common knowledge that in any building of any kind whether house, school or factory or one’s own individual character that one of the most important parts of the building is the foundation. When the building is finished very often the foundations are hidden under the superstructure but though hidden they are still necessary and important to the rest of the building. So it is in building a school.

The corporate life of the school must be reared upon strong sound foundation and for two reasons. The life of the school will be a long one and must show strong foundations if its continuity, its health and “wholeness” is to be maintained. The foundations must be sound and firm if each child is to be able to feel on leaving the school that it has been good to have been there. This strong feeling of belonging, of pride in one’s school and its achievement, a feeling for the spirit of the school, a knowledge that every single member must give of his or her best to the corporate life of the school whilst at the same time creating a healthy relationship with life outside, all this we felt must be planted and tended in the minds of the children.

What are the requirements necessary to achieve this? What are the fundamental conditions which would produce these attitudes in the children?

It is true to say that when one observes and considers dispassionately any living corporate body one does not see the whole of its reality if one observes only its physical aspect.

Any judgement we may form about Raglan must take cognisance of its past – the past which existed even before the thoughts of a new school were present in the deliberations of the Education Committee, for the roots of its life and vigour are laid in the years before 1928. Raglan is what it is today because of the patient work and life given by the parents and teachers of those who now teach in Raglan. No

generation lives unto itself, and the life that is now lived in Raglan owes much to the fundamental principles of life and behaviour which were laid down by past generations of parents and teachers. Let us acknowledge that. Every teacher and parent today can trace back to its source the inspiration which energises his own work. In considering therefore, how our own work shall be fruitful and show good results in the future, we know that the foundations we are laying must be put down with a determination to understand the eternal principles which govern the growth, mental, spiritual and physical, of young children. We must lay our foundations with thoroughness, patience and perseverance so that the eternal values of Truth, Beauty and Goodness shall become the formative forces in the lives of the children. The reality of the life of the School, its teaching and its power will be judged by successive generations when they, as adults, look back in judgement on their school life.

Just as the human being cannot exist as a solitary being having no connection with the social order of his day, so no school can live a full life apart from the life lived round it, and to that end it was necessary that there should be a real co-operation between home and school. The association first known as "Home and School Association" and now known as the "Parent Teacher Association" came into being very early in the life of the school. Looking back we can justly take pleasure in the fact that Raglan could produce a Parent Teacher Association long before the Education Act of 1944 drew attention to the need for such associations. Looking forward we can hope that no parent can feel quite happy if he stays outside the Parent Teacher Association.

Again, looking back, one remembers that five years of our twenty-one have been spent under and in a struggle to win the victory of the Second World War. We remember the many anxious parents and their consultations with the staff on the problems raised by evacuation, we remember with gratitude the kindly folk who welcomed us in Diss on that overpoweringly hot Friday in September 1939. We remember how the surrounding villagers welcomed us to their homes and sheltered us for four months. We remember with gratitude the people in Monmouthshire who offered us homes in our second evacuation and we remember with deep thankfulness the fact that our school and children suffered no serious loss during the five years of war. We remember in thankful pride all those scholars and staff who gave honourable service in their war-time posts of responsibility.

And now on the occasion of our twenty-first birthday I am sure that our scholars, past and present, will realise and wish that some mention of the men and women who have taught them should be made.

A school, just as a human individual, must possess a head and a heart. The head without the heart would be useless. So at Raglan, the class teachers have been the very heart of the school, bringing to life with their work, love and devotion, the skeleton plans made by the various heads of departments. And as between the various members of a human body there has been co-operation and a strong determination that the life of the school as a whole shall be strong, vigorous and healthy.

It is a law of the universe that nothing remains static if it is to be thoroughly alive in every part and so changes occur, transformations take place. In the Infants Department our growth has been remarkable. We began in 1928 with four teachers and a head teacher and 240 children. Today there are 465 children on roll, a staff of twelve teachers, a domestic staff of four and five meals supervisors, a clerk and a matron. In the nursery there is a teacher, three assistants and a cook and her domestic helper and 30 children.

Probably nothing has given me such deep satisfaction as the coming of a matron to the school. For years I have felt the need of a "mother" for the department and since her advent experience has proved how necessary she was for the school and how quick the children were to recognise her capacity to put things right for them when they went wrong.

So now looking, as all people do on their twenty-first birthday, with high hopes for the future, I can say that my deepest desire for Raglan is that our school may go on from strength to strength, strong in body, valiant in spirit so that, in their retrospective thinking as adults, many will look back on their school days and say: - "It was good to have been there when I was a child"

J.DEAN