



St. Margaret's Church & School, Lowtherville



The Mission Church and School, one of the first buildings in Lowtherville Road, officially 'Lowtherville National School', was designed by local architect, Theodore Saunders, and was opened on May 28th 1883 with 28 pupils whose ages ranged from four to seven.

In 1951 a new school - Lowtherville County Infants School – was opened in Newport Road (where the Free School is now) which was soon after re-named St Margaret's C of E Primary School. The old school in Lowtherville Road became redundant but the Church itself remained open for almost twenty more years with spasmodic closures and re-openings. It finally shut for good in 1970 and was soon demolished to become yet another housing scheme – St. Margaret's Court - in 1971.

However, a small part of St Margaret's church remains to this day as the font was donated and installed in St. Mark's church in Wootton in 1970.

As you would expect with a traditional church building, the internal arrangements such as seating were OK for church use but not very good in a school environment. In about 1903, to that end, the Board of Education carried out a survey and this is what they found:-

The main schoolroom is 37 ft. x 21 ft. at the end of which is a small classroom 11ft. x 11ft. The accommodation, based on a requirement of 9 sq.ft. per child would allow 70 children in the main room and 13 in the small classroom. All obscured glass should be removed and replaced by clear glass to improve the natural light. Artificial lighting is by oil lamps. The cloakroom is a temporary building on the north west corner of the main building and the toilets are in an external stone-built block. These consist of three wooden seats over a lead trough connected to the main sewer. The water supply is automatic but is run into the trough by the caretaker. There are no stall dividers and the children sit in a row. There is a proper WC for the teachers with a small flushing tank. The playground is a nice open piece of ground which is levelled but not gravelled. Most of it is laid down to grass and it is fenced in with posts. There is no teacher's house attached to the school.

Although I was there from 1945 to 1948, many years after that 1903 inspection, I do not recall the facilities being very different from those described in the report. There were still outside toilets, but I think they at least had a flushing cistern by then! Another thing that I clearly remember is a line of camp beds at the altar end of the main room, enabling the very young children to have their afternoon nap.

In 1947, the headmistress was Mrs. F. E. Ingram and the school role was a healthy 51 children. The majority of them are listed under the title "A HAPPY FAMILY" on the right. As Mrs Ingram said at the 1947 prize-giving: "Ours is a happy family, not an ordinary school and that is how they wanted it to be." When pupils reached the age of seven or eight they moved on to Junior school, at that time in Albert Street, opposite Ingrams, and now replaced by flats. I wonder how many on that list are still alive? – I personally know of just a handful.

"A HAPPY FAMILY"

Mrs. F.E. Ingram, speaking at the 1947 Prizegiving, said there were 51 scholars on the books, with 95% attendance. There was a happy little family - it was not an ordinary school, and that was how they wanted it to be. Each child received a prize and included: Ann Griffiths, Jean Snow, Enid Bramham, Jennifer Williamson, Margaret Creese, Maxine Cullen, Pauline Westmore, Billy Cotton, Brian Grant, John Howell, Donald Milligan, Brian Reed, George Wood, Graham Martin, Andrew King, David Creese, Colin Beavis, John Griffiths, Barry Greenhill, Denis Grant, Kenny Nobes, John Saunders, Keith Turner, John Wheeler, Trevor Wood, George York, Valerie Westmore, Ann Brigdale, Joan Dowling, Marion Hargreaves, Phyllis and Patricia Jones, Valerie Kent, Nora Linington, Pauline Orchard, Janet Price, Julia Croad, Margaret Reed, Mavis Wheeler, Myra Westmore, Eileen Grant, Mary Saunders, Jillian Sampson, Keith Rogers, Carol Saunders, Tony Walton, Elizabeth Bagnald and Roland Atkinson. The children were treated to ices by the kind generosity of Mr. and Mrs. T. Sydney Parry.

Ventnor & District Local History Society; Colin Beavis – Photographs from Society Archives.



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