

## Norwich Teacher Training 1920s:1960s by Peter Ayres

First published in Keswick Old Students' Club magazine December 2018

### How Did Norwich Training College Differ in The 1920s From The 1960s?

Society was very different in a pre-welfare state, with fewer higher education opportunities for those who had little money, no national health service and the Workhouse for the poorest. There were no local authority grants and so the 1920s intake was limited to those whose parents could afford to pay the fees. However, in 1923 the college was in financial difficulties and consideration was given to raising fees, reducing the number of students and reducing staff salaries. Unlike the 1960s, when the college had been expanding, the 1923 building, although only 31 years old, was becoming inadequate by the standards of the time, with no library, art room, craft room or gymnasium and insufficient lecture rooms. Student accommodation in the early 1920s was also inadequate.

*"We slept in cubicles with no rugs or carpets. Every Saturday morning we cleaned our cubicles and were inspected by our lady superintendent.....There were only forty in our year and 50 years later I am still in touch with fifteen of them and see them most years....We liked each other immensely and didn't mind the discipline. We all thought ourselves immensely privileged to be at St Ethelreda's and expected to work very hard. I remember vaguely being cold and hungry and hating to get up in the dark and having to wait on table when we were juniors but more clearly I remember the fun we had."*

*"We were cold, no central heating, hot water in the bathroom only at night (one at the end of each corridor).....The people who lived on 'West' were lucky to have Miss Oates' sitting-room at the end of the corridor. She expected great things of us and we often did much better than we thought we were capable of, for her. When it was very cold she would say as she went home to her hostel, "Goodnight West" and casually add to anyone she saw "See that my fire is out, won't you?" and we would go into her room and find the fire well made up and so we sat on the rug to get warm before diving into our cold little cubicles."*

Student accommodation in neighbouring houses had begun in 1910 by renting two small houses and Rothwell annexe was bought in 1921 on the oppo-

site side of College Road. However, it was not until 1929 that West Hostel was available, although Hollies, next door, was in use in 1925. In the 1960s, student accommodation was well up to the standards of the day. Except for a few who shared rooms in Old Hall, college accommodation consisted of centrally heated study bedrooms with washbasins. Each hostel had a kitchen, bathroom and utility room. When you spent a year (usually the second) in billets, it depended how lucky you were to get to somewhere that suited you. I lodged in Swardeston Vicarage, the former home of First World War hero Edith Cavell, which was just a short distance from the college, with enormous rooms that were not very well heated in winter. My bedroom, even colder.

By the 1920s the late Victorian and Edwardian college rules, such as these, had been relaxed.

- No male visitors allowed in college except one's own clergyman or schoolmaster
- Everyone to be out of the building from 2pm to 4pm, unless pouring with rain or suffering from an illness
- Morning service at St Thomas Church was compulsory
- Norwich students could not go home without previous permission
- All restaurants were out of bounds
- When on waitress duty you had to set breakfast and wash up

When on laundry duty you had to spend Thursday evening airing laundry and Friday evening sorting it into students' bags ready for collection.

When Miss Winnington-Ingram became Principal in 1924 each student was given a bedroom rug, they did not have to go to S. Thomas Church on Sunday mornings and they could go into the city without signing the book. Every Saturday night there was a dance in the big hall, students asking the staff to dance. Music was provided by violin or piano, played by any musical student, but no men were allowed. *"How crazy we were on dancing then! Every break between lectures we were waltzing, one-stepping or fox-trotting to the strains of 'I Want Some Money' (1924 – L Silberman), 'Nights of*

*Gladness'* (1912 – Charles Ancliffe), or *'Sheik of Araby'* (1921 – Ted Snyder). Of course *'Pictures'* were forbidden, but this *Sheik* (Rudolph Valentino) was so alluring....” Perhaps these dances were heard on records or possibly the radio, which began in the 1920s. In the 1960s we had greater choices. Some of us had radios or record players in our bedrooms and we had a film club at which films were shown. One of the two common rooms became a bar, it had a television and a college “group” often played there on Saturday evenings. If this wasn't to your taste you were free to go anywhere away from the college, as a number of students had their own transport. Those in college had to be in their hostel and visitors out of hostels by 10pm, unless an extension or a weekend pass was given.

School practice differed in the 1920s from the 1960s. There was a practice school in College Road, which was very handy. Other nearby schools were used. However, in 1927, as more than half of students took up a post in a rural school, it was decided that a special class would be formed to look at the task of teaching in a small rural school. *“The organisation of School Practice in rural districts presents difficulties but Miss Hill and Miss Oates have taken up the work with great energy and enthusiasm....It seems right that a College situated as ours is, in the midst of a large rural district, should take the leads in an experiment of this nature.”* By the 1960s the college has its own buses and so teaching practice could take place in many rural schools.

Rhoda Cook (1926-28) was not very impressed with college food. She was informed that the fee for 1926 was only £32. *“How could they feed us on that? No wonder the food turned out to be so poor and what a blessing to receive 'Tuck Parcels' from relatives at home and midnight feasts to celebrate a birthday.”* Another student wrote, *“We were often hungry, bread and margarine for breakfast with one sausage or a kipper on Sundays and one helping of lumpy porridge made with water; and the strange dinners. I remember rhubarb and custard every day for pudding until we had eaten all the rhubarb in the kitchen garden, more than*

*half a term!*

In the 1960s I can recall that the food was quite adequate in college and there was certainly no reason to feel hungry unless you were a fussy eater. The college kitchen had to cater for a very large number of students, providing them with three meals a day and also a morning and afternoon snack, so within the financial restrictions imposed on them, they did a good job. It seemed that a number of practices from the 1920s still carried on in the 1960s. *"Everybody ate in the dining room, with the staff table in the middle of the room"* (It was at one end in the 1960s.) *"They all joined us for breakfast and lunch."* (This was lunch and dinner in the 1960s.) *"Really it was one big family. The seniors acted as 'college mothers'."* When it became a mixed college we still had 'college mothers', but also 'college fathers' as well.

What does seem strange to me is that in the 1920s *"students wore gymslips and blouses for everyday wear."* (Recollections of Cicely Godbold, 1927-29) *"We seemed to spend most of our time in gymslips!"* (Rhoda Cook, 1926-28) All the above photographs only show them dressed in this way whilst engaged in physical activities. I wonder whether this was their usual wear during lectures, as they are dressed in ordinary clothes in other situations. However the gymslip seems a practical way to dress if you compare it with the extremely long dresses and full blouses of the Victorian era. It was in 1914 that a move away from such large garments was made. *"The powers ordained that the dress must be shorter, smarter and, in fact, uniform. So for the first time all gym tunics etc were made by the same firm after we reached Norwich. How carefully each was examined by the fitter to make sure it just cleared the ground as we knelt!"*

The college was much larger in the 1960s, reaching over 400 students, whereas it was only 92 in 1926, and the course lasted only for two years. Although some mature students only studied for two years in the 1960s, most stayed for three years, allowing them to devote more time to their main subject. The curriculum was devised to enable students to be prepared to become a successful school teacher as well as developing the

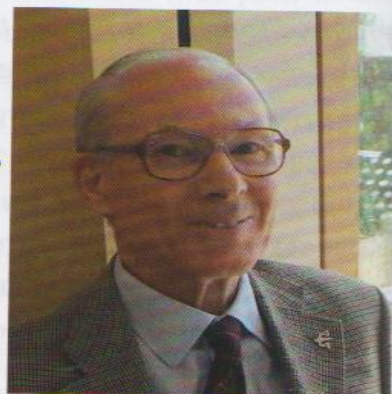
student's education, which it did very well.

The photographs and comments made in the College Letter, which began in 1896, show how much the students in the 1920s enjoyed their college training and how they made friendships that lasted many years. They met others who had the same purpose, which was to be equipped to enter the profession of a school teacher. The photographs certainly show how much they enjoyed this, even though life was not one of luxury. Accommodation and food was a great improvement in the mid 1960s, but despite this, perhaps the 1920s student felt the same satisfaction that we felt from the opportunity to enter a profession that we wanted to belong to. Although the mid 1960s family that we belonged to was much larger and less cosy than those of the 1920s, it had its advantages in that there was greater opportunity to be involved in various social and cultural activities that took place in a larger community.

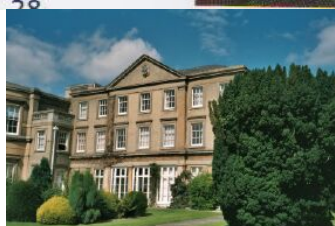
Whether you had a short or long teaching career or however successful you thought it had been, we all benefitted from being a student at Norwich Training College/Keswick Hall College of Education, whether in the 1920s or the 1960s, because we had lecturers who specialised in curriculum subjects, we lived and worked in a fine group of buildings in a beautiful setting, we enjoyed ourselves most of the time and we met interesting fellow students from different parts of the country. Like many fortunate students over the years, I count myself privileged to have studied there from 1964-67, as this collection of College Letter comments and photographs vividly show us.

**Peter Ayers (1964-67)**

*With acknowledgements to '1839-1981 The Story of Keswick Hall Church of England College of Education' edited by Jack Bull*



Norwich Training College



Keswick Hall