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# The History of Glemsford School

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# Blazes Blowing a Yard

## Heating the School

Working in Glemsford School has never been a simple matter! The first hint of winter, after school opened in 1874, proved that the heating was inadequate. Cold weather struck in the week beginning 23 November. The new experience that the 100 infants faced daily could not have been a happy one. ***"The fires give out no heat, consequently the school is very cold and the children cry because they cannot get warm,"*** reports Miss Forbes, showing a sympathetic concern for the well being of her pupils. Unfortunately the school remained cold for the next fortnight, and, as matters developed, the problem with heating was only beginning to emerge. Towards the end of a hard winter, a new mistress, Miss Eleanor Lilley, reported on March 10th 1875, the ***"school very cold today. We were not able to have fires on account of the smoke from the chimneys"***. The fireplaces were totally inefficient, giving out little heat and having a tendency to smoke. The chimney breasts can still be seen in the present school hall: their size and position can probably explain their inefficiency.

The next winter confirmed the poor state of affairs. By November 19th 1875 the chimneys were smoking so badly that ***"we shall have to let the fires out. It is so dense at times that it is impossible to see the whole length of the school."*** If smoke and lack of heat were not bad enough, the safety of the fires was put in doubt on Thursday 28 January when "Albert Jarman was by the fire where a piece of coal fell into his shoe and burnt his foot." On 24 February, ***"the chimneys have been smoking so dreadfully both yesterday and today that it is almost impossible to stay in school."*** It is hardly surprising that ***"the children complain of headache through it."*** Some were more fortunate: ***"I am compelled to take the teachers in the house for lessons."*** (These would have been the young "pupil teachers" aged between 15 and 18 who, apart from their part-time teaching duties, also had to attend lessons themselves for about an hour before and after school, taught by the teachers.) The Board had invested in a "new stove for the infants" the previous November, seemingly without result.

If not seeing across the room was a minor matter, how bad must it have got by 17 March 1876 when the ***"room was so full of smoke that I have been compelled to dismiss the children."*** It was not as if they were burning old socks. Board accounts suggest that they were paying high prices for best steam coal! Anger reached a peak the following winter. [1 February 1877] ***"I was not in school on Monday morning, having a severe headache. The school was so full of scoobsmoke, the fires had to be put out; on Tuesday it was the same, not fit for teachers or children to be in. In the afternoon, we were without fires, and in addition to being bitterly cold, the children came in wet from the rain...."***

Miss Lilley now seems to have persuaded her employers to take some action: ***"The Board have promised to have something done to the chimneys to prevent them smoking."*** Perhaps her

indignation was successful. Miss Lilley does not mention the problem again. Nor does any of her immediate successors. Whether the chimneys were corrected, or the staff became accustomed to the smoke is not clear. Unfortunately, some Mistresses were less voluble in their contributions to the log. Amelia Hammond (1885-1888) does not mention a single child by name, in all her entries. M.G. Telford (1892-1894) is similarly terse. Perhaps matters such as the chimney seemed equally trivial to them. Even so, Miss Telford eventually had to join in the struggle with the Smoke.

After 14 years without mention, January 1891 saw the Glemsford chimneys regaining their central role in the history of the School. Sarah Roberts was not having a good New Year. When School had reopened after Christmas, on 29 December, she had been too ill to attend. She did not start work again until 7 January - an unusually long absence for any headmistress. On 15 January, she ***"began to mark the registers but had to dismiss school because of the coldness of the room and the continual smoking of the stove."*** Matters must have been bad for a whole attendance to be cancelled. In April, however, Miss Roberts excelled herself in her description: ***"Impossible to do anything with the room so full of smoke, and blazes blowing a yard from the stove."***

During a wet autumn in 1892, Miss Telford had, on the morning of 12 October, ***"to send the children into the playground until [the smoke] cleared away."*** On 9 December, attendance was hit by a fall of snow. ***"Room full of smoke again this morning. Obligated to have the fire in the stove put out because of the smoke. Children very cold all day."*** The cold weather returned after Christmas. There was ***"smoke in the room"*** on 3 January 1893, and instruction times for the pupil teachers were altered from 6 January because the inefficiency of the stove meant that ***"the room was very cold in the morning."*** On 23 January, ***"the room filled with smoke morning and afternoon and the pupils were dismissed early"***; this exercise was repeated on 1 February. A week later, conditions were just as bad. Two days after that, ***"the children were sent to the playground"*** until the room was usable, as they were on 2 March. By 17 March, Miss Telford reached a point where she felt her usual brief note would no longer do: ***"The Room again full of smoke. Obligated to send the children into the playground until it cleared away, although the weather was very cold this morning. Brought the children in again as soon as possible."***

If the logbook was a means of getting a message to the Board more effectively than by word of mouth, Miss Bowrey used it more often than most, though whether to better effect is doubtful. The early winter of 1899 brought many coughs and colds. Miss Bowrey was herself off school in November. On 15 December, she was ***"unable to be at duty ... having taken fresh cold in the smoky atmosphere of the room on Thursday."*** Not only did she place the blame fairly and squarely on the Smoke, she also hammered the point home the following week. ***"School closed ... by Miss Plume (Assistant Mistress) for the Christmas Holiday. ... Mistress being anxious to avoid travelling by night on account of a very troublesome cough, left by the 12. train, by permission."*** Members of the Board gave such permission. Members of the Board read the logbook. Three months into the New

Year, our brave heroine launched yet another attack on the conditions in the room. There was *"a slight fall of snow ... with a very rough wind"* overnight on 25/26 March 1900. *"The School room was scarcely habitable all day owing to the dense clouds of smoke and flames from one of the 2 stoves in use. Children had to be sent out for extra play in consequence, and the time spent in school was much wasted by the draughts, every window and door having to be kept open for the greater part of the day, and both teachers and children very cold in consequence."* The irate Mistress followed up on 27th when she was *"unable to be present at Pupil Teachers' lessons, having a severe headache owing to the effects of the smoke in school yesterday, but present from 9 a.m."* The wind definitely seems to have been the culprit on 25 March 1902 when the children were given a morning off because of the *"dense volumes of smoke."* Nearly 30 years of frequent complaint might have been expected to bring a reliable cure. If success had been achieved, however, we would have missed three days in January 1903 when Miss Bowrey reached the peak of indignation: *"14 January: Owing to the clouds of smoke and heavy fumes of soot which filled the room from 8-10 a.m., lessons could not possibly be carried on, and the intense cold rendered it absolutely dangerous for children to remain in the room. ..."* The children were sent home. Some returned in the afternoon, but not Miss Bowrey: *"...unable to be present this afternoon owing to the effects of the soot, smoke and draughts in the morning..."* When, the very next morning, she found the *"Room again too full of smoke and flakes of soot for teachers and children to distinguish each other. ..."* she obviously felt enough was enough: *"School was ... dismissed at 9.25 a.m. and the caretaker again requested to take proper steps to clear the chimney and prevent a recurrence of the catastrophe. ..."* The catastrophe didn't end there, because *"at 2 p.m. the room was all in disorder owing to the sweep having failed to answer when called for..."* A more detailed examination of the room was then carried out by the intrepid Miss Bowrey, armed not only with her anger, but with scientific support: *".. everything was thickly covered with soot and the thermometer stood at 35'F."* That did it. *"The children were therefore sent home again and the room left to be put ready for school on Friday." She cannot have been surprised that only 70 scholars were present the following day, but those present "were all tormented with coughs and heavy colds"!*

Ten days later, her anger abated into a weary and cold acceptance: *"Room full of smoke again, both fires refusing to burn clean, and children and teachers all having bad colds were utterly unable to work or speak in the dense atmosphere. School dismissed and the caretaker requested to remedy it."* That was Miss Bowrey's last recorded confrontation with the idiosyncrasies of the Glemsford stoves. She resigned the following August. The stove story continues longer than the story of the Board. Certainly as late as 1909, Miss Eglington was still fighting the same battle against cold, smoke, soot and flames. Even in recent years, the battle to keep the school warm has been a long-fought one, and has only lately been won, ... or has it?