

'I, Annie Wilson, take charge of this school July 1st, 1889. Very few children present owing to haymaking and preparation for the village Feast.' I see Da made a similar entry when he took over Burton Leonard School twenty years before me. We were both 25 when we started, only he already had four children! I resigned from my new school in County Durham after he died – our patron, Miss Shiffner and Ma both begged me: what else could I do?

I started as a pupil teacher under Da at 14 and obtained my Certificate at 19. I didn't always live up to his standards: he once wrote, *'Annie Wilson very much improved, though wanting a kind and pleasant manner.'*

I managed with help from Ma and my sisters. Young Mary became my assistant: she was better with the little ones. As Her Majesty's Inspector pointed out: *'there is little or no improvement in the quality of the work'* but *'the infants are pleasantly taught.'* He said I lacked control over the older boys who should transfer to a school with a master! They always liked the sewing but that was Ma, of course.

Then the yearly remarks about the offensive state of the 'offices'. As if we didn't know! In summer we couldn't open the windows for the stench! In his letters my brother Arthur called him 'that old devil of an inspector'. After twenty-four years of such complaints from London *and* Wakefield, the managers had the privies rebuilt, yet still made no provision for a drill ground! The Diocesan Visitor always praised our religious instruction, else I really think I would have handed in my notice. Arthur's letters from Canada kept me going – I didn't mind sending him the 'Yorkshire Post', and money when needed. He usually paid me back ... I used to read extracts to the children, tales of the Indians, wild animals and camp life, for their geography lesson.

The village people never thought much of us: many were chapel, not church. We knew too much about them. The attendance was often poor. The parents wanted the boys on the farms and the girls in the dairy or in service, earning their keep. Very few attained Standard VII before leaving, even in Da's day, and it got worse really.

When Dr Coopland came in 1912, she was strict about excluding children with infection. As well as colds and influenza we had scarlet fever, measles, and diphtheria. Some died. Mary tells me children are immunised against diphtheria now. ... We closed for five weeks before the previous Coronation because of whooping cough – they sat the children right by the lime kilns to inhale the fumes, *supposedly* to clear their chests!

It was always so very cold in winter. After the War it was even worse – we pleaded with the Education Officer to let us have fuel for the stove but his reply was *quite* uncalled for. And it was just after we lost Arthur. We really thought he had recovered from those dreadful wounds – here we are: June 3rd, 1915: *‘Mary E Wilson absent for afternoon school having gone to see a brother who has been wounded.’* I couldn’t go of course ... I *always* feared those Germans would do us harm.

After the Armistice, Arthur still wrote from the Canadian camp in Surrey, but he was chiefly concerned with Jessie and the children. I tried to help him with little loans when I could. None of us got over the shock when he died so suddenly. There are ten names on the church lychgate, including Arthur. I taught several of them ... We always mark Armistice Day and lay flowers on his grave.

When the managers took away my assistant in 1922, I lost heart. Many families had left for better-paid work in the towns; pupil numbers were so low they wanted to close the school, but the office said no, so when I resigned in 1925, Beatrice Jewitt was appointed.

Mary made sure the children sang very sweetly to me on my last day: she said I had taught more than 630 children, from the ages of 7 to 14, over 50 years.

It was so pleasant when John Arthur came to live with us. He doesn’t get on with his stepfather. Carrie, Mary and I loved to take the boy with us to Whitley Bay - he insisted on wearing his new school uniform on the sands! I used to read him stories from his

father's letters: he has the same taste for adventure as Arthur ...

I get rather muddled these days - after all I am 82, or is it 83? Mary is very good, even though she is still teaching. But I know John Arthur is back with us from the Navy, now this awful War is over. I'm so exhausted now. But he will take care of everything for us - just like his dear father. Goodnight.

Annie Wilson (1862-1946)

Vivienne Ravis

Notes on sources:

Burton Leonard School Logbooks (1869-1946): compiled by Annie, her father Charles and her successor Beatrice Jewitt

Burton Leonard School Admissions Register (1880-1946): as above

General Register Office: Certificates of birth, marriage and deaths of Wilson family

The National Archives: Correspondence and inspection reports for Burton Leonard School (c1890-1913)

North Yorkshire County Record Office: Correspondence re Burton Leonard School (c 1900-c 1933)

Wilson, Arthur (1903-1919): Collected letters (mimeo-unpublished)