

The Gate-shutting "Racket" on Cow Close.

(Taken from a cutting in the Yorkshire Post) *cover page*.

"In the summer of 1935* a gate-shutting "racket", perhaps inspired by gangster films, was nipped in the bud by statesman-like methods at Langcliffe.

It was the enterprising small boys of the village who started it. There is a road crossing the high limestone fells of Langcliffe, passing Malham Tarn, and dropping down to Malham. Along the road there are several gates which are always kept open. Always, that is, until the racketeers appeared. For at weekends this summer the small boys of Langcliffe assembled at the gates and closed them as soon as a car was sighted in the distance. As the car approached, the gate was courteously opened again by a beaming small boy, who would be rewarded by twopence, threepence, or even sixpence by the grateful motorist.

After a time the racketeers took to more advanced methods. The words "Toll 2d." were chalked up in conspicuous places, and business prospered. The most enterprising racketeer of all took his small brother with him, directed him to keep his eyes tightly shut, and told a passing motorist the pitiful story of his brother's blindness. He was rewarded for his enterprise with a shilling.

Statesman-like methods

But now the racket is no more. A paragraph in the "Yorkshire Evening Post" culminated in a school general meeting at Langcliffe, in which the small boys themselves discussed the undesirability of introducing gangster methods to the neighbourhood.

In the end, two important resolutions were passed. The first was to the effect that this school deplores the practice of going up the road to shut gates; and that the elder pupils of the school will try to set an example to the younger children in the non-shutting of gates. One statesman wanted to add an amendment giving the name of the road; but another statesman pointed out that this would leave the signatories free to go up other roads and shut other gates. The amendment was accordingly defeated, and the resolution was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

It was then proposed: That those who have so promised to leave the gates open should do so for the honour of the school.

This was then also carried unanimously, and the great gate-shutting racket was at an end. NORTHERNER"

* Although my father dated the cutting as June 1934, the references to the Gate Racket in his 1935 diary indicate that a member of the Parish Council, who evidently brought the local policeman with him, arrived to complain at the school on the first day of the Autumn term, 19th. August 1935.

(Mary A. Atkin 1995)

Y.P. 9.6.34.
The Gate-Shutting Racket

I expect it is safe to blame gangster films for the very promising "racket" which has just been nipped in the bud by statesman-like methods at Langcliffe, the village a mile out of Settle. It was the enterprising small boys of the village who started it. There is a road crossing the high limestone fells of Langcliffe, passing Malham Tarn, and dropping down to Malham. Along the road there are several gates which are always kept open. Always, that is, until the racketeers appeared. For at week-ends it has been the custom of the small boys of Langcliffe to assemble at the gates and to close them as soon as a car was sighted in the distance. As the car approached, the gate was courteously opened again by a beaming small boy, who would be rewarded with twopence, threepence, or even sixpence by the grateful motorist.

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In the end, two important resolutions were passed. The first was to the effect that this school deplores the practice of going up the road to shut gates and that the elder children of this school will try to set an example to the younger children of this school in the non-shutting of gates. One statesman wanted to add an amendment giving the name of the road, that is, the Langcliffe-Malham road; but another statesman pointed out that this would leave the signatories free to go up other roads and shut other gates. The amendment was accordingly defeated, and the resolution was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

It was then proposed that those who have no promised to leave the gates open should do so for the honour of the school.

This also was carried unanimously, and the great gate-shutting racket was at an end.

NORTHERNER

Floods, Drains and Lavatories in Langcliffe School.

On October 1st 1935, when we arrived in school every room had an inch of water across the floor and there was a waterfall down the steps into the back lobby. The register was taken and then THE SCHOOL WAS CLOSED FOR THE DAY. The same thing happened on Oct 28th and this time the boiler house below the school was flooded and there was no heating, so this time SCHOOL WAS CLOSED FOR TWO DAYS - much to the pupils' delight! From this time forward my father (H.H. Bland, the headmaster) had a series of visitors, the WRCC Clerk of Works, members of the Parish Council, men examining the drains and sewers which ran under the school, a Board of Health official, an Inspector from the Land Survey Department and his assistant, and several teams of builders and contractors taking up the floorboards and discovering that there was water under the classrooms even in drier weather (Dec. 5th 1935).

A considerable sum of money was assigned in order to deal with the problem. The cause was fairly obviously related to the stream which flowed down Cow Close and then passed into the field behind the school. There was some suspicion that some of the older boys knew where to place a few sods in order to "help" the floods, and so get a day off school, but I don't think this was ever proved! In any case it was certain that the school had been built just about the point where a series of springs broke out after heavy rain. In limestone districts such springs often change position.

But in spite of the work done between October 1935 and March 1936 water was still getting under the school floors in wet weather! There is mention of blocked sewer traps (and new ones put in), disinfectant put down the sewers (the school smelt strongly of sewage at times), and a "mystery" drain which had been uncovered by the contractors. Fluorescent liquid was put into the stream to try to trace the source of the water, but none of the colouring appeared under the floorboards (Jan. - Feb. 1936). Then in February a spring was uncovered in the drain behind the school, and after a new drain was put in the problem seemed to be solved; but then, by the beginning of March, it was clear that water was still seeping under the school, and it was suggested that a new drain on the east side of the school (the "Girls' Back") should be put in, and left uncovered, and fenced to prevent anyone falling in it. This may have been put in during the summer holidays 1936, and it is still there, and evidently still occasionally gets blocked!

The sewage problem was solved when new flush lavatories were installed for both boys and girls in the outbuildings at the back of the school in place of the old privies and in March 1938 a hot water system was installed. The school was getting modernised!

During the summer of 1936 everything dried out, BUT by October there was water under the floors again, and contractors started work again!. Then in December 1936 very heavy rain caused a large stream to run across the track leading to the school, planks were placed so children could cross it to reach the school, but the school itself DID NOT FLOOD!

Nevertheless contractors were working at the school until the end of January 1937, and every important visitor to the school - HMIs (Aug. 17th 1937), two County Aldermen (Feb. 1938) - was shown the water under the floor! I don't know when that problem was solved!

Floods, Drains and Lavatories in Langcliffe School.

SCHOOL
FLOODED

C.H. There are now two
Langcliffe mysteries associated with
"Mysteries." Langcliffe. The first,
discussed in these
columns last year, is of the secret of the
ebbing and flowing reservoir, and now
there comes a report of a series of
"wet weather springs" (for lack of a
more appropriate term) which drain
towards the foundations of the Lang-
cliffe elementary school. These springs
are causing much trouble. They have
been inspected by many officials of the
County Education Committee, including
those versed in land drainage problems
but, as yet, no remedy has been found.
"Springs are bubbling up all over the
place," is one descriptive comment;
and the reason for this unwelcome
activity during wet spells is put down
to the fact that the school's excavations
seem to have tapped springs. There
appears to be no way of getting rid
of them, at the moment, at least.



↑
Looking from the Hall into the back lobby.
N.B. The steps outside the lobby door.

Floods - Oct. 1935

↑
Looking from the Hall through the
partition door into the Infants' room

Floods, Drains and Lavatories in Langcliffe School.



December 1936

When Langcliffe School was Famous!

Soon after becoming Headmaster at Langcliffe, Mr. Bland (HHB) heard a lecture about "The New Art" from an HMI (school inspector) called Miss W. Biggs, who asked teachers to try her ideas in school and send the children's paintings for exhibition. He was very thrilled by it, because instead of the sort of dull art teaching he had had himself -

"years of stilted school art - ginger jars on books; jampots (upright)with inkwells (lying down); cylinders; two oranges and a banana.....and weary scientific explanation and accompanying bewilderment about perspective and vanishing points" -

children were to be encouraged to use their visual memories and paint and draw their own pictures, on big sheets of paper with very large brushes or with big pastels.

He wasn't sure how to start, but decided to ask the children to imagine that they were one of their ancestors standing -

"at the mouth of a famous cave where hyenas had once dragged the mangled remains of elephant, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus. A great glacier had scraped across its mouth and refugees had found a home there in Roman times."

He didn't tell them where it was, but they recognised the description easily. (As I'm sure that present children at Langcliffe will!) He drew a word picture of -

"the nearby rock and limestone cliffs, the field below and its dew-ponds, the wood-darkened slopes of the scar further away, and far beyond, the distant remains of volcanic eruption that cradle the Lakes. And beyond again, the blazing evening sky."

Then he asked them to draw the view from the cave. The results were very exciting. They learnt to stand back to look at the picture from a distance, as you do in an Art Gallery and they discussed each others paintings. Then they had another try. This time the word picture was of a brightly-lit fruit shop, seen from a side street on an a wet night.

"Ernest's (Kitchener) was a jewel of Mediterranean fruits, greens and daffodils and watery reflections. Elizabeth's (Jackson) was a blend of colour and dark night shadows... and painted reflections in the unlighted upper windows above the shop."

At last the new art materials were delivered, and the classroom and the hall were turned into an artist's studio. They made some rickety easels which could be taken outside where they found lots of new ideas for painting.

"Ernest went into the grounds of (Langcliffe) Hall where building work was in progress. He caught the sunshine on new rafters and a heap of mortar and piled planks. A blue-overalled man wheeled a barrow through the foreground....sunshine splashed through the trees above the high wall."

Another painting showed an old man walking up Cow Close with a sack of wood upon his back. Two had caught the clean rain-washed colours of the Dales - the girl's was a typical Dales farmhouse with windows reflecting the sky; the boy's was of the barn and vegetable garden of the same farmhouse, the garden somewhat geometric, contrasting with the lilac bush at the corner and a hawthorn bent by the wind on the crest of the distant screes. A boy who was a poor reader made a splendid picture of a farmyard with hay-ricks, poultry,

languid cows and rounded pigs. Another boy climbed up above the village and brought back a view looking down on the village with school, and church and Institute, and a spacious view of the distant hills and the sky. There were human figures too - two girls running for the tape at the Jubilee Sports; animals - a muscular cart-horse hauling a heavy farm cart done by a boy of eight, and one was an imaginative view of a royal procession with golden coach and marching soldiers passing ~~through~~ her own Dales cottages and roofs. Even the Infants joined in and produced living, moving figures - men running uphill in the Jubilee Fell Race; a gaily coloured bus thudding across a landscape; a procession of brilliantly coloured cars. One painting showed the pupil's idea of the recent earthquake at Quetta with a house lying on its side and an ambulance team at work.

A collection of the best and liveliest was sent off to Miss Biggs who was very enthusiastic, and then were exhibited (with the work of other schools) at the World Education Conference held at Oxford.

- * "The paintings aroused considerable interest among distinguished education officials, among them Lord Halifax, President of the Board of Education... and also Sir Michael and Lady Sadler. They were deeply impressed by the efforts of these Dales children and asked the headmaster of Langcliffe Council School to accept a painting from their own collection and to hang it upon the walls of the school" (Craven Herald 1.11.1935.)

The paintings were later shown at an exhibition in Leeds, and the Langcliffe scholars were able to go to see their own paintings. There were other articles about the pictures in the Daily Express and also in the Yorkshire Post. The school won some more prizes in 1937 in a national competition run by The Teachers' World, and received a gift of £10 from the Holgate Trust which was an old endowment shared by Settle, Langcliffe and Stainforth schools. £10 doesn't sound like a lot of money today, but at that time it was more than the whole school of 73 children got for one year's requisition of paper, pens, notebooks, books, paints, etc.!

* They were the paintings by,

Joe Cokell

Alice Benson

Elizabeth Jackson

John Farrington

Jon(?) Towler.